

“ENTRE PURAS MUJERES” / “ONLY AMONG WOMEN”:
APPLIED THEATER, COMMUNITY BUILDING & WOMEN’S WATER
KNOWLEDGES IN CHIAPAS, MÉXICO

A Thesis

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Master of Science

by

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ABSTRACT

Operationalizing critical pedagogy and Applied Theater to gain understandings of women's collaborative knowledge sharing and co-creating through story-based theater workshops, and utilizing narrative storytelling, transcriptions and analysis from recordings of firsthand accounts and interviews, as well as photography, this thesis tells the story of what essentially amounted to two days of theater workshops with women in rural communities in the lowlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Through story-based collaborative theater making, the mujeres (women) described herein, with virtually no prior theater experience, were able to share their own water knowledges and experiences, listen to each other's water stories, and co-create collaborative art / theater works, leading to co-imagined possibilities. This paper explores the possibilities for story-based theater as a liberatory tool for accessing co-constructed and co-performed knowledges of water, with real implications for global development concerns such as water health, water access, and water governance in these communities.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Bogotá, Colombia, to a family of historically agrarian people, Carolina Osorio Gil is an artist, activist, and academic based in Ithaca, NY, where she is pursuing a MS/PhD in the Development Sociology department at Cornell University. She is a theater artist, spending much of her life acting and directing, and her current artistic focus is on developing story-based transnational interdisciplinary arts collaborations that revolve around social justice issues. Before re-entering academia, Osorio Gil's roots as a formerly undocumented Colombian living in the US led her to a career as a Latinx community organizer in the Ithaca area where she founded the CULTURA Ithaca program that strives to share and foster Latin American and Latinx cultures through free and low-cost arts and cultural events. Osorio Gil holds a MA in Early Childhood Education from Columbia University's Teachers College, where her focus was on gifted education and community-based education; and a BA in Cognitive Psychology from Cornell University, where her focus was on language acquisition and development in early childhood and infancy. In addition to her academic and social pursuits, she also spent 15 years working at a robotics company, where she developed an interest in information management and systems design. Her future work will connect her research interests in technology and humanity to develop people-centered social science data tools.

Dedication

To las mujeres, las aguas/the waters, Pacha Mama, y mi mamá Maria del Carmen.

To las mujeres of the villages of Berriózabal who participated in the Mujeres
Brigadistas program.

To my dear friends and learning partners Erika Díaz Pascacio and Debra Castillo.



Yemayá, Yoruba Orisha of Water

<http://www.aboutsanteria.com/yemayaacute.html>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Master's Thesis would not be possible without the care and support of many people in my professional and personal life.

First, I extend deep gratitude and respect to las mujeres, the women of the Mujeres Brigadistas program in the communities of Berriozábal, Chiapas, México, for their kindness and generosity in welcoming me and my theater practice into their lives and homes.

I am immensely grateful to my Master's Thesis Committee members, including my advisor Dr. Scott Peters; my longtime collaborator and mentor Dr. Debra Castillo; and especially to Dr. Sofia Villenas for kindly guiding me through the process of developing a rigorous methodology and approach to my research.

I would not be here today if it weren't for my mother Maria del Carmen Gil-Meinhofer, my stepfather John Meinhofer, and my best friend and "brother" Devon Van Noble.

The project that I describe in this thesis would not be possible without the collaboration and trust of my learning partner and dear friend Professor Erika Díaz Pascacio in Chiapas, México, as well as the following Collaborators: Olivia Hernández Gómez, Citlalli Ventura Tamayo, and Cynthia Trejo Ortiz. Thanks as well to the Municipality of Berriozábal and the organization Cántaro Azul for their support and partnership in making this collaborative project possible.

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INTRODUCTION

EL MANANTIAL (THE SPRING)

Often represented as a feminine element, water as we know it, on Earth, is tempered by the Mother Moon, who controls her tides, which can manifest dramatically in weather events like hurricanes (often named after women) and tsunamis, simultaneously destroying and cleansing in nature. To say that trying to wrangle a master's thesis is anything like managing the tides of the oceans would be a dramatic overstatement, but it nonetheless has required some containment. This thesis balances two often complementary – though sometimes opposing – forces, which is what makes it interdisciplinary: on the one hand, it is a social science thesis that operationalizes critical pedagogy and Applied Theater to understand women's collaborative knowledge sharing and co-creating. On the other hand, it is an arts-based project that utilizes narrative storytelling, transcriptions and analysis from recordings of firsthand accounts and interviews, as well as photography, to tell the story of what essentially amounted to two days of theater workshops with women in rural communities in the lowlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Through story-based theater exercises designed in the vein of critical pedagogy and education for critical consciousness, the mujeres (women) described herein, with virtually no prior theater experience, were able to share their own water knowledges and experiences, listen to each other's water stories, and co-create collaborative art / theater works, leading to co-imagined possibilities. Through the women's testimonios of their experiences, both as participants in the workshops and with water in their daily lives, this paper explores the possibilities for story-based theater as a liberatory tool for accessing co-

constructed and co-performed knowledges of water, with real implications in development concerns such as water health, water access, and water governance in these communities. In this project, theater specifically was able to fulfill some roles/goals for the individuals and organizations involved, including myself, that would not have otherwise been reached through standardized methods of capacity-building community development workshops. For the purposes of the research project described herein, the collaborators and co-researchers, in addition to myself, consisted of academics, community organizers from NGOs and a local government.

In particular, this project revolved around the capacity building project called *Mujeres Brigadistas*, developed collaboratively between the water NGO *Cántaro Azul* and the municipal government of *Berriozábal* in Chiapas, Mexico, to bring women who showed leadership potential together to work on issues of water access, water health, and water governance. Specifically, through the intervention that I, along with my collaborators, offered, theater acted as a modality/tool/methodology for having women's voices and knowledge about water heard in their communities, in which culturally women are usually literally unheard, i.e. silent. The results of this work have implications not just for how these types of capacity workshops are carried out in the context of community, local, and global development scenarios, but to the use of theater as a feminist methodology for social science research. I tell these stories through the use of first-person narratives from a few of the women involved in this work, through the analysis of some of that narrative utilized as data, and through the careful tacking between social science analysis and story-based theatrical narrative. As

an emerging scholar, I wrestle with this tension throughout this thesis, as I develop my skills as navigator through these waters.

This work is largely situated in the spaces and disciplines of theater for social consciousness and contributes to existing and growing interdisciplinary conversations on the subject of theater as methodology for research and praxis, attempting to bridge the gap between the silos of performance studies, sociocultural anthropology, and development studies. Theater spaces can be created anywhere, any time by anyone, provided that someone has knowledge of theater practice and can share that knowledge – that is one of the aspects of this study that is very specific to this case – I came in with a vast experience of community-based and improvisational theater as well as a background in teaching theater workshops to many different audiences. In this case, we created theater spaces physically in the shared multi-use community room at the first encounter, and at one of the Mujeres' houses in the second. More importantly, we created discursive theater spaces through a combination of theater exercises as well as the willingness of everyone involved. These discursive spaces were collaborative and accessible to all the women immediately. This is one of the unique qualities of theater as compared to other art modalities, which is that you do not need much to carry it out other than people, their bodies and minds/imaginings and a physical space to do it. You also need at least one person who has some knowledge as to how to practice theater but it is also something that many of us do in our daily lives, i.e. being dramatic. Thus, that practical theater knowledge can readily be demystified and imparted on those who will stay to continue the work, because it is important to acknowledge that as a researcher and academic, my participation in these

spaces is intensive, hopefully impactful, and always temporary. In many ways theater, in the way that it was carried out here, is permission for adults to play in a way that is usually only acceptable for children.

El Encuentro¹ – The Confluence

In the Spring of 2019, my long-time collaborator, amiga and mentor Prof. Debra Castillo and I had traveled from Ithaca, NY, and Prof. Erika Díaz Pascacio from Tuxtla-Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas, to a rural village in the Municipality of Berriozábal to lead two theater workshops with the newly organized Mujeres Brigadistas², a group of women selected by the municipality leadership and the Mexican water NGO Cántaro Azul for their interests in working on water governance and water health issues. This project was organized by the Municipality of Berriozábal's newly elected and young political leaders as an outreach program for women's empowerment in the rural communities of the municipality as part of their larger goal of making progressive change in the municipality.

¹ Un encuentro is a meeting of more than one person in a particular place at a particular time. The literal English translation is “encounter” though that word does not fully encompass the complete meaning of an encuentro. It is kind of like a temporal and geographical crossroads. Serendipity certainly plays a part in gifting us encuentros that lead to growth, learning, and co-construction of common realities. As is the case with many Spanish words, there is not one specific word in English that captures the true essence of an encuentro. In order to also contextualize this encuentro within the extended metaphor of water, which I use throughout this thesis, the words I have chosen in English to describe this serendipitous encounter (encuentro) is Confluence- which further contains a connotation of waters coming, and flowing, together. Fluidity itself is a feminine word – the tides controlled by la Luna (the Moon), the flow of menstruation, the suppleness and flexibility implied by the word flowing that are traits commonly associated with women.

² Mujeres Brigadistas is the name of the project and refers to the women selected to be in the program as well.

Erika had connected months before the workshops with leadership at Cántaro Azul³, a Mexican-based water NGO, when they were just starting to work with the municipality of Berriozábal on the issue of Water Law. At that time, students from the Mexican Association of Hydraulics at the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, where Erika is an Industrial Engineering professor, were involved with diagnostic work with the Comités de Agua (water committees) in some of the communities of Berriozábal. Erika told Cántaro about the project she had recently participated in with Debra and I called *Aguakinesis*, its story-based, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach through the arts and local knowledges, and asked them if they would be interested in utilizing our story-based interdisciplinary approach in Berriozábal. With the affirmed interest of the (female) leadership at Cántaro, Erika brought Debra and I into the conversation. The women at Cántaro said they were interested in having us (Erika, Debra and I) execute the workshops, but that first they wanted to know what our objectives were. We answered that our principal objective was to support their efforts and this led to a series of conversations where we were able to establish common objectives. The objectives of Cántaro were to see if using theater workshops would help facilitate leadership building and agency among the women so that they could provide valuable water governance leadership in their communities. So that is what became the shared goal between the NGO, the Municipality, and the academics – who are considered the collaborators in this project. Although our ultimate goal was to achieve true collaboration with the mujeres, that was not able to happen at this early

³ Interestingly, the leadership at Cántaro Azul were all women, as well as the representatives from the municipality who we collaborated with on this project.

stage of this project and, due to limitations related to COVID and other circumstantial issues, it was not able to become a reality in the end.

Our collaboration with Prof. Erika Diaz Pascacio was born a full year before our field trip to Chiapas, as Debra, Erika—a Professor of Civil Engineering at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Chiapas (UNACH)—and I had worked together on a different interdisciplinary art project around the theme of water called *Aguakinesis* (Castillo et al, 2020). When we decided to bring *Aguakinesis* to Erika’s university in March-April 2019 for an exhibition and series of workshops with Tuxtla Gutiérrez-based students, Erika identified and initiated contact with Cántaro Azul, with the goal of expanding our project beyond UNACH into regional rural communities in Chiapas. Cántaro Azul’s objective for their water governance program (as listed on their website) is:

“Generar un nuevo paradigma para la gestión del agua en México, basado en una visión de gestión integral y de cuenca, con un enfoque de Derechos, que reconozca la gestión comunitaria del agua y que promueva una visión de servicios mas que de infraestructura, así como soluciones basadas en la naturaleza.”⁴

“To generate a new water management paradigm in Mexico, based on an integrated vision of watershed management, with a focus on Rights, that recognizes community water management and that promotes a vision of services that is beyond infrastructure, like solutions based in nature.”

⁴ <https://www.cantaroazul.org/gobernanza-del-agua>

Olivia Hernández Gómez, a community organizer, and Citlalli Ventura Tamayo, a biologist and community educator, were the individual collaborators representing Cántaro Azul.

As we came together in those initial pre-planning meetings, we each had our own individual and organizational goals. Cántaro Azul aimed to fulfill its commitment to the municipality to establish a successful training program for the Mujeres Brigadistas to share and develop their skills and understandings of water in order to share that knowledge with the governing bodies. Within that greater goal, Olivia was interested in developing her knowledge of training techniques by learning some arts-based approaches; Citlalli aimed to connect with the women's understanding of biological water issues such as water-borne diseases. The municipality, and Cynthia in particular, was trying to make more meaningful outreach connections with the rural communities. Erika was interested in continuing the interdisciplinary collaborative work that she, Debra and I had already been doing in order to help communities in Chiapas understand and improve their lives as related to water. Debra and I were also interested in continuing our work with Erika, as well as continuing to develop our engaged, interdisciplinary, story-based arts projects. Commencing this collaboration, we were able to establish a common objective: to see whether theater workshops

would be able to support the goals of the Mujeres Brigadistas endeavor of Cántaro Azul and Berriozábal. More specifically, this common objective consisted of, through the workshops, helping the women feel safe to share their stories, gain confidence in sharing their water knowledges with each other, and bringing their collective ideas to the comités de agua (water governing bodies).

Cántaro Azul⁵ is a civil organization, or an NGO, working in Berriozábal on a diagnostic process for the water committees in rural communities⁶. Mujeres

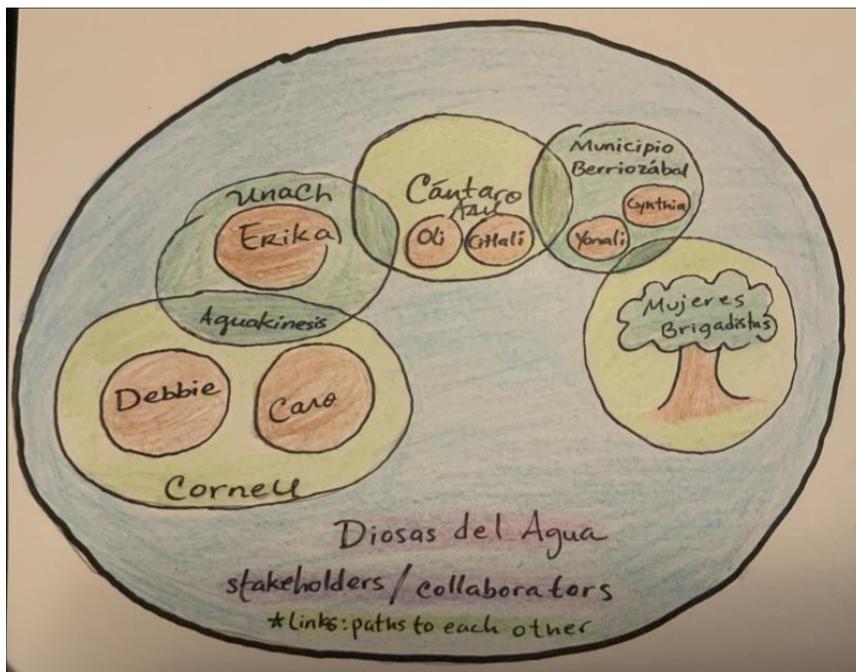


Fig. 1: A concept map of the connections that linked our organizations, and us as individual stakeholders, together to create the Diosas del Agua project. Individuals are labeled in the brown circles, and each “island” (in two shades of green) represents our institutions. The Mujeres Brigadistas are represented as a tree. These types of visual aids help me organize, understand and communicate my research.

Brigadistas is a joint effort between the municipal government of Berriozábal and Cántaro Azul. Just before we carried out the theater workshops, Cántaro Azul had been conducting a qualitative diagnostic in approximately 40 communities (villages), some of which have water committees and some that don't.

⁵ <http://en.cantaroazul.org>

⁶ This information and quotes herein are from an interview with Olivia

According to Olivia, these diagnostic efforts were carried out in order to later strengthen and build capacity in the process of water management for access to water since water is “un derecho humano para todas y todos” (a human right for all). The project’s goal is for communities to have better access to good quality water and that the three villages organize and make an “organismo comunitario” (community organism/body) so that they can manage their own water and find better alternative solutions on the topic of water as it affects their own communities. During an interview, Olivia provided the following description about the Mujeres Brigadistas project and justification as to why women are the ideal candidates for this water knowledge sharing:

Olivia:
Pretende fortalecer a las mujeres para que ellas puedan acompañar a los comités, en este caso asesorarlos, trabajar en conjunto, para que se pueda dar resultado a estas problemáticas del agua... Por qué las mujeres? Las mujeres - a pesar de que ellas utilicen el agua, son las usuarias del agua, ellas están--ellas son responsables de todo lo que se hace con el agua en las comunidades. Si no hay agua, ellas la llevan. Si hay agua, ellas lavan, ellas cocinan, ellas proporcionan el agua en sus hogares. Pero, también hemos identificado que regularmente cuando se trata de un representante o un comité o un patronato del agua, todos son hombres.

Olivia:
The goal is to capacitate the women so they can participate in the committees, in this case to consult them, to work together, so that results can be created for these problematics of water... Why women? Women – apart from being the ones who utilize the water, they are – they are responsible for everything that is done with the water in these communities. If there is no water, they collect it and transport it. If there is water, they wash, they cook, they allot the water in their homes. But, we have also identified that, when it comes to representation or being on a committee for water management, they are composed solely of men.

The Municipality of Berriozábal, under newly elected younger and more “progressive” leadership, created a partnership with Cántaro Azul with the objective of strengthening a community-based water management and water health initiative

through an alliance with the public-community and especially with the current and potential women members of the comités de agua from the rural communities within the municipality (Plan de Trabajo, 2019). According to the Plan de Trabajo con Promotoras Socioambientales (Work Plan with Women Socio-environmental Promoters), created by Cántaro Azul and the Municipality of Berriozabal, 157 women leaders were identified from 37 rural communities to participate in a year-long leadership training program. This collective group of women was called the Mujeres Brigadistas. For this study, we worked with approximately 25 women who ranged in age from 17-35. All but a few of them are mothers, and virtually all of them are married. Citlalli summarized the goals of the project for the training of the women:

Citlalli:

El papel de ellas que van a desempeñar son actividades socioambientales que se puedan desarrollar y que ese conocimiento lo puedan replicar hacia su comunidad en un momento dado. Osea, ellas queden queden formalizadas y que en un momento dado ellas van a ver por su comunidad. Que en cuanto este proyecto termine o nosotros nos vayamos ellas queden trabajando por su comunidad.

Citlalli:

The role of [the women] will be to carry out socio-environmental activities that they can develop and the knowledge that they can replicate with their communities at the given time. In other words, they will be trained and at the proper time they will be able to see after their communities. So that when the project ends or when we leave, they will be able to keep working for their community.

The Municipality of Berriozábal and the surrounding rural communities are located in the lowlands of Chiapas; whereas extensive research has been done in Chiapas, it has largely situated in the highlands, which is different not just geographically, but also demographically - the people in the highlands are more

Mayan language (Tzetzal and Tzoltil) speaking. Olivia is from the highlands and discusses this some in our interviews.

The communities we worked with are located along the Sabinal River watershed, in the state of Chiapas, the southeastern-most state in Mexico, bordering Guatemala. Water management among these communities has historically been divided along gender lines, with men occupying decision-making positions within community comités de agua and carrying out most of the harder labor such installing and repairing water infrastructure. Women's work, which includes cooking, bathing children, and washing clothes, is considered of lower prestige among men (Villalpando et al, 2018). The source of water for daily use varies from community to community and is also dependent on climate (dry season vs. wet season). Where water pipelines are unavailable in these rural areas, people mostly rely on wells or community water supply systems (i.e., water trucks, vendors). This water often costs much, much more than water supplied in urban areas. It is also water of lower quality, thus worsening inequities between the rich and the economically disadvantaged (UN Report, 2019).



Fig. 2: Sign leading to one of the communities on the road to the location of our first workshop. This ejido (communally-farmed land community) in the Municipality of Berriozábal is named after Mexican Revolution leader Emiliano Zapata Salazar, for whom the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN aka Zapatista Movement) is also named. (Photo courtesy of Erika Díaz Pascacio)

The state of Chiapas has a revolutionary history most associated with the Zapatista uprising, which officially commenced via an internationally transmitted internet announcement on January 1, 1994. Chiapas has long been of interest to anthropologists, social scientists and other academics, and activists and social and cultural organizations in Chiapas have extensive experience working with educational institutions from the North. One example specifically related to theater is the work of Smithsonian Institution anthropologist Robert M. Laughlin (1995), who, together with renowned theater director Ralph Lee (Mettawee River Theater Company), has produced collaborative Tzoltzil-Tzeltal plays with members of these indigenous Mayan communities.

From the Municipality of Berriozábal, our principal point of contact and collaborator was Cynthia Trejo Ortiz, representing the Sistema de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado Municipal⁷ (SAPAM). Also accompanying us on the workshops from the Municipal government were Commissioner Yonalli Hernández Ávila, IV Regidora de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Hidráulicos⁸ as well as Pilar Sordo Sánchez, an intern with the municipal offices of Berriozábal. Throughout this thesis, I interweave direct quotes from, as well as feature photos of, some of the women, following their paths through the theater workshop experiences. I include brief bios about them below. These women are divided into three categories, as I refer to them

⁷ System for Municipal Drinking Water and Sewerage

⁸ Fourth Commissioner for the Environment and Hydraulic Resources

throughout this thesis: 1) las/the mujeres or Mujeres Brigadistas (Tomasa), 2) the facilitators (Cynthia, Olivia, Citlalli), and 3) the academics (Erika, Debra, Carolina)

Tomasa (Tomi)

Tomasa is one of the Mujeres Brigadistas, who attended our workshop on the first day. Of all the women, she was the only one who sat on a water committee in her village. After the workshop, she stayed to chat and told me that she had taken the day off work to be sure she didn't miss our visit. During the workshop, Tomasa's story was one of the ones represented theatrically, and so I feature her throughout this thesis. She has also become a friend and we have maintained in communication for the past two years.

The next four descriptions, those of representatives from Cántaro Azul and the Municipality of Berriozábal, are taken directly from the one-on-one decompression interviews that I conducted with each of these women after the second day of the workshops.

Olivia (Oli)

Olivia Hernandez Gomez describes herself as a Mayan woman who speaks Tzotzil, and comes from the municipality of Chanal de los Santos, in southern Chiapas. She works as an organizer for the NGO Cántaro Azul.

Citlalli

Citlalli Ventura Tamayo is a biologist who specializes in environmental education, community. Development, and social interventions in communities. For the purposes of this project, her work is to help assemble groups of women who will be "promotoras socio-ambientales" (socio-environmental promoters). As part of

completing her thesis while at university, Citlalli spent some time doing field work at one of the villages, and saw some of the women she had met there during our second workshop.

Cynthia

Cynthia Trejo Ortiz is 26 years old⁹ and works in a community water “organismo”¹⁰ with the women. At the time of these theater workshops, Cynthia had been working in the field with the women for approximately two or three months, and seemed to be the person who knew them best out of all the facilitators. During the workshops, Cynthia took photos and provided logistical support, so she did not participate in all of the theater activities, but she was a contributing member of the group when she was able to do so.

Yonalli

Yonalli Hernandez Ávila, a biologist, is the 4th Director of the Municipality of Berriozábal, Chiapas, and is commissioner of Environment and Natural Resources. Yonalli attended the second day of the workshops and participated in a brief interview after that workshop. She also participated in some group discussions when we went to visit the municipal government in the town of Berriozábal.

Erika

Erika Díaz Pascacio is an Engineering Professor at the Universidad Nacional de Chiapas (Chiapas National University) in Tuxtla-Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas, where she was born and raised. Through our many pláticas and convivencia (both

⁹ These interviews were conducted in April 2019.

¹⁰ This is a word I cannot properly translate, so I am choosing to keep the Spanish word. It is what they call a community organizing body.

Latina feminist methodologies, roughly corresponding to “conversations” and “living among each other” respectively, that I will discuss at length in this thesis), I came to know her intimately, including her deep relationship and concern with communities and her profound interest in the geographies and waterways of her home.

Debra (Debbie)

Debra Castillo is the Emerson Hinchliff Professor of Hispanic Studies in the Department of Comparative Literature at Cornell University. She is also my long-time collaborator, friend and co-conspirator in transnational interdisciplinary arts projects. Debbie was critical in helping bring Erika and I together for the Aguakinesis project, and for continuing our collaboration with the project described in this thesis. Her deep connections with a variety of artists and scholars in Chiapas facilitated our work, and her expertise in navigating community engaged scholarship were crucial to our successes with these projects.



Fig. 3 Collaborators on the Diosas de Agua project. (left to right) Carolina, Erika, Olivia, Yonalli, Citlalli, Debra, Cynthia, standing in the atrium of the Municipality government building in Berriozábal, Chiapas.

Carolina (Caro)

I live on stolen Cayuga (Haudenosaunee) land, near Lake Cayuga, in Ithaca, NY, where I am a PhD student at Cornell University in the department that until the writing of this paper is transitioning from being called Development Sociology to Global Development. The land where I live is surrounded by water in the form of gorges, waterfalls, streams, and rivers in addition to the lake. Joyce Tekahnawiiaks describes Haudenosaunee people's relationship with water, writing "Today...water has lost its ability to communicate. The responsibility for its voice has been passed on to the Haudenosaunee!" (King, 2001). I have long-standing relationships with communities of color from over a decade of being a Latinx community organizer, as well as with Haudenosaunee communities in this geographical area. Language is important to me; English is my second language, Spanish my first. Theater was actually a great help to me in learning English when I was a little girl. I see the language we deploy in academia in our research-- in naming, labeling, and sorting--- as a tool to be utilized with care like a pair of sharp scissors, needing to be put back in the drawer after they're used.

I identify as a mestizx Latinx woman of Colombian origin (formerly undocumented) living most of my life in what is called the United States and I embody US Latina feminist theory and praxis. Having "illegally" crossed the border between Mexico and the USA when I was a small girl, the border in turn crosses through my very existence - I inhabit the liminal spaces of "feminist border thinking" described by María Lugones (2010) and named nepantla by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 2012)- never

quite belonging where I have lived most of my life or in the land of my ancestors, the land where I was born. My story is one of immigration and the struggles that are commonly associated within the US immigration narrative in popular culture, but I also come from a position of educational privilege. My entire secondary education experience has occurred within Ivy League institutions, and although I have often lived in what is considered “poverty” as a grassroots community organizer, I have had access to the enormous resources available at a top research institution. My approach to academic work has been based on engagement principles that center community partners not only in research, but also financially. In my community organizing work and in my academic work, I strategically leverage the intersectional identities I possess to help our most vulnerable community members; I see this subversive work as identifying with what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls “tactical subjectivities”.

I am also an artist, mostly a theater artist, and I have practiced theater for almost my entire life. Art is intrinsically a part of my being and all my endeavors, including my academic work. Listening to and making music, cooking certain meals, writing poetry, and drawing are all part of my process. For this project, I keep four separate journals/books of notes: 1) an official ledger/diary of the meetings around this project, 2) a digital record of all email correspondence related to the project; 3) a small portable journal for field notes written at the time of the workshops; and 4) a large art notebook for reflections and drawings (like the concept map illustrated in Fig. 1). I also keep a digital album that contains photographs, videos, and other multimedia artifacts related to the project. Because of my lifelong relationship with theater,

utilizing it as a methodology is natural for me and allows me to intersect theater with my training and interests in pedagogy and Development Studies.

After decades of practicing traditional theater methods of acting in and directing scripted plays, I have moved into the realm of theater as a *process* for social change, combining theater with community-based educational programming (Villenas and Osorio Gil, 2019). In this work, I am inspired by Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire's concept of education for liberation or education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). In his work, Freire gives power and agency to what Michel Foucault (1976) labels "subjugated knowledge", knowledge that is not deemed legitimate and has been historically oppressed by dominant Western academic structures. Freire (1974) describes how his approach differs from traditional and hegemonic views of el pueblo (the people) in shifting the people from Object of study to Subject thereof:

In my opinion such affirmations express an unjustified lack of faith in people, an underestimation of their power of reflection, of their ability to take on the true role of seekers of knowledge: that of the Subjects of this search. Hence the tendency to transform them into objects of the "knowledge" imposed on them. Hence the haste to make them docile and patient recipients of "communiqués" which are injected into them, while on the contrary the act of knowing and of learning requires of people an impatient, unquiet, indocile attitude.

Paulo Freire (1974), *Education for Critical Consciousness*

Literature Review & A Methodological Intervention

In reviewing literature to create the conceptual framework for this research project, my goal is to put critical pedagogy (ala Freire 1974) and Boal (1979)) in conversation with Latina Feminist methodologies. My methodological intervention is

two-fold. First, I seek to contribute elements from Performance studies, such as Dwight Conquergood's (1991) concept of performance ethnography to the burgeoning area of Applied Theatre within development contexts. Secondly, I incorporate US Latina feminist theoretical and methodological approaches into critical pedagogy. The result is creating a theater educational methodology that is both liberatory in aim, and also is a tool for collecting data for the respective projects of the investigators involved in this collaboration, including my own academic project represented in this thesis.

I utilize a feminist approach to critical pedagogy, which is brilliantly discussed by bell hooks in numerous of her writings, but in this case I focus on her book *Teaching to Transgress*, in which hooks explores "...the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination" (p. 4). In this volume, hooks (1994) offers feminist critiques to Freire and vice versa, using Freire's "pedagogical paradigms to critique the limitations of feminist classrooms" (5), concluding that "any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged" (8). I look to hooks to guide my use of Freire's critical pedagogy design in this project. In addition, I incorporate several US Latina feminist theories and methodologies to strengthen and make my intervention on critical pedagogy and praxis more attenuated to the needs of the mujeres/women participants, as well as more in line with my own values and approach related to community-based participatory research.

In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) outlines a specific dialogical approach to research, with an explicit series of steps, to implement what he terms “thematic investigation” with participants (in his case, working class people). Of his dialogical alternative to the “antidialogical and non-communicative ‘deposits’ of the banking method of education,” Freire writes, “...the program content... is constituted and organized by the students’ view of the world, where their own generative themes are found. The content thus constantly expands and renews itself.” (ibid, p. 109) In this research project, informed by Freire, we are similarly undergoing a thematic investigation of water knowledge in the villages of the Municipality of Berriozábal with participants, who are women from each of the approximately 40 villages selected to participate in the Mujeres Brigadistas program. The table below provides an overview of the four stages of investigation that Freire describes, along with a brief description as to how this stage was implemented in our project:

Paulo Freire’s Stages of Dialogical and Thematic Investigative Work		
Stage	Freire’s Description	How it Worked for Us
Preliminary Stage	“...the investigators have determined the area in which they will work and have acquired a preliminary acquaintance with the area through secondary sources.” (110)	Cántaro Azul did this with the Municipality as their secondary source for learning about the communities, and then, in turn, we (the academics) did this with the Cántaro as our secondary source to learn about the women, and then all of us went to visit the Municipality representative.

<p>Stage One / Initial Decoding Stage</p>	<p>First contact with the individuals and the community and getting “a significant number of persons to agree to an informal meeting during which they can talk about the objectives of their presence in the area... In this Stage, investigators must recognize their own values, but not impose them upon the participants or be critical of the values of the people with whom they are working.” (ibid.)</p>	<p>Cántaro Azul completed this process with selected women from the community through the qualitative research they carried out as they established the Mujeres Brigadistas program. In turn, the team members of this research project got together during several informal meetings to discuss our objectives. We shared a common value not to impose our own judgments onto the mujeres.</p>
<p>Stage Two / Decoding of the Unique Living Code</p>	<p>“The analysis of reality made by each individual decoder sends them all back, dialogically, to the disjointed whole which once more becomes a totality evoking a new analysis by the investigators, following which a new evaluative and critical meeting will be held.” (ibid., p. 112)</p>	<p>Throughout the process, prior to Debbie and I traveling to Chiapas, the collaborators met and checked in, as the Mujeres Brigadistas program was getting under way, to update our plan as needed. Later, creating the theatrical works with the women became a form of analysis of their water knowledges, but also of the role of theater to the goals of the Mujeres Brigadistas project.</p>

Table 1: Freire’s stages of dialogical and thematic investigative work, including how I apply the stages to this project.

Utilizing Freire’s structure in this way allows me to see the ways that this research project, and the educational theater workshops, have a liberatory potential themselves, and as a barometer for measuring whether we are indeed working collaboratively not just with each other as academics and researchers, but including

the mujeres. Because this was only my first time meeting the mujeres¹¹, my ability to have the project be as participatory as I wanted was thwarted. Nonetheless, in combining theater and pedagogy, I am influenced by Brazilian theater artist and scholar Augusto Boal (1979), who himself draws on Freire to create a theory of theater practice and praxis that disturbs the traditional divide between actor and spectator, drawing the latter into the focus of the performance as what he calls “spect-actor”. Boal’s methodology, *Theater of the Oppressed*, and the theater games he designed (2002, 1992) have become ubiquitous in theater for activism, community development and social change.

Regarding theater as methodology, I look to incorporate Dwight Conquergood’s (1991) concept of performance ethnography as contributing to the project of Critical Theory. In addition, Conquergood (2002) makes the case for interdisciplinary collaborative approaches to research as necessary for doing this sort of academic work. I see my research as contributing to building bridges to cross the academic chasms caused by the knowledge silos created in Western institutions of higher learning of which I am a member. Inhabiting spaces of interdisciplinary intersection - another type of liminality - I am within and without disciplines such as Performance Studies, Anthropology, Education, and Development Studies. Regarding the relationship between Performance Studies and Development Studies, which is my primary academic focus, Clammer points out that “art practices have not yet entered

¹¹ Subsequently, COVID and a leave from my program delayed the project and when we re-connected, in 2021, we learned that the Mujeres Brigadistas program had been disbanded due to lack of funding as well as a new incoming municipal government.

the mainstream of development thinking”. This is precisely where I want to situate my research. The theater work that we did with the Mujeres has the potential to influence (and may already be influencing) water governance in the Municipality of Berriozábal.

As Conquergood (2002) suggests, rather than occupying the role of the observer looking from “on high” in with an objective lens looking at the Subject(s) below, I am on the ground working *with* my learning partners and building with a relational approach. I don’t just see and write, I feel and co-create. My approach to performance ethnography includes my participation as a co-creator, as well as researcher, is integral to address my research questions (see Research Questions below). This also dovetails with Freire’s call to move people/participants from subjects of our research to emancipated participants, actors if you will, in the research work.

Theater as a methodology provides exciting opportunities for engaged, emancipatory research that inverts historical power dynamics in research, shifting participants (also known as research “subjects”) to the center of the research process as co-creators of critical thinking and co-constructed knowledges. In *Applied Theater: Research*, O’Connor and Anderson (2015) see in applied theater methodologies an opportunity for “processes where the marginalized might be the authors of their own stories, as co-researchers, and equal collaborators” in what they call a “post-normal” world full of “chaos, complexity and contradictions”. Similarly, Hughes and Nicholson (2016) view Applied Theater as responding to contemporary concerns and

also “influencing the ways which socially engaged art and art-making are produced and understood.” Thus, Applied Theater simultaneously contributes to knowledge (re)creation and (co-) generation but also to art praxis itself.

As a research methodologies, Applied Theater is a point of departure from traditional Western academic approaches to social science research, an opportunity to utilize and leverage art with--and within--communities, a space for the voices of women to be lifted and their water knowledges heard. O’Connor and Anderson (2015) write, “applied theatre, as a performance of hope and resistance, provides a unique opportunity for an aesthetic research form, one that challenges hegemonic structure and envisions the world as it might be.” (p. 29) Applied theater, in the case of this project, offers an accessible vehicle for women to express their experiences in a safe space and to create, re-create, and co-create, and to give collective voice to their knowledge. In practice, theater as a methodology is deployed in as diverse ways as there are research questions and locations for the research. However, as O’Connor and Anderson (2015) point out, a common element throughout research that utilizes theater/performance as methodology is the use of “real people’s narratives”. For my work, I utilize story-based theater as a method for re-creating and co-creating water knowledges, for collecting data about local water knowledges, and as an assessment tool to evaluate the process¹².

¹² Although I am working from a specific feminist viewpoint, utilizing Freire’s dialogical methodology, I am not looking to impose my own viewpoint or ideas about gender and power onto the women. These viewpoints help me with my research and with my work as an academic. In our project, I offer my viewpoint as that of another mujer (myself) as a collaborator in this project. It is not my interest or goal to “save” the mujeres from the patriarchy or to impose a neoliberal or western agenda, or any agenda, onto them, their knowledge, and their work.

Chicana / Latina Feminist Theories and Methodologies

Influenced by US Latina scholars who have paved the way in developing a set of theories and methodologies to social science and the humanities, I find that their critical lens deeply resonates with my own academic and experiential sensibilities that facilitates my goals in carrying out research that is transformative and emancipatory. Ruth Trinidad Galván (2015) contributes to critical pedagogy from a Latina decolonial lens, introducing the concepts of Convivencia and Supervivencia, both of which I discuss and explore in Chapter 3 of this thesis. She describes these uniquely feminist, uniquely Latina concepts in terms of the Spanish word *vivencia*¹³, “While both words [convivencia and supervivencia] speak of living and being in the moment (*vivencia*), one emphasizes a sort of communion with others, a togetherness (*convivencia*), while the other word (*supervivencia*) claims a beyondness (*super/sobre*) to mere material survival” (ibid., p. 113-114). These terms, or, more specifically, strategies, that we use in this project bring us close together and, once together, help us transcend. As beautifully described by Trinidad Galván in her collaboration with her interlocutor Carolina, *convivencia* occurred in the everyday interactions that she had with Carolina and with the other women involved in her research project. Likewise, in the project described in this thesis, moments of deep connection and togetherness occurred while driving along the bumpy unpaved roads to and from the field sites, while laughing together over teleconference calls before actually meeting each other in the flesh, while eating sandwiches that the Municipality provided during each of the workshops.

¹³ Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda (1987), developer of Participatory Action Research, attributes the concept of *vivencia* to Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.

And, as Trinidad Galván writes, “From this communion with others surfaces la supervivencia, a move beyond survival to creative, full lives.” In the instance of these theater workshops, supervivencia took form in together being able to imagine continuing to work together to improve each of our understandings of what it means to carry water knowledges and strategies for improving water quality, access, and governance in the communities of the Mujeres Brigadistas.

In describing *convivencia* and *sobrevivencia* – technologies, as she refers them – in the context of “creating compassionate pedagogical spaces of resilience and resistance”, Sofía Villenas (2005) foresees that “radical possibilities lie in *convivencia* and respect – in how we educators and researchers, daughters and community members, continue to engage and reflect with these mujeres”. Other embodied Latina technologies of understanding that we utilized in this project include an approach to conversational dialogue called *plática* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) and *testimonio*. Cindy O. Fierros and Dolores Delgado Bernal describe *plática*, as a Chicana methodology, as approaching research “from a goal to honor researchers’ and research participants’ epistemological position,” which, as I will demonstrate, is how we approached our work – from a place of honoring researchers’ and participants’ epistemological positions. A key goal of the theater workshops was to share knowledges between participants and facilitators, in both directions, in a fluid way, also honoring the epistemologies of water itself, always flowing, always in motion.

Additionally, decolonial Feminisms & Latina feminist theory (and practice) interventions push back on what Linda Martín Alcoff (2020) identifies as “imperial feminisms”. Alcoff follows in the footsteps of María Lugones’ (2016) concept of

Coloniality of Gender, suggesting that “without a decolonial approach, transnational feminist activism risks colluding with colonial rhetorics about backward societies that need to be ‘westernized’ (Alcoff, 2020)”. Just as embodied Latina feminist methodologies honor the epistemologies of all related to the research through everyday interactions of *convivencia*, Alcoff calls for “a genuine reorientation of feminist theory toward the quotidian or the everyday, toward a democratic epistemology that takes the activist oppressed as the ultimate makers of their own liberation”. This, in my view, circles back to Freire’s vision for pedagogy for critical consciousness, adding a critically important Latina feminist lens.

Similar Studies: Women’s Water Knowledges and Applied Theater

Numerous studies exist on the topic of women’s water knowledges in the context of Development; and although there are studies that utilize theater for empowerment in development contexts, I did not find any that use theater as a methodology in these settings. Chiblow (2019) examines (Native) Anishinabek’s women’s water knowledge, governance, indigenous research methods, and ontology/epistemology using Indigenous Research Methods (Smith, 1999, 2021). Chiblow utilizes self-reflection (auto-ethnography) and her position within Anishinabek culture to argue for “responsibility-based governance based on Anishinabek *giikendaaswin* [knowledge or traditional ecological knowledge] which is about relationships and responsibilities. Chiblow’s approach to knowledge and research resonates with me as I work to design a methodology and an approach to research that is respectful and honors the women who I work with and their

(traditional and/or indigenous) water knowledges, not just in Berriozábal but in other sites of relevance to my research, such as with members of indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada region of northern Colombia.

In a qualitative study about women's local water knowledges and the implications for local resource governance also situated in Mexico, in Veracruz, Kernecker et al (2017) utilize qualitative methods of interviews, participant observation, and study groups to explore how "local knowledge of specific groups of resource users can contribute to social-ecological resilience". In this case "specific groups of resource users" refers to women of the local communities in Veracruz, Mexico, where they conducted their study. Conducted in a manner that is typical of such qualitative ecological studies, the researchers are most concerned with scientific rigour and the implications of their research for the study of socio-ecological resilience. Here is an example of the language Kernecker et al. (2017) use to describe their process: "One concern is that the community being studied will bias their responses according to what they think the researcher wants to hear. By using data saturation, this issue can be controlled. This means that the researcher continues observing and analyzing data until new themes no longer appear, and therefore no new data are necessary (they cite Glaser and Strauss, 1967)." With a goal of achieving validity in its data analysis, and thus minimizing bias, these researchers are working for a decidedly academic project – tapping into "the potential value of using women's local knowledge for local planning processes to better steer development measures toward supporting resilient social-ecological systems" (Kernecker, 2017). Although the article utilizes the language of the "local" as it relates women's knowledge with

governance potentials, the project that this study contributes is an academic one and one that seeks replicability for “socio-ecological system governance” on a global scale.

From the field of Global Development Studies, Chaulagain & Parajuli (2018) explore women’s medical- and health-related water knowledge in Biratnagar, Nepal. Again, the researchers utilize qualitative methods - in this case, a questionnaire (an impersonal research tool) provided to several dozen women to determine how knowledge is assessed and what the researchers consider “knowledge”. Through close-ended questions about water knowledge, there is no opportunity to learn what knowledge the women themselves consider relevant. The authors’ model of training and testing in a rote and irrelevant manner is out of context, arbitrary and limits sharing of knowledge. As with Kernecker et al. (2017), these researchers are conducting research that with a goal of extracting knowledge in order to make empirical claims about the “potential” women’s knowledges and understanding for global development implications. The collaborative research project described in this thesis, as will become apparent, does not fall into that category.

Regarding the intersection between development studies and the arts, interest in Participatory Theater for development work for women is current, as is exemplified most recently, in June 2021, by the World Bank release of a Policy Research Working Paper (Hoff et al, 2021) entitled *Participatory Theater Empowers Women: Evidence from India*. Focusing on the global scourge of domestic violence in developing countries, in this paper, the authors utilize a mixed methods approach to provide

quantitative and qualitative data evaluating whether “community based participatory theater—a novel, cultural intervention—can shift the focus of attention in spousal violence from the manhood of the assailer and make domestic violence unacceptable by changing the social norms.” Hoff et al. determine that Forum Theater interventions performed by an organization called *Jana Sanskriti* significantly reduced domestic violence significantly. As can be expected from a working paper from the World Bank, this report, 36 pages in length excluding the extensive appendices that are comprised of a variety of tables and graphs presenting statistical analysis of the quantitative data, leans on numerical evidence for supporting its findings. What was more interesting to me is that the World Bank, in June 2021, is taking a keen interest in Participatory Theater, with roots in Boal and Freire in Latin America and with Free Southern Theater in the 1960s, among others, referring to it as “novel”. The authors describe Participatory Theater as a powerful tool because they determine that it has the capacity to change culture through changing narratives, which has enormous implications on a global scale.

Research Questions & Research Design

Reflecting the current interest in utilizing theater for community development purposes, the NGO that we partnered with for this study, Cántaro Azul, wanted to know the effects that utilizing an arts-based intervention like theater workshops would have on the community building of their Mujeres Brigadistas project in Berriozábal Municipality, as they expressed in one of our early organizing meetings. Erika also had some questions about using the arts in combination with science in her own research. A civil engineer concerned with communities affected by water

infrastructure projects, Erika also was looking to develop her own artistic knowledges - her way of using art to express herself - not feeling like she was particularly an “artistic” person but very interested in learning more about it and practicing it.

Each of us (Cántaro Azul, Erika, Debra and I) came to this collaboration and to those early meetings with our own set of questions, concerns, and intentions, though in working collaboratively, our individual goals informed each other’s and intersected throughout the project, and also adapted and changed as we got to know each other better and as we collaborated more deeply. In those early meetings, in seeking to have this project become my master’s thesis, my initial research questions were around knowledge sharing between women through theater:

1. What kind of a discursive and performative space does theater provide for sharing stories that may not otherwise be shared? Or for facilitating trust in order to share those stories?
2. (How) can theater be used to collect data for the use of community building, specifically around intergenerational and ancestral knowledges of water as a natural resource that community members are stewards to and have been for generations?

For me, the content of what the knowledge was, in this case water, was in the beginning, and remains, secondary and somewhat incidental. My primary concern is the way that women utilize theater to access knowledge, share knowledge with each other, and co-create new shared and individual knowledges through collaborative story-based theater making. Although the matter of concern of the Mujeres Brigadistas and the organizer’s work and dialogue was water, my concern was the way the women

access, value, and share their knowledges of water within the context of the theater workshops.

In structuring my research design, I was guided by Maxwell's (1996) interactive model, which includes five distinct research elements that interact rather than standing alone or being organized in a linear manner, where one precedes the other. For a sample of how I have operationalized this model in my research design, please see Figure 4 below, which represents a snapshot in time as my research questions were then, which was early in the process. Because Maxwell's model is interactive, it is also constantly in flux, as research questions are inevitably informed by other elements of the research design, like goals (which in this case were to some degree collaboratively worked out), and vice versa. Thus, research questions, as well as the other aspects of the research project, are always changing in reaction to each other.

Regarding specific methodologies, as mentioned earlier, I am employing various Latina feminist methodologies in this project including *convivencia* and *plática*. I see *plática* as related to a phenomenological approach to interviewing, which, as Seidman (2013) describes, “focuses on the experiences of participants and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 16)¹⁴. As a Chicana/Latina methodology, *pláticas* emphasizes “sharing ideas, experiences, stories, and relationship building” while developing “a goal to honor researchers’ and research participants’ epistemological position” (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016)

¹⁴ For more on phenomenology from a US Latina perspective, see Ortega (2016)

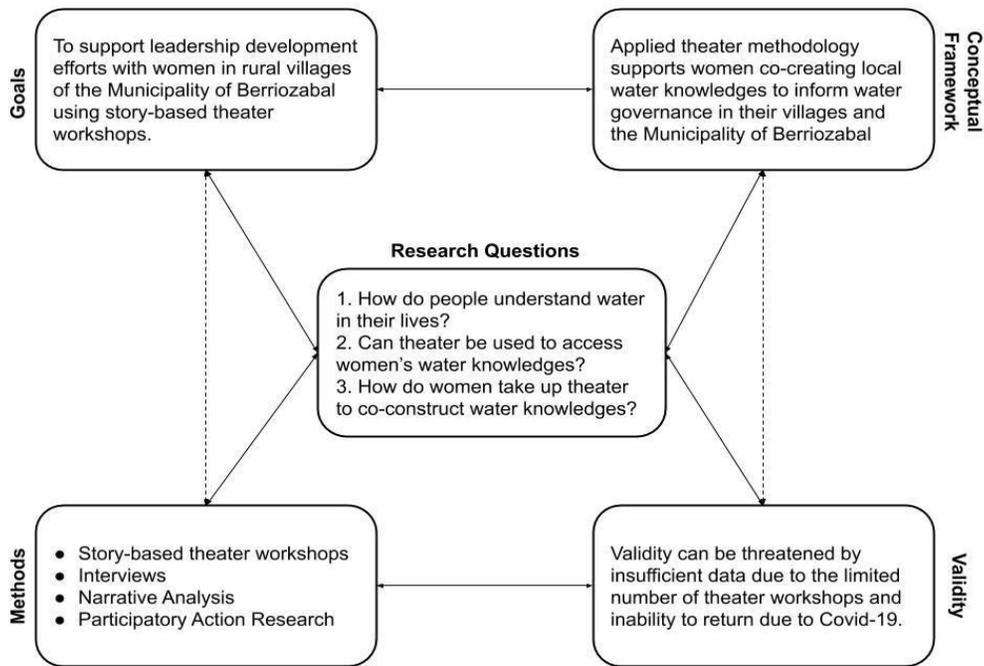


Fig. 4: Interactive research model for this study based on Maxwell (1996). This particular model is a snapshot in time of what my research design looked earlier in my process.

Story-Based Theater Workshop Structure

Utilizing Story Circle methodology as a foundation, I designed a two-hour theater workshop to carry out with the Mujeres Brigadistas as well as our teaming partners. Below, I provide a brief history of the development of story circles, specifically its place in the Black Freedom Struggle of the 1960s in the United States.

Story Circle Methodology: Roots to Rise

“This is more radical than it may sound.”

Lizzy Cooper Davis (2019), p. 128

“The Free Southern Theater’s Story Circle Process” in *Creating Space for Democracy*

The African American origins of Story Circle methodology is a history that is often overlooked, and I look to Lizzy Cooper Davis' (2019) chapter on the roots of the Free Southern Theater (FST) within the Freedom Struggle of the southern United States for guidance in my own historicization of the story circle process, which has become integral to my work as an artist/activist/scholar. In her succinct and thorough history of the FST, Davis discusses the frequent omission of the FST, and specifically that of civil rights activist Ella Jo Baker as a leader of this work, in the histories of liberatory pedagogy and North American theater. Davis accurately points out that these omissions “highlight the extent to which certain stories—particularly those of people of color—are spoken over in our historical narratives. It is time to tell new stories” (p. 136). Davis ends with an invitation for new stories that use story circle methodology, and I see my work, and this thesis, as a contribution to those new stories. Like the stories of people of color are overwhelmingly overlooked, as too are the stories of the women of the communities of Berriozábal. They carry these stories and knowledges, like those of the water, around with them, not really having an opportunity or space to share them. In these workshops, story circle methodology provided a space to build trust and confidentiality to share those stories with other women, to find value and connection in them.

Moreover, story circle methodology is in line with the oral traditions and communal social practices of these communities. About the power of oral tradition, FST founder John O'Neal states, “...the process, like the stories that people use it to share, is essentially oral in nature... when people sit down to actually talk together we have the chance to look at the body language, listen to the tone of voice, to question if

you're not clear about something or to challenge if you think that's in order.” (John O’Neal in Davis (2019, p. 129) Additionally, in a practical sense, because story circles are done completely orally, they do not involve reading writing like surveys or other teaching and assessment tools might, which present challenges and stigmas with participants who are illiterate (in Spanish or their dominant language). Davis also discusses how story circles are specifically employed by theater artists to “support ensemble-building and generate material for playmaking, by organizers to surface core concerns and guide planning and action, by educators to keep student voices at the center of learning, and by those at the intersection of these various roles for myriad purposes” (Davis, p. 133) In addition to all of those applications, as it relates to this project, story circle methodology is used in combination with other aspects of theater making without needing to have a focus on a theatrical product or production, but as a process for discovering and sharing individual and co-created knowledges.

My proposed lesson plan¹⁵ for each of the two 2-hour workshops was identical, and was as follows:

1. Introductions: Seated or standing in a circle
2. Warmups: Standing; Gentle and easy corporal and voice warmups. Beginning with stretching and moving up in complexity through some basic and fun improvisational games.

¹⁵ My approach to community-based pedagogy draws heavily from Freire (for more on this, see Villenas & Osorio Gil, 2019), as well as training in developmentally appropriate, multicultural curriculum design taught to me at Cornell University’s Teachers College.

3. Story Circle (utilizing Roadside Theater methodology): Seated, 2-minute limit per participant.
4. Tableau Vivant/Frozen Scene: Divided into small (4-5 participants) groups, participants chose one story from a woman in their group to act out. The woman whose story is selected to be dramatized becomes the “director” of the scene, and fine-tunes the re-presentation of her story. This part of the workshop culminates in presenting the frozen scenes and having others guess whose story was being presented.
5. La Telaraña / The Spider Web: Reflection knowledge exercise with the guidance of Citlalli from Cántaro Azul.

The theater workshops, which Cántaro Azul and the Municipality of Berriozábal were interested in utilizing for team building and empowerment among the Mujeres Brigadistas, also served me as a data collection methodology to answer my research questions. I collected audio recordings of the story circle, video recording of the small group work, and photographs of the finished Frozen Scenes/plays.

Data Analysis

The data that I am working with for this project involves a variety of media/formats including: video and audio recordings of the workshops and of interviews with several of the Mujeres and with the colaboradoras; documents shared about the project; as well as my own field notes and illustrations. I collected 3 hours of audio recordings, 24 videos totaling approximately 70 minutes of recorded time, and over 150 photographs. All of this data was collected between April 3 and April 5,

2019, which were the dates of Workshop 1 and Workshop 2, respectively. Although I would have liked to have more data from the voices of the mujeres participants of the Mujeres Brigadistas program, due to the limitations of the study, most of the voices that are presented in this thesis are those of the facilitators.

In order to analyze the speech data, I utilize Kathy Charmaz's (2010) Grounded Theory approach to coding as well as Saldaña's helpful *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* for foundational and operational guidance. Additionally, utilizing Charmaz's technique of memos as a way of examining my coding critically, creating a dialogue with myself, and expanding upon my coding in this iterative process. I videotaped or audio recorded all of the speech presented in this paper live, and then I transcribed the speech in the original Spanish and provide my own English translation. In my translation, my goal is to preserve as much as possible the form of the women's ways of speaking, which are in various contexts from conversational among friends and colleagues, to telling their stories to other women they hardly know. In transcribing the speech, I use commas to separate the lines without a full stop, and periods to indicate the end of a sentence.

In my analysis of the women's words used in this study, I present quotes from the transcription of each person's speech as originally delivered, with a brief discussion following each excerpt. I draw upon a combination of contextualizing information as well as theoretical questions to present my analysis of the women's discourse. Through this analysis, I identified 13 thematic elements (see below), as well as several larger themes that I discuss in the next three chapters.

Closing Thoughts – About the next four chapters

Below, I identify the 13 thematic elements that I found from the analyzed data, which I have utilized to organize Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis. In Chapter 2 I introduce and describe the structure that I planned for the story-based theater workshops. The data I present in this chapter has to do with the primary focus of the story-based theater workshop, which is to have participants feel comfortable enough to participate. From this data, the following topics emerged:

- 1) How shyness was attributed to the mujeres by the facilitators as a barrier to overcome, and how the mujeres themselves describe their shyness;
- 2) Social obstacles that prevent or complicate the capacity-building workshops for the mujeres;
- 3) Gender dynamics that affect women's participation in certain leadership roles in their communities and that prevent women from being recognized for their water-related labor and knowledge;
- 4) How these theater workshops can help overcome some of the barriers mentioned in #1-3 above.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the interpersonal dynamics and relationships that the Latina feminist methodologies that I described earlier, and in particular the practice of *convivencia*, living and being together, facilitates the building of those relationships and the subsequent collaborative that begins to take place during the workshops. The data I analyze in Chapter 3 deals with the following themes:

- 5) How friendship and trust-building can benefit collaborative community work, and how these connections can be facilitated during these theater workshops;
- 6) By interacting in a non-hierarchical and artistic manner, empathy and a greater understanding of each other's experience can occur among the mujeres, as well as mutually with the facilitators and government representatives;
- 7) The dark side of the omnipresent patriarchal social system in these communities, and how women themselves can sometimes be the enforcers of that patriarchy;
- 8) On the other hand, the potential for collaborative knowledge-building strategic work and network-building among women for the benefit of their communities; and
- 9) The importance of laughter, play, and fun in this work.

In Chapter 4, I delve deeper into the activity of co-creating story-based theater and explore the way that the tableau vivant (frozen/living scene) exercise facilitates a presentation and re-presentation of the women's lived experiences that, once the techniques are learned, can help with the collaborative water work the women were to undertake after Debbie, Erika and I left. The following related themes emerged from the data collected from interviews with both facilitators and mujeres regarding their experiences with the theater making activities:

- 10) How story-based theater allows women to re-live memories and access memories and more recent experiences related to the theme of water;

- 11) Re-interpreting each other's stories, in the form of theater production, helps women connect with each other and re-imagine each other's and their own experiences in a creative way;
- 12) Contrasting with the perceived shyness in #1, the women surprised the facilitators by participating fully in the theater activities and committing themselves to this collaborative creative work;
- 13) The mujeres enjoyed the workshops, and in particular the theater games, and had fun playing together.

I conclude this thesis by discussing the implications of this work for all of the women involved, for the rural communities that the Mujeres Brigadistas project represents, and for scholarship around Applied Theater, critical qualitative methodologies and the study of women's ways of knowing.

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CHAPTER 2

“(NO) ME DA PENA” / “I’M (NOT) SHY”: SHYNESS AND FACILITATING VISIBILITY WITH STORY-BASED THEATER

Historias del Río / Stories of the River

As we sat in the folding chairs in a circle in the mostly empty multi-use building of Camelias, one of the rural communities of the Municipality of Berriozábal on April 3, 2019, our collective nervous anticipation and hesitation about the theater workshop ahead was palpable. After I briefly provided instructions for the preliminary story circle activity, with some encouragement from the visiting facilitators, the women slowly, one by one, opened up to sharing around the prompt of their experiences with water in their communities. As we went around the circle, each sharing a 2-minute or less story, a similar and unexpected (to me) narrative began to unfold. The stories shared by the women converged around one primary theme: their fear of the river.

Expecting the women to share about their day-to-day experiences with the water that they used in their homes for drinking, washing, etc., I was surprised that the stories took this turn towards the dangers and perils of the river, and I became nervous that the topic of fear of the river was “irrelevant” to the goals of the workshop (leadership building around water management, health and governance). However, as we proceeded with the workshop and created theatrical scenes of these stories, and later reflected on the experience after the story circle was complete, the significance

and relevance of the women's stories became apparent. Citlalli, the biologist on our collaborative team, later reflected on what the stories about the river revealed to her about health concerns (e.g. infected wounds from walking to the river to collect water). Yonalli and Cynthia explained that the stories helped them better understand the challenges women had in accessing water from the Sabinal River such as dangerous walking routes and their inability to swim. To Erika, Debra and I, the stories painted a picture of these women's life-long relationship with the river from their childhood to the present day.



Fig. 5 Mujeres Brigadistas Theater Workshop Day 1 (Camelias community): Story Circle Activity

The story circle anecdote reminded me, as this work constantly reminds me, that no matter how meticulously I plan these workshops, story-based theater will always take its own direction – the direction of the participants. And, thus, it's a particularly effective methodology for cultivating individual and collaborative experiences, and furthermore, for looking forward to co-creating future possibilities. In these story circles we work out our fears, we find solutions together, we comfort each other. This chapter explores the very first step of making that possible in a

workshop with people/women who have minimal experience with theater. The first step, most often the scariest, is being seen and heard. This is quite the opposite of what these particular women, like many women around the world, are used to. A theme that emerged from the interviews with the facilitators as well as the reflection of the women in the Spider Web assessment exercise was about shyness – namely the women possessing a shyness that is difficult to overcome.

In this chapter, I provide a description of the intended structure for each of the workshops, which includes starting with a corporeal and voice warmup, and then moving on to the Story Circle activity. I describe both of these elements in some depth to describe my rationale for the structure of these story-based theater workshops. Next, I discuss the theme of shyness that emerged through my analysis of the interviews I conducted with the facilitators, as well as how the mujeres themselves described their apprehensions during the Spider Web assessment activity. Finally, continuing to unpack the issue of gender in the context of community development work in the data I collected, I explore issues around the ways that the mujeres' voices, knowledges, and labor are, or are not, recognized and valued in the context of their communities and their family structures.

Voice and Body Warmups

In the workshops that I have designed in my community work, and the way I was taught to do theater with participants of all ages from children to seniors, vocal and corporeal warmups are a key starting point that provide a transition into theater work, especially when theater is new to participants. During the Spider Web reflection period in Workshop 1, one mujer commented that her favorite part of the workshop

was doing the body stretches. She had never done this sort of movement. Hearing her say that really shocked me – what to me seems like a most basic daily movement of stretching, reaching up and then bending down to touch your toes – a movement so seemingly small and one that I perform daily, was such a significant experience for this person. Experiences like that remind me that every detail, no matter how seemingly small or inconsequential, of the workshop is meaningful, and thus should be planned with careful intention.

The warmup games and exercises were all carried out while standing in a circle. Here is a list of those warmup activities/games:

1. Saying our name and our favorite animal – this is a very simple exercise that provides each participant to have a chance to say something that they are very comfortable saying (their name) as well as providing a significant but low-risk fact about themselves (their favorite animal). I start the circle to provide a model as well as to get the game started with some good energy.
2. Body Stretching – depending on the amount of time available, we stretched our bodies from head to toe. I provided instructions and modeled the exercises.
3. Vocalization and Movement “Telephone” – this is a beginner-level theater game that involves the first participant doing a single original movement (e.g., putting their hands on their hips) while making a simple vocalization.

After the warm-ups, we sat in chairs around a circle to share our water stories, which I describe in the next section. After that, we moved on to the main activity, which, for the first day, consisted of creating theatrical scenes, which I will describe later, re-telling the water story of one of the women in small groups of four to six women. With the permission of the participants and the facilitators, in addition to the recordings I have already mentioned, I took wide angle panning video recordings of the theater workshops, particularly during group work on the tableaux. Throughout this thesis I refer to these recordings to most accurately portray what happened during these activities.

Our Story Circle

Creating a Story Circle activity, like most community organizing, requires a carefully detailed plan that one is willing to adapt and change on the spot, depending on the participants, the location, and any other unplanned or unexpected factors, which are inevitable. Below is the list of rules that I provided to the group before beginning the Story Circle in Workshop 1. This set of instructions is specific to this moment with these group of women; it is geared to encourage their participation and is responsive to assuage what I felt as their hesitance at that time:

2. Each woman will tell a brief 2-minute-long story and I (Carolina) will time it using my cell phone.
3. The story must be yours (the women's). It must have happened to you at a particular time in a specific place.

4. Everyone should participate. You may pass the first time around, but you will share the second time around, no matter how brief your story is.
5. The theme is water, in whatever form. Some examples include the river, rain, tears, drinking water, etc.
6. Your story should include other characters, which need not be human. Examples are animals, trees or plants, objects like a water tank, etc.
7. Something must have happened (I provided the example of tripping and falling) and as a result something else happens (e.g., you had to go to the hospital, or you were fine and kept on walking).
8. One person speaks at a time.
9. Tell whatever story happens to come to you when it's your turn. You may have a story in mind right now, but a different story comes to you inspired by the stories you heard before you and that is the idea, that there is a thread that connects our stories to each other.
10. Speak up so that everyone can hear you (this was especially important as many of the women are very soft-spoken and also not used to speaking to crowds).
11. Confidentiality – what is said in the circle stays in the circle “para que compartan en confianza” (“so you may share in confidence”).

Upon reviewing the recording, I observed that it took longer than I had expected to get the story circle going. In reviewing the recording of the story circle, it took approximately 7 minutes for the first woman to tell her story. After I gave the

instructions, in an attempt to provide some modeling of telling a story, I asked Erika to go first. Erika shared a brief story of being six years old and throwing herself into the sea to look at turtles while on a boating trip with her parents, and forgetting that she hadn't yet learned to swim. The woman whose turn it was next was silent when her turn came and, after several seconds of tense silence, Olivia, who was sitting in a different place in the circle, volunteered to go next. Seeing this is an opportunity for her to provide an additional modeling of the activity, I let Olivia go and then had the circle continue in a direction so that Citlalli could go next, thinking that this would provide some more examples and time for the women themselves to share their stories and be clear about the instructions. However, the women still were not volunteering, and this is when Debra shared a very personal and intimate story, one that I will not share here, that took place in a Korean bath house. When she concluded her story with a punchline ending, all of us broke out into a loud chorus of laughter. This comical intervention greatly facilitated overcoming barriers of shyness, breaking the ice in a major way, and the first mujer, Tomasa, told her story¹⁶. In this instance, being flexible with the rules (i.e. having to go around in a circle) allowed the women to overcome any hesitance they may have initially had and commence to tell their stories. Once Tomasa shared her story, the other mujeres followed suit, some more hesitantly than others, until every one of us, including the facilitators, had shared a story.

Shyness & Femininity – The Gendering of Being (Un)Seen

At multiple points in the interviews and workshops, the mujeres (women) were described by the facilitators as being shy, and the facilitators expressed that the

¹⁶ Tomasa's story appears in its entirety in Chapter 4

women's shyness is a challenge that needs to be overcome. As I analyzed the data, paying close attention to the words used by the facilitators and those used by the mujeres, I wondered if shyness was a trait projected onto the women by the outsiders that the women in turn internalize like a self-fulfilling prophecy, or if it was a trait that the women identified with themselves. This led me to reflect on whether I myself was also guilty of projecting certain traits onto the women in a similar way. Upon reviewing recordings of the women's reflections on the workshops, I found that the women did describe themselves as being shy on several occasions, which are presented later in this chapter. In Spanish, the phrase most commonly used to express shyness can literally be translated as a trait that one possesses (e.g. "me da pena" – shyness overcomes me / I get shy). I think that the Spanish wording separates the subject, the person, from the feeling of shyness, and so shyness is not an internal phenomenon that comes from within the person as much as it is an external, temporary state of being and, thus, one that can be overcome.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with Cynthia, a community organizer working for the Municipality of Berriozábal, who has spent a large amount of time in the fields working directly with the women of the villages in the municipality, and grew up in Berriozábal herself. At other points in this thesis I present different transcriptions from this individual interview with Cynthia and with the other facilitators, which were conducted after the second workshop was complete. The excerpt below demonstrates Cynthia's assertion of the women as being shy, the difficulties she perceives that shyness creates in trying to organize the women, and the

ways she sees that theater work can help facilitate overcoming that initial barrier of shyness:

<p>Cynthia: Trabajar con mujeres en comunidad es un poco complicado porque son un poco más... penosas, digamos. Y ese tipo de ejercicio yo creo que les ayuda a poder desenvolverse un poquito. Y rompan como... esa cadena, digamos, de poder hablar con otras personas.</p>	<p>Cynthia: Working with women in communities is a bit complicated because they are a bit more... shy, let's say. And this type of exercise (theater), I think it helps them loosen up a bit. And helps them break that... chain, let's say, of being able to talk to other people.</p>
<p>Cynthia: Fué... como romper con esa barrera, no? Desenvolverse un poquito más. Y ellas también se pueden expresar. Porque muchas veces, como a las únicas personas que ellas ven son a las mismas de su comunidad. Y el hecho que otras personas, digamos, de otros lados, lleguen, se cohiben un poco. Entonces ya rompieron como, esa barrera de, de la pena. Y de la vergüenza, porque tienen muchas de ellas esa vergüenza como poder hacer, este, no se, ejercicios o actuación. Ese tipo de cosas. La verdad ya fué un cambio totalmente diferente.</p>	<p>Cynthia: It was... like breaking that barrier, right? Loosening up a little more. And they could also express themselves. Because many times, like, the only people (women) they see are the ones from their own community. Also, the fact that other people, let's say, from other places, come here, they inhibit themselves. So, breaking that, that barrier of, of shyness. And of shame, because many of them have that shame to be able to do, I don't know, an exercise, or acting. That type of thing. Honestly it was a completely different change (in them).</p>

At first, Cynthia's description as the women's shyness as an obstacle to overcome aligned with my view of the mujeres. However, the longer I sat with this discourse and listened to the women themselves describe their experiences in the workshop, I began to question whether labeling the women as "shy" was our own projection onto them. I wondered whether we were seeing the "obstacle" as theirs to overcome, rather than as a social obstacle of them now knowing us well enough to trust us. By looking at the "shyness" in this way, as a quality of being cautious with strangers coming to "teach" them, I was able to see what we, as facilitators, could do

to overcome the obstacle of being strangers. Either way, whether the women themselves were shy, or whether they were being cautious, sharing stories and making theater together helped overcome those obstacles.

Reflections from Las Mujeres During the Telaraña / Spider Web Activity

At the end of the workshops, we concluded our time together with an activity called the Telaraña / Spider Web. This was the only activity during the workshops that was not developed by me; it was suggested and lead by Citlalli, the biologist working with Cántaro Azul. An assessment exercise, the Spider Web involved all of the participants and facilitators standing in a circle and saying first the most challenging part for us and, second, our favorite part of the workshop. This reflection as a group is a pretty typical way to end a workshop. However, the unique part about the Spider Web is that as we share the most challenging part for us, we throw a ball of string to each other at random points in the circle, ultimately creating a spider web with the string. Once the web is created, we move as a group in various directions (half the circle up, while the other half crouched down; clockwise; counter-clockwise). The idea is to demonstrate the bonds we have created and the web we have woven and the effort and challenges that come when we try to work together as a connected group. Then, when we say our favorite part, we go backwards to undo the spider web and roll the string back up.

Recording video of the Spider Web activity allowed me to document what the women saw as the biggest challenge in the workshop, as well as the part they remembered or liked the most. In all, I collected data from 24 participants (14 at Workshop 1 and 10 at Workshop 2) on the Spider Web exercise in the form of a video,

which includes the most challenging part for them. Below is a list of the challenges that they found, in order from most to least frequent:

Concern/Challenge	Frequency
Coming up with a Story/Remembering their Story	8
Doing the Tableaux / Frozen Scene	4
Thinking of an Animal	2
Pena / Shyness	2
Nervous due to not knowing others	1
Doing the Movements/Stretching	1

Table 2 List of concerns or challenges about the theater workshop that mujeres reported during the Spider Web reflection activity.

As can be seen from Table 2 above, almost half of the women expressed that their biggest challenge was thinking of a story during the Story Circle. Regarding the concern about logistics/lateness, at Workshop 2 there was a miscommunication that caused half of the women to arrive an hour late and, thus, miss the earlier activities, as well as for me having to improvise, which I will discuss a bit more in the next chapter.

Two women, both in Workshop 1, explicitly used the term “pena” or “shyness” to describe their biggest challenge during the workshop. Below is a transcription of those two women’s statements in the original Spanish with English translation:

Mujer:
 “A mí lo que me dificultó mucho fué también lo de la **historia** porque me daba un poquito de **pena**, así.”

Woman:
 “What was very difficult for me was also the part about [telling] the story because I felt a little shy.”

Tomasa: “Pues, yo, al principio, pues, me dió mucha pena.”

Carolina: “Te dió mucha pena, al principio”

Tomasa: “Ajá. Pero dejé ya.

Tomasa: “Well, for me, at the beginning I felt very shy.”

Carolina: “You felt very shy, at the beginning.”

Tomasa: “Uh-huh, but then I stopped [feeling shy]”

The first woman above expresses that her shyness caused her to have a difficult time telling her story. The second woman, Tomasa (who I will be writing about throughout this paper), states that she was feeling shy at the beginning of the session, but that she eventually stopped feeling that way. Thus, even though the women were described as shy numerous times by the facilitators, that expression of “me da pena” or “I feel shy” was not used by the women themselves as frequently as, for example, having a hard time thinking of a story to share. Although closely examining the connotations of the term “shyness” might seem like splitting hairs in terms of determining the exact reason the women were not as likely to participate vocally at the beginning of the workshop, or to the satisfaction of the facilitators, I think that this is precisely the type of phenomenon and cultural/ethnographic disconnect that is crucial to overcoming in order to design more successful skills- and community-building workshops, which is the goal of the Municipality, but also of the women and the communities in their concerns for access to safe and potable water.



Fig. 6 After every woman has shared her biggest challenge from the workshop, the web is created. Above is a photo of the Spider Web at the second workshop.

The Hum of the Spiders: “Estas mujeres saben tejer”/ “These women know how to weave”

A very curious phenomenon occurred in the space when the web was completed and we moved around in it, and right before it was time to “unweave” the web and share our favorite parts of the workshop. As we were preparing to move as a group, each holding a part of the string that, when interconnected between us made up the web, as a group, we noticed that there were certain spots where the string was loose and needed to be tightened. As the mujeres worked together to even out the tautness of the

string, they quietly murmured among themselves in a low confident tone, like this is an activity (working with string) that they are experts at, which is the case. Just as they were finishing, right on cue, Debbie said, “well, it’s obvious that these women are expert weavers!” When I was watching this part of the footage, at first glance I skipped over this part, assuming there was no “data” here. However, I had been struck by the hypnotically intriguing murmuring and found myself watching that part over and over, and after a few times it struck me that this was like watching spiders weave their web or bees build a honeycomb. The steady hum of experts at work. It became important to note, as well, that this moment was one where the power dynamics of knowledge were shifted as the mujeres became the ones giving instructions to each other and the facilitators, who obviously had much less experience weaving, in efforts to tighten the “Spider Web”. Providing space to have a moment like this, and then to appreciate it upon review of the recording, provided me an opportunity to reflect on the expertise of the women and to acknowledge the importance of building space for unplanned teaching/learning moments to emerge.

Women (Un)Seen and (Un)Heard

Some of the excerpts that I analyze throughout the next few chapters are from conversational plática-style interviews that I conducted with Olivia and Citlalli though Erika and Debra were also present during the pláticas and participated in the conversations. Altogether, I recorded a little over four hours of combined audio and video footage that I reviewed, transcribed and translated¹⁷; I have divided excerpts

¹⁷ Because I am Colombian, my Spanish dialect is different than the speakers’, who are all from Chiapas, and thus some of my translations may contain errors related to differences in expressions and

from these transcriptions¹⁸ (with translation) into thematic sections to facilitate analysis and discussion. In the following segment of this plática, or conversational interview, we were discussing the background of the Mujeres Brigadistas project and the involvement of the NGO Cántaro Azul, which Olivia and Citlalli both represented in this project. Olivia and Citlalli discuss their experiences with attempting to organize and create programming for these particular women of the Municipality of Berriozábal, as well as their experiences in other geographical areas with other women. They discuss similarities among female participants, including the structural social and community-based factors that affect these women’s attendance and participation. For me, these excerpts provided a richer look at what might make the mujeres appear to be “shy” to the facilitators (including myself) when in fact there are significant factors that may be causing that characterization.

<p>Olivia: Como mujer es un gran reto empezar a tener como estos cargos. O sea las mujeres con las que yo trabajo es muy complejo, no? Del decirle, <<como le hacemos para adaptarnos a tu tiempo?>> Pues y ella dice, <<si es un taller de un día, y si es en mi comunidad, mucho mejor. Porque si tengo que salir, trasladarme...>> es muy complejo porque la mujer es madre, es esposa, ama de casa, es criada si quieres. Pero es de todo.</p>	<p>Olivia: “As a woman it is a great challenge to start to have these tasks. In other words, the women I work with, it’s very complicated, right? Saying to them, “how can we adapt to your timeline?” Well she will say, “if it’s a workshop that lasts one day, and if it’s in my community, that’s much better. But if I have to leave, travel...” it’s very complicated because the woman is a mother, a wife, a homemaker, she is the maid if you will. But she is everything.</p>
<p>Olivia (cont’d): Entonces es mucho mas complejo para ellas estar como capacitando. Incluso también habla del miedo. Por ejemplo, una mujer dice, <<si ella va, o si vamos</p>	<p>Olivia (cont’d): So it’s much more complicated for her to do a training. Also, she will speak of fear. For example, a woman will say “if she [another woman] is going, or if two</p>

vocabulary. When in doubt I aim for an interpretation to convey meaning rather than a direct translation.

¹⁸ I have included an Appendix document that contains all of the transcription and translations that I did.

dos o tres, sí puedo ir. Pero si no, no.>>
 Incluso han habido mujeres que dicen,
 <<pero es que mi marido me tiene que
 acompañar.>>

or three are going, then I can go. But if
 not, I can't". There have been many
 women who say, "well my husband has
 to go with me".

In the excerpt above, Olivia expresses the difficulty of assuring women's participation in the workshops she organizes. She states that women in the communities that she works with state that it is much easier for them to participate in a training workshop if it is in their communities, as opposed to their having to travel elsewhere. And if they do travel elsewhere, they are much more likely to do so if they are accompanied by other women or, in some cases, their husband. This last point obviously presents obstacles to having women-only trainings. In fact, during the second workshop, which I will discuss in the next chapter, the event was held at one of the women's home and, although they were notified there were to be no men present, that woman's husband and her father stayed just outside of the front door, causing us to be careful with what we said. At the end of this excerpt, Olivia names the different role these women fulfill in their communities: mother, wife, homemaker, and finally Olivia states that the women are basically maids. Here, Olivia points to the roles the women can and cannot play in their communities, as well as the insular nature of their daily lives, not being able to leave their homes or communities.

Olivia (cont'd):
 Porque hay muchas que dicen, [she says
 something in Tzotzil] que es como ese, o
 sea "ser loca" empiezas a pensar cosas
 que en pocas palabras también es el celo.
 Entonces tiene que ir el hombre a
 acompañar la mujer para ver, a que
 realmente. Entonces--no son todos los
 hombres, pero si hay como esas
 personas--

Olivia (cont'd)
 Because there are many who say, [she
 says something in her Mayan language],
 which is to say like "to be crazy". You
 start to think things that, in few words, is
 jealousy. So the husband needs to go to
 see, what is really going on. So then—
 it's not all mean, but there are those
 types of people---

Citlalli:

Citlalli:

--porque van y le meten otras ideas en la cabeza.	Because they will go and get other ideas put in their heads.
<p>Olivia: Exacto. Entonces, es eso no? Más cuando hacemos como encuentros mixtos. Hay muchos maridos que sí. Ahora, si alguien más le mete, le fortalece esas ideas, es mayor complico para las mujeres. Es como buscar este lenguaje adecuado para trabajar con ellas es muy importante. Es muy importante. Entonces si son como experiencias, o sea muy variadas.</p>	<p>Olivia: Exactly. Well, that’s it, isn’t it? More so when we have mixed encounters. There are many husbands that yes. Now, if someone puts those ideas in their heads, it becomes more complicated for the women. It’s like searching for the adequate language to work with them is very important. It’s very important. So yes, they are as experiences, very varied.</p>

In the above excerpt, Olivia continues to explain the assumptions that she sees as causing men to determine that they need to accompany their wives to training workshops – namely a fear and jealousy of their wives getting “ideas put into their heads”, as Citlalli adds. This speaks to the fear that the husbands can feel of outsiders coming in and changing the women – an interesting contrast to a common reflection of the mujeres about the theater workshops, which is their gratitude for having a chance to interact with outsiders (gente del exterior). And so, in this way, as Olivia insinuates, their husbands’ fear of the unknown becomes another obstacle for the women to attend these trainings. In order to succeed in having the women participate, this makes the specific language used by the organizers extremely important, as Olivia points out. This excerpt speaks to the thorough and immense amount of background work that facilitators like Olivia, Citlalli and Cynthia need to do to create trust not just with the women, but with their husbands, their families, and their communities. To me, as a researcher/visitor from “el exterior”, it also means that having local partners, like Cántaro Azul and Prof. Erika Diaz-Pascacio, who have intimate knowledge of the

cultures as well as established relationships with participants, is vital to these types of collaborations.

Olivia (cont'd):

Acá, por ejemplo, en Berriozábal, lo poco que conocí cuando vi realizar el diagnóstico, hay mujeres que dicen, <<pues, nosotras estamos registradas porque nosotras manejamos el agua.>> Pero hay otras que realmente los que se hacen responsables son los hombres. Y eso se logra ver también en muchas entrevistas, no? Por ejemplo, cuando hay hombres trabajando el tema del agua. <<Oye, y las mujeres participaron en la construcción de tu sistema?>> <<No, todo lo hicimos nosotros.>> Porque es trabajo duro, nó? Pero, en otras ocasiones, en otras entrevistas a mi me toca que me dijeran, <<Sí.>> <<Y, ¿que hicieron las mujeres?>> <<Prepararon la comida, nos pasaron el agua.>> Bueno, están reconociendo lo que hizo la mujer. Pero hay muchos que no reconocen esa actividad, o sea, porque si no cargaron materiales, no hicieron nada. Pero, o sea, realmente si, quién les hizo la comida entonces?

Olivia (cont'd):

Here, for example, in Berriozábal, the little that I learned when I went to carry out the diagnostics, there are women who say, "Well, we are registered because we manage the water." But there are other women who really the ones who make themselves responsible are the men. And that is what you see in many interviews, right? For example, when men are working the topic of water, "So, did the women participate in the construction of your [water] system?" "No we [men] did everything." Because it's hard work, right? But, on other occasions, in other interviews, I have had them tell me, "Yes." "And what did the women do?" "They made the food, they brought us water [to drink]." Well, they are recognizing what the woman did. But there are many who do not recognize that activity. In other words, because if they don't carry the materials, they didn't do anything. But, really, yes, who made the food for you then?

In the segment above, Olivia discusses the different ways that the women and men she works with perceive and discuss the roles of women in water activities in their communities. For the women who participate in the workshops, according to Olivia, some state that they have registered for the workshops because they manage the water in their households. However, Olivia also finds that men claim responsibility for managing the water, and in some cases they don't see women as participating in any of the labor for water work. However, there have been other instances where men do recognize women's part in water management duties, such as cooking lunch and

bringing them water to drink. At the end of this segment, Olivia expresses her own frustration with the fact that some men don't recognize women's work. Rhetorically and somewhat cynically, she asks, "So, who made your lunch then?"

<p>Citlalli: Por ejemplo, ayer, ahorita cuando dijiste eso del reconocimiento - Ayer, por ejemplo, fuimos a una comunidad en donde una mujer es este--la única del comité, es bombera. O sea es la que bombea y reparte el agua, no? Pero, este, nos dan el nombre y todo, no? Este, <<si es una mujer. Se llama tal tal. Edad de tal tal.>> Okay. Y de pronto estamos platicando y <<Es que si, este, es que Manuel es el que da--reparte el agua,>> y no se qué. Bien. Cómo? Y muchas veces se oye decir el nombre de Manuel, no? Y, <<Cómo? Que no es Ester la bombera?>> <<Bueno, si, es, pero su marido le ayuda.>> <<Ah, bueno, pero quién es la que - entonces la responsable, or el responsable?>> <<Ester, ¡Ester es la bombera!>> <<Ah, bueno.>> Y, de repente, <<Sí, pero-->> Todo el tema era el reconocimiento iba dirigido a Manuel. Al hombre--</p>	<p>Citlalli: For example, yesterday, now when you said that about recognition. Yesterday, for example, we went to a community where a woman is the only one on the committee, she is in charge of the water. So she pumps the water and distributes it, right? Well, "Yes, she is a woman, her name is such and such, age such and such." Okay. And suddenly we are talking and, "Well, yes, it's Manuel who—distributes the water." And whatnot. Fine. What? And many times I hear Manuel's name mentioned, right? "Well? Wasn't Ester the water officer?" "Well, yes, but her husband helps her." "Oh, well, who is the—the woman responsible, or the man responsible?" "Estelle! Ester is the water officer!" "Oh, well," And, suddenly, "Yes, well—" The whole idea is that there is recognition given to Manuel. To the man--</p>
<p>Caro: Al esposo.</p>	<p>Carolina: --To the husband--</p>
<p>Citlalli: --Pero entonces le digo, <<Pero, cómo? O sea, es Ester o es Manuel? O todo lo hace Manuel?>> <<No. Ella lo hace. O sea, a veces le ayuda él.>> Pero el reconocimiento va hacia él. O sea, va hacia él. Y ella es la que está registrada ante la comunidad de que ella es la bombera. Entonces ahí hay un tema así que, yo hacía que me confundía, y de pronto hacia de que me confundía para yo decirle a él, <<Bueno, cómo? Entonces, es Ester o es Manuel?>> <<No, bueno, es Ester. Ester es la bombera.>> Y yo, <<Sí, pero es que me</p>	<p>Citlalli: --But then I say, "But how? I mean, is it Ester or is it Manuel? Or does Manuel do everything?" "No. she does it. I mean, sometimes he helps her." But the recognition goes towards him. Like, it goes to him. And she is the one who is registered with the community and she is the water officer. So right there there is a topic that, I was pretending to be confused, and would act confused so that I could say, "Well, how is that? So, is it Estelle or is it Manuel?" "No, well it is Estelle. Estelle is the water officer." And I'm like, "Yeah, well you mentioned</p>

mencionó Manuel.>> <<Es que él le ayuda, sí, a veces, pero-->> Bueno, pero, entonces entre su pensar y todo ese proceso como que les cuesta mucho pues aceptar que realmente, ella es la bombera, no?

Manuel.” “Well, it’s just that he does help her, sometimes, but—” Well, but, if between their thinking and that whole process, it’s a lot for them to accept that really, she is the water officer, right?

Citlalli carries the conversation on the topic of recognition, and particularly of the way that women’s and men’s roles, or their labor, are recognized differently, or even at all, in regards to water management in the communities she works with. She tells the story of a conversation she had the day before with several men from one of the villages in Berriozábal regarding the particular case of one woman, Ester, who is the water officer for her community. Feigning confusion, Citlalli probed the men to continue explaining to her how it was that, although Ester is the person accountable for water in the village, her husband Manuel is the one who they recognize as in charge. In the end, Citlalli comments that recognizing the reality that a woman, Ester, is the person in charge of the water is beyond the capacity of these men – it’s a sort of cognitive dissonance that they cannot overcome. The stories presented above were discussed in the context of being just a couple of examples of the reality of the way women and their contributions are viewed in these communities, according to Olivia and Citlalli’s shared experiences.

Olivia:
Y eso que ha pasado, en muchas de las historias, es lo que pasa. Que han habido muchas mujeres líderes; el detalle que no son reconocidas. O sea, o no son nombradas en la historia.

Olivia:
And that is what has happened, in many stories, that’s what happens. There have been many women leaders; the thing is that they are not recognized. In other words, they are not named in the (his)story.

The final excerpt above asserts that, indeed, this lack of recognition is pervasive in the stories and histories (the Spanish word *historia* means both) of these communities. Olivia's point is that it is not necessarily that women do not take leadership roles, but that their leadership is written out of the (his)story. This consideration is important when we, as outsiders facilitating leadership trainings and workshops, come with our own knowledges and notions about whether women are shy, or whether they are absent from leadership in their communities.

In general, the segment of the interview discussed above highlights different constraints that women may face that their husbands don't have to think about at all. These factors include the approval of their husbands and families, the recognition (or non-recognition) of their leadership and contributions to water management work in their communities, and the representation of themselves as not contributing "real" labor to their families and communities. In her book *Caliban and the Witch*, Italian philosopher Silvia Federici (2004) contests that the erasure of women's work from the narrative of a social structure, and the oppression of women (in the case of her book in Medieval Europe through the burning of witches and other violence), is vital to the phenomenon of primitive accumulation and to the subsequent success and dominance of capitalism. I see a connection here and argue that depreciating women's contributions and not counting them as "real" labor can be essential to perpetuating the male-dominated culture in the villages, which in turn may perpetuate the notion that the women are "shy" or, worse, that they are passively getting "ideas put in their

heads” and should not participate in these workshops¹⁹. Participating in the Mujeres Brigadistas program and changing women’s roles in community governance as well as re-defining the value of the labor (and/as knowledge) has the potential to disrupt the existing social fabric, including that of the family structure/the home. Utilizing a seemingly “benign” activity like creating art and theater offers a palatable catalyst for meaningful knowledge exchange that has the potential to push back against existing social power dynamics.

The Importance of Joy and Fun for Transformative Education

Although I have largely described some challenges that the workshops uncovered, it is also important at this juncture to mention that theater is fun, it’s enjoyable! Bell hooks writes about the lack of acknowledgement of excitement (having to do with FUN!) in the context of critical pedagogy and Western feminism, “Neither Freire’s work nor feminist pedagogy examined the notion of pleasure in the classroom. The idea that learning should be exciting, sometimes even “fun,” was the subject of critical discussion by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade schools...But there seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education” (hooks, p. 7). Nor, I would add, in adult education and capacity building. Even in the books and articles I have read about community engaged theater and applied theater practices, I have found that the idea that theater with adults, or at any age, can actually be enjoyable is largely left unsaid, perhaps because it is seen as threatening to being taken seriously as

¹⁹ This is an argument based on this initial data, and is something that I would be interested in looking further into to make a clearer conclusion on.

an academic discipline. In my research I have found that having these interventions be enjoyable and pleasant is a key factor to their success. When participants are at ease



Fig 7 Olivia stands with her arms up and a big smile while constructing a tableau vivant with her group

and having a fun time, they are more open to trying something new and taking those sorts of risks. And here, I am referring not only to the Mujeres Brigadistas, but also to the facilitators, who were also participants in the workshops. These story-based theater workshops challenged the traditional and dominant notion that participants, i.e. “villagers” or ‘peasants’²⁰, are receptacles who receive knowledge unilaterally from facilitators and “experts”. In our

workshops, those of us who organize and lead the workshops are also learners and actors – we also take risks and share our own stories, hopes, and fears.

For example, in one of our many pláticas, Olivia told us how she would like to do the theater workshops but she is shy and her story of how they had tried another workshop with puppets, but the participants were too shy. And since she was shy too,

²⁰ Both terms that have a history of oppression related to them, and terms that I do not like using.

it didn't work out. So, there is a need for the leader of the workshop to model how to overcome shyness. During our workshops, Oli enjoyed exploring and pushing her own artistic boundaries. In this photo of Olivia (Fig. 7), we can see her standing proudly, with a beaming smile, as her group performs their obra/tableau vivant²¹. I can't remember exactly what she is representing in this tableau vivant but it is an object, possibly either a water tank or a tree (both were commonly present in their stories and tableaux).

Conclusion: There's Something About Theater

There is something specific about these types of story-based liberatory theater workshops, inspired by Boal and coming from a Freirean pedagogical tradition in this particular case, that helps people feel comfortable expressing themselves in ways that have previously been unfamiliar to them. In these workshops, creating democratic spaces of learning that are collaborative, supportive, and enjoyable is an effort that itself is well worth the effort, as is reflected by the participants themselves as well as the facilitators of this project. Below is an excerpt from Citlalli describing the potential implications that incorporating arts-based interventions into community development workshops can have.

Citlalli:

Cómo ese tipo de dinámicas – la cuestión artística – que...pues hasta nosotros que estamos en la ciudad estamos un poquito ajenos a ellos, pero...Cómo desde esas actividades puede uno desinhibirse bastante y de ir como conociéndonos y también decir, hay gente que le gusta expresarse mucho

Citlalli:

How this type of dynamic – the artistic aspect that – well, even those of us who live in the city are a bit estranged from it. But, through participating in these activities can one disinhibit oneself a lot and how getting to know each other and, say, there are people who really like to express themselves and sometimes they

²¹ For a description and discussion of tableaux vivants, see Chapter 4.

y a veces no lo hacen porque tienen como el temor como, <<pues no lo hacemos>>. Son así. Entonces temenos que estar todos calladitos.

don't do it [express themselves] because there is a fear like, "well, we won't do it". They are like that. So we all have to stay silent.

After having participated in the story-based theater workshops, Citlalli expresses the potential that she sees for “even those of us who live in the city” to benefit from exploring arts methodologies. She observes how the theater work and play we did helps people, participants and facilitators alike, to get comfortable being together and getting to know each other. She contrasts this with the way some workshops go where attendees refuse to participate and so they sit in silence. As a participant and facilitator in many workshops, I have also experienced that deadening silence – a lost opportunity for true connection and exploration.

The themes that emerged from the data I have discussed in this chapter largely have to do with shyness, as it is often what is described by facilitators and participants as the first obstacle to overcome in participating in theater workshop, i.e. an inhibition to participate or even to have the willingness to participate. However, through working closely with this data, I discovered a nuance to what shyness really meant in these workshops with the Mujeres Brigadistas, who, somewhat relatedly, were selected for the program because they were the women from their communities who seemed more outgoing and willing to participate in the leadership development program. As I listened and re-listened to the words from the facilitators (Cynthia, Olivia, and Citlalli) and to the testimonies of mujeres, I found that there appeared to be a difference in how on the one hand shyness was used to describe the women, but on the other hand what

could be perceived as shyness may have, at least in some cases, been better described as apprehension to open up to strangers in doing an novel activity. This assessment is supported by the responses the mujeres gave during the Spider Web activity to describe the most challenging aspect of the workshop. Their responses indicated that, in order from most common response to least common: they had trouble thinking of what to say when it was their turn, performing the theater activity, and feeling shy. These responses point to a more complicated story than just being shy – the women expressed that they felt uncomfortable or unprepared for the activity, which makes sense since it was brought to them by strangers from another country.

Through theater games and story-based theater making, the mujeres reported feeling safe and heard. In the course of participating in the workshop, opened up and became more comfortable with each other, the process, and the act of doing theater. This speaks to the potential of story-based theater workshops as tools for facilitating deep connection and collaborative knowledge sharing and knowledge making with women in rural communities. However, it is important to note that these types of theater workshops also require instructors/workshop facilitators to put themselves out there and have a certain amount of energy and theater skills to carry out the workshop and keep participants engaged. As Citlalli mentioned in the excerpt above, I too was greatly impressed by the trust and willingness that all of the women, participants and facilitators alike, had for me and for the theater that I offered.

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CHAPTER 3

“HASTA AMIGAS”/ “EVEN FRIENDS”: WOMEN WEAVING WEBS FOR COLLABORATIVE WATER WORK AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Going with the Flow – When Things Don’t Go as Planned

Feeling calmer now that we had one successful workshop under our belts two days prior, Olivia, Citlalli, Erika, and I giggled and talked excitedly on the car ride on our way to the second village, Las Camelias, and the second workshop. As we approached, we were surprised to stop, not in front of a community space like the first workshop, but at one of the women’s homes. I wondered how we would fit 20 plus women in this space, but I smiled and introduced myself to the people —particularly the two men (the woman of the house’s husband and father), who milled around the outside of house just within ear shot (and remained there for the entirety of the workshop). This predicament quickly reminded me that we were indeed in patriarchal communities and that having a private space for just women, as we had had for the first workshop, is a luxury that we could not take for granted. And this was just the start of the surprises that our second day of theater workshops with the Brigadistas brought us.

Although the initial plan for the workshops conducted in the two communities was identical, due to circumstances outside of our control, like half the participants being over an hour late due to communication and transportation issues (there is no

cell service in this area; communication is done via two-way radio) and most of the women who were on time bringing their young children, we had to be nimble and



Fig. 8 “Baby warmups” during Workshop 2. Women with babies held them in their arms. Those of us without babies pretended to hold one. This was one of the many ways we improvised and adjusted for the unplanned presence of numerous babies during Workshop 2.

adaptable in our work. This meant that the planned curriculum was thrown out the window. And so the second workshop ended up being very different which, as has been my previous experience, presented exciting opportunities, such as the chance to do “baby warmups” (body warmups with babies – real or imaginary - in arms – see Fig. 8) as well as a makeshift interview activity. For this activity, I paired each Mujer

Brigadista up with one of the visiting collaborators. Another difference for this workshop is that we were joined by a Commissioner representing the Municipality. Together as a group, we came up with questions about each other's daily lives, and specifically around daily water experiences (e.g., "Where does the water you use in your home come from?"). The mujeres added that they wanted to know other things about the visiting women, and the facilitating women (the visitors) agreed. Together, they added questions like: What kinds of books you like to read? What do you make for dinner? And more.

Through the interviews, we were collaboratively creating a discursive space as well as a physical space for us to interact as women – to be vulnerable and silly together, even if there were men just outside the doorway. The times that we spent in more informal conversation as well as facilitated discourse through the interviews and the story circle is the sort of *convivencia* that Trinidad Galván (2015), Villenas (2005) and others write about. As Ruth Trinidad Galván (2015) describes in her research utilizing *convivencia* as a methodology, "Those moments of real interaction and learning took place in the sheer moments of living, spending time together, and being each other's ears and companion." (pp. 96-97) *Convivencia*, the act of spending time together that has its root in the Spanish verb "vivir", happens organically through working together and living amongst each other. However, in the case of the theater workshops that we did in these two communities, *convivencia* was at times facilitated, sort of "fast-tracked" through activities of deep connection like the interviews in Workshop 2 and the story circle in both workshops. At other times, *convivencia*

happened naturally while we mingled waiting between activities, or while we got a bite to eat when sandwiches arrived during the workshops.

This chapter focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of story-based theater workshops and the way that these experiences supported the connections between mujeres in five specific ways. First, incorporating the qualitative methodology of interviewing into the workshops guided by the Latina feminist approaches I discussed earlier, in an embodied and emergent way, provided an unexpected opportunity for all of the participants to get to know each other deeply and make real connections. Second, I show how power dynamics played out in these workshops, especially as compared to the typical hierarchical style of community-based capacity-building workshops, and how collaborative and participatory arts making activities can even out these hierarchical tendencies. Third, I demonstrate how making space for *convivencia* – for being and living among and with each other, and enjoying our time together, supported the goal of the Mujeres Brigadistas project of having the women feel comfortable to work together – facilitated connections that they could continue building up on in their future water management work together. Fourth, I discuss the importance of women-centered spaces and show how working among “*puras mujeres*” (only women) nourished a special site for water knowledge that promoted safety and trust. Finally, I explore the importance of joy, laughter and fun in this work, and discuss the implications of fun for collaborative meaning making.

During the Spider Web reflection activity, which I introduced in Chapter 2, in the second workshop, one of the women shared how her favorite part of the day had been doing the interview:

Mujer: “La pude conocer un poquito más, y ya agarro más confianza con ella. Ya nos podemos hacer hasta amigas.	Woman: I got to know her [interview partner] a bit more, and I am trusting her more. Now we can even be friends.
Todas: “Ahhh... Hasta amigas!”, laughing	All: “Wow!... Even friends!”, laughing
Mujer: Ya me invitó a comer.	Woman: She invited me over to eat.

“Even friends!” – all of the other women were so excited by this prospect that we all laughed as a group. Imagine the feeling of becoming friends with someone, someone who seems so different from you, who minutes before was a stranger from an unfamiliar place with a possibly complicated history or power dynamic – who now, after a couple of hours together and one 15-minute-long informal conversational interview, feels like your friend! I actually caught a moment just like this one on video. As I did several times during each workshop, I panned across for a 2-minute-long snippet of to record the process of an activity (e.g. the interview) in progress. As the video was fixed on a different pair of women, off-frame is heard the sound of one of the organizers responding to the answer to her first question, “what are you making for dinner?” After her partner tells her what’s on the menu, the first woman (organizer) says, “that sounds delicious! Yes, please invite me to eat sometime!”, as both women laughed. The feeling of deep comradery that these collaborative and flexible activities facilitates, to even create bonds of friendship, is invaluable to the collaborative work of water governance and leadership development that is the

ultimate goal of these workshops. With friendship comes a true and deep trust and with that good work may be carried out.

Another unique aspect of the second day of the workshops was that we had the opportunity to be joined by Yonalli Hernández Ávila, a Fourth Commissioner of the Environment and Hydraulic Resources for the Municipality of Berriozábal. Upon



Fig 9 Makeshift interview between Yonalli and a Mujer Brigadista, who holds her young child in her lap.

returning to the municipal offices in Berriozábal, I conducted a brief interview with Yonalli regarding her experience in the workshop. In that video interview, she provided the following reflection upon how the experience shaped her

view of the mujeres, and her own relationship with them as a member of the governing political body:

Yonalli:
Me gustó mucho poder tener esta convivencia tan cercana hacia las chicas porque permitió conocerlas un poquito más. Conocer cuales son las necesidades lejos de las obvias que ya tienen con el tema del agua. Pero también ver que ellas quieren seguir capacitándose y quieren seguir aprendiendo en diferentes temas. Y encontrar que tengo tanto parecido con ellas también, ¿no?

Yonalli:
I really liked being able to have that intimate “convivencia” with the girls because it allowed me to get to know them a bit better. To know what their needs are apart from the obvious ones they have around water issues. But also to see that they want to keep building their skills and learning about different topics. And, also, to find that I have so much in common with them, right? That

Etonces eso me motiva adelante, a seguir | motivates me to move forward, to keep
trabajando arduamente por ellas. | working hard for them.

Through the informal interview process, Yonalli states that she was able to find commonalities between herself and the woman she interviewed, leading her to find new motivations in how she approaches her work for the local government. Typically, municipal officials like Yonalli do not get to convivir, such as sharing a meal or a chat, with community members, much less participate in a collaborative art-making activity. In this interview, Yonalli states two ways that the the workshop, and specifically what she refers to as “esta convivencia tan cercana” (this close/intimate convivencia), affected her understanding of the mujeres: 1) Yonalli was able to learn about interests and concerns that her female constituents have beyond the limited scope of the Municipality’s water project; and 2) she was able to find commonalities between herself and the women – in other words, she was able to relate to them. This relatability can be a steppingstone to empathy, which is one of the most valuable known effects of collaborative community-based theater.

The theater workshop experience, and specifically the moments of close connection and opportunity to truly get to know each other, was mentioned by all of the women facilitators who joined us at the workshops either during the Spider Web reflections or in follow-up interviews: Cynthia and Yonalli (from the Municipality of Berriozábal), Olivia and Citlalli (from the water NGO Cántaro Azul), Erika and Debra (from the two universities), and Pilar (an intern with the municipal government).



Fig. 10 Makeshift interview between Erika and a Mujer Brigdista, who holds her young child in her lap.

In this photo (Fig. 10), one of the mujeres, with her young daughter in her lap, conducts an informal conversational interview with Prof. Erika Diaz Pascacio. The woman can be seen with a bite of a

sandwich in her hand and both women have their beverages on the floor next to them as they shared a meal in convivencia while getting to know each other. While analyzing videos and photos, as well as my field notes of the workshops, several vital aspects of convivencia stood out to me:

1. Time/space for flexibility to allow for the women's needs (specifically in workshop 2), especially to have and include their children (more obvious in workshop 2 but there were also some moments during workshop 1 where older children were present and incorporated into the activities (which will be discussed in the next chapter)
2. In turn, that opened up opportunities for more organic activities (like the makeshift interviews – in fact, Erika commented during

the Spider Web that she wished the interviews had been even more informal/unstructured).

3. Food – sharing a meal. In both of the workshops, the Municipality provided lunch and it was an important aspect of our time together. Although it was more of a working lunch, it was also an opportunity for the organizers to demonstrate gratitude to the mujeres through providing sandwiches and drinks. Sharing a meal inevitably facilitates more relaxed conversation and convivencia.

As can be seen in the table below, during the Spider Web reflection activity, 12 women listed their favorite part of the workshops as either meeting new people (6), all of the women participating together (4), and having the opportunity to “convivir” together (2) (the women specifically used the term “convivir” in their response). In fact, all three of these responses fall within the category of “convivencia”, about spending time together getting to know each other and just being with other women. Even becoming friends – “hasta amigas!” Thus, all of the women, all of us, felt especially aware of and grateful for some time spent together, getting to know each other, telling our stories and hearing each other’s, playing together, and just being together – this is what convivencia looks like.

Favorite Part	Frequency
Play / Tableaux	11
Meeting New People	6

Everyone participating together	4
Stories / Listening	4
Warmup Exercises / Movement	3
Convivir (being together)	2

Table 3 List of favorite part of the workshop expressed by mujeres during the Spider Web activity. All of the responses represent aspects of “convivencia”.

Trinidad Galván relates *convivencia* with *sobrevivencia* (survival) and what she calls *supervivencia* (going beyond surviving; thriving):

“The need to create spaces and places that sustain was a crucial determinant for their [the women’s] *supervivencia*. This is precisely where *convivencia* ties to *supervivencia*. Our *vivencia*, according to Ortega y Gasset (2007), is made of the mundane insignificant occurrences and every so often of great happenings, many times painful and others joyous, but always a relationship with a circumstance and others. While both words speak of living and being in the moment (*vivencia*), one emphasizes a sort of communion with others, a togetherness (*convivencia*), while the other word (*supervivencia*) claims a beyondness (*super/sobre*) to mere survival.” (113-114)

In these initial *encuentros*, or confluences as I describe them earlier, consisting of storytelling and theater play, we began to create the framework for these “spaces and places that sustain” that Trinidad Galván states are crucial for women’s *supervivencia*. After all, these workshops were meant to be merely pilot programs for what was to be a series of story-based workshops directly related to the water work that was the goal of the *Mujeres Brigadistas* program²². In the next two sections I will analyze speech and stories told by two of the facilitators, Olivia and Cynthia,

²² For more information on this, see the Introduction.

regarding the ways in which women went beyond survival, superaron (came out ahead), and how during these and future Mujeres Brigadistas workshops the women have the chance to superar together, which I see related to supervivencia – both terms are about going beyond survival – to bettering themselves or coming out ahead. These stories, in turn, were shared and are thus accessed by me now sharing them with you, the reader, in moments of convivencia between us, between women-- both facilitators and mujeres participantes. First, Olivia relays the story of a woman superando in her career and her life despite extreme pushback from her family, and then Cynthia and Olivia comment during our Spider Web activity about the potential for the mujeres to connect to uplift each other. These stories speak to the complex nature of gender and relationships between women in these communities.

“What Tangled Webs We Weave”: Examining & Creating Bonds of Alliance through Web Weaving among Women

On one of our various story-based pláticas as we drove between destinations, Olivia told us story of woman who had been trained as a midwife whose husband supported her but mother-in-law didn't and found the man a new wife. The woman felt ok with that and grateful/happy that she could continue doing her work.

Olivia:
El año pasado realizé estudios diagnóstico a puras mujeres. A puras mujeres. Para preguntar su estado de ánimo. ¿Cómo se sentían ellas? ¿Qué tanto han aprendido? Y yo me quedé con muchas experiencias o sea que realmente hasta a mí me daban ganas de llorar. Porque cuando empezamos a hablar entre puras mujeres, empezaron como a platicar, ¿no? Y se desenvolvían. O sea

Olivia:
Last year I carried out some diagnostic research with strictly women. To ask the state of their willingness (morale). How did they feel? How much had they learned? And I was left with many experiences, in other words, ones that really even made me want to cry. Because when we started talking amongst only women, we began to like, talk, right? And they got comfortable. So

tanto que si teníamos una hora para esa actividad nos llevaban dos horas, tres horas.

much so that if we had an hour for the activity, we would take two hours, three hours for it.

Olivia uses the phrase “puras mujeres” (only women) to indicate workshops and spaces where she has been with only women and what happens when you get together among only women. When Olivia, as an organizer, facilitates spaces for women to be in convivencia together, they take time, they “desenvolverse” (unwind, get comfortable) and end up sharing deep stories of pain, survival, and “supervivencia” (Trinidad Galván, 2015), as is this story of the doula that follows.

Olivia:

Porque incluso decía una, una experiencia de señora. De una partera. Que cuando ella se empezó a capacitar, me dice, <<mi esposo me dió permiso>> ¿no? <<mi esposo me apoyó. Pero a mi suegra no le gustó. Y le buscó otra mujer. Y la metió en mi casa.>>

Olivia:

Because one even said, the experience of a woman. Of a midwife. That when she began training, she say, “my husband gave me permission,” right? “My husband supported me. But my mother-in-law didn’t like it. And she found him another women. She put her [the other woman] in my house.”

Olivia tells a story relayed to her by a woman who was training to be a doula. Although her husband supported her and “allowed” her to continue with her training, her mother-in-law vehemently disapproved. So much so that the mother-in-law ended up finding another woman for her son to marry and the first woman was pushed out of her home. Olivia says that this story brought tears to her eyes.

Olivia:

Así y [clears throat] cuando ella me platicaba y yo dije, <<¿cómo?>> dije, <<pero si tu marido te apoyaba.>> <<Pero mi suegra no. Mi suegra le buscó otra mujer y, pues, a mí me dejaron sin casa y con mis hijos.>> <<Y, ¿qué

Olivia:

So [clears throat] when she talked to me and I said, “How?” I said to her, “but your husband supported you.” “But my mother-in-law didn’t. My mother-in-law found him another woman and, well, they left me without a home and with

hiciste?>> <<Pues me dí cuenta que soy una mujer muy valiente, lo dejé, y saqué adelante a mis hijos. Lo he sufrido. Pero vale la pena.>> Porque, ya, a raíz de esa formación que ella tuvo, pero perdió su marido, ella ha salvado muchas vidas. Que es la partería.

my children. “So what did you do?” “Well, I realized that I am a very brave woman, I left him, and did the best for my children. I have suffered. But it is worth it.” Because, now, as a result of the training she had, though she lost her husband, she has saved many lives. Which is what midwifery is.

Reflecting on her own experiences, Olivia asks the woman how this could possibly be? She continues the story; the newly trained doula was left without a home and alone with her children. But, through this difficult experience, the woman learned of her true strength and was able to bring her kids ahead on her own. In this case, this woman lost her husband and nuclear family structure, but gained training in a field that in turn will save other women, as well as allowing her to financially care for her children.

Olivia:
Entonces, yo como mujer, yo como adolescente, que digo, me estresa un trabajo y ya quiero renunciar por tantas cosas. Ella no. Ella utilizó eso como una fortaleza. Pero es un dolor que muchas mujeres han vivido y es un dolor que ella tiene como guardado, ¿no? Porque cuando nos contó eso, las otras parteras que la conocen dijo, <<hizo eso tu suegra?>> Y ella dijo, <<Sí.>> Entonces si es, como, es--Entonces como mujer es un gran reto empezar a tener como estos cargos. O sea las mujeres con las que yo trabajo es muy complejo, ¿no?

Olivia:
So, as a woman, as an adolescent, I say, I am too stressed to work, I want to give up for so many reasons. Not her. She used it as a source of strength. But it is a pain that many women have lived and that she has sort of hidden, right? Because when she told us this, the other midwives who know her said, “Your mother in law really did that?” And she said, “Yes”. So, it’s like—So as a woman, it’s a big challenge to have these charges. In other words, the women with whom I work, it’s really complicated, right?

Comparing the story of the doula to her own life experience Olivia somewhat humorously questions whether she would have the same fortitude, calling herself an

adolescent, meaning she feels immature about being able to handle challenging situations that aren't nearly as severe as losing her family in exchange for her vocation. Olivia then goes on to contextualize the story of the doula within the experiences of many of the women in the villages where she works, who go through similar painful situations in the name of taking “esos cargos” – those charges (vital roles like delivering babies and other similar labor) in their communities.

The story above, as Olivia relates it, encompasses the deep tensions women in these communities sometimes face between gaining educational training and capacity-building in exchange, many times, for potentially deep disturbances to their home lives. Moreover, when these women challenge the existing patriarchal values and practices of their communities, even with support of their husbands, it is sometimes other women who are the reinforcers of that patriarchal social structure. This is particularly painful for women organizers and trainers like Olivia, who want to support these women's desires to gain new skills and knowledge, knowing that the price they pay may be enormous. What follows is a contrasting anecdote – one of the women in our workshops finding solidarity and bonds through our collaborative theater work.

“Si realmente tejéramos estas redes” / “If we actually wove these webs”:

During the first workshop, when sharing her favorite part of the event during the Spider Web exercise, Cynthia shared the following statement about the incredible opportunities that could be possible if women wove the webs that currently are much more available to men:

Cynthia:
...no solo en el tema del agua, sino también como mujeres, y si realmente tejiéramos estas redes de manera efectiva, cuánto podríamos lograr, ¿no? Porque, si nos damos cuenta, estas so las redes que tejen los hombres. Y para ellos, pues, les es más facil poder salir al ámbito público y estar... en política, decisiones, este, de nuestra comunidad. Y si nosotras, este, realmente tejáramos estas redes y jaláramos parejo y sin aflojarle, creo que pudiéramos hacer cosas muy increíbles.

Cynthia:
...not just in the topic of water, but also as women, if we really weave these sorts of webs effectively, how much could we achieve, right? Because, if we realize it, these are the webs that men weave. And for them, well, it's easier to be able to go out in public and to be... in politics, making decisions for our community. And if we really wove these webs and if we pulled each of us evenly without letting go, I think we could do very incredible things.

Sharing next in the spider web activity, Olivia added to Cynthia's comment about the web weaving metaphor by saying:

Olivia:
...y como decía Cynthia, por lo regular estas redes las tejen los hombres. Pero también hay muchas mujeres que tejen. Y las mujeres no solo tejen; bordamos, costuramos, algo que rompen los hombres lo reparamos nosotras, sinceramente. Entonces, creo que es como el momento de nosotras ir, pues, tejiendo todo esto y armando una red entre mujeres.

Olivia:
...and as Cynthia was saying, usually these webs are woven by men. But many women also weave. And women don't just weave; we embroider, we sew. If a man breaks (rips) something we repair it, honestly. So, I think that this is like the moment for us to go and, well, weave all of that and build a web between women.

In relating the tactile act of weaving, something the women are experts at, with the figurative act of weaving social webs²³ (networks), Citlalli (who introduced the exercise), Cynthia and Olivia concretize an important lesson they aim to impart on las mujeres: the power to make a real positive impact on their communities, in terms of contributing to water management and governance, is already in their hands. Because

²³ The Spanish word "redes" means both webs and networks (or literal nets).

the Mujeres Brigadistas have only few chances to come together, mostly staying in their insular communities, group cohesion is an important lesson to impart in these workshops as the women collaboratively build agency around water management.

“Esa Chispa” / “That Spark”: Love and Laughter – Trust, Connection, Confianza

Besides, doing this work todas juntas (all together) is FUN – something that is often overlooked! It can sound so boring on paper but it’s fun. Something that has struck me and encouraged me through the process of reviewing and analyzing data are all the moments of extreme joy, happiness, laughter. This laughter helps us cope with difficult topics; it warms us up to each other and to the task of doing the theater work.

Citlalli (from Spider Activity on Day 2):
...esa chispa. Alegría. ¿De qué? Bueno, a lo mejor al principio, sí, esa pena. Pero, ya que están como en confianza, el hecho que se estén riendo, y eso, que estén muy en confianza.

Citlalli:
...that spark. Happiness. From what? Well, maybe, at first, yes, that shyness. But, now that you (the women) are in confidence, the fact that you are laughing, and that. That you are very much in confidence (trust with each other).



Fig. 11 Citlalli laughing with two Mujeres Brigadistas and Cynthia (right) One of the mujeres looks out the window while holding her young child.

Laughter - so much laughter! - we explode into laughter at several points in the recordings, as you can see in the collage de risa (of laughter) on page 89. The photo on

this page (Fig. 11) is a still shot from a 16-second video of this group assembling their

tableau. In it, María Lucero (second from right in white and black striped shirt) is explaining how, as a young girl, she fell into her family's water tank and that her grandmother, when going to the tank to collect water with a small bowl, found her. Citlalli and Cynthia join her in laughing at the absurd idea of her grandmother reaching in with her small bowl and scooping a young María Lucero out of the water tank, as María Lucero herself played her grandmother. Finding humor in a potentially scary memory-turned-story like this facilitated a safe discursive space for these women to explore and entertain different, and sometimes silly, outcomes. Moreover, practicing collaborative exploration and play has implications for doing similar work in relation to developing collaborative plans for water care and governance across villages. Laughing together as a creative team allows for trust to be quickly established among colaboradoras. Sharing a laugh can help us be en confianza to do this future water work.

As we drove away from the second workshop at Las Camelias, the whole first minute of the post-workshop interview with Olivia and Citlali is us laughing about it, the excitement was palpable as we reflected on the first theater workshop with the women. Regarding this excitement for our collaborative work, bell hooks (1994) writes that, at its core, "excitement is generated through collaborative effort" (p. 8). In other words, excitement is not something an instructor, researcher, or workshop leader can generate single-handedly – it must be done with and around others.

Furthermore, in general, typical capacity building workshops often do not result in the level of deep connection and trust because typical workshops are often hierarchical – with the facilitator, more like an instructor, coming in assuming the role

of the “expert” who is relaying information and knowledge onto the participants, who are typically observed passively sitting and receiving this knowledge. Furthermore, in hierarchical models of capacity-building community development workshops, the facilitator never has to reveal anything about themselves as a person – they are not considered “participants” in the experience. As is demonstrated in this study, practicing collaborative, non-hierarchical story-based arts interventions like the one carried out in this study allows for deeper connections between participants, and between participants and facilitators, which in turn leads to richer collaboration in creating solutions to community needs. Furthermore, it moves the participants (in this case las mujeres) from the role of Object of the training or research to that of Subject with a legitimate voice and agency about the work at hand (water governance). Non-hierarchical work like this can also be generative – creating new ideas and solutions together.



Fig. 12 A collage composed of 12 photos of mujeres laughing – expressions of joy in this work!

“Entre puras mujeres” / “Among strictly women”: The Value of Creating Women’s

Spaces for Knowledge Sharing and Collaborative Water Work

Mujer:

Nos escucharon cada historia. Yo escuché y me escucharon a mí.

Woman:

Each of our stories was heard. I listened, and I was listened to.

Cynthia:

Yo creo también que hay, este, un contexto de puras mujeres les dió también la libertad de ellas desenvolverse totalmente como ellas son.

Cynthia:

I also think that, well, a context of women only also gave them a freedom for them to feel comfortable to be themselves.

The statements above, one from a participant (Mujer Brigadista) and one from a facilitator (Cynthia), touch upon the climate of deep listening and deep understanding that led the women to feel safe to share their experiences in these workshops. Feeling listened to and appreciated can help participants be comfortable sharing more. Participants and facilitators both expressed at different times how sharing a story and then watching it get acted out – get treated with care and attention to honor our experience, is a transformative experience that also is generative – fosters the sharing of even more (hi)stories and experiences. As the next chapter discusses, this can lead to the co-creation of possible futurities.

Typically, if you or I (an outsider such as a government official or a workshop leader) go into one of these communities of Berriozábal, as we learned from the interviews with Olivia, Citlalli, and Cynthia, we will hear from the men, not the women. These very same women who, in the course of a 3-hour workshop, shared their fears and traumas around the river, laughing as they co-constructed the frozen

scenes – these same women who laughed and joked easily while eating sandwiches during the lunch break – these women are typically unheard in a public format. Meanwhile, these women are the ones who hold significant water knowledge in their communities. They are the ones who use the water for cooking, for bathing children, for washing clothes. They are the ones who know what the most efficient ways are for reusing the water. They are the ones who walk to the river with young children in tow to collect water when needed. As they revealed in the informal interviews after both workshops, they are the ones who know when the water delivery comes to the communities that purchase tanks of water. However, when it comes to governing and standing as official water officers for their communities, it has typically been the men who take these roles.

As is demonstrated by this study, when we created women-only spaces for “*puras mujeres*”, we made space for these women to “*desenvolverse*”, to feel comfortable enough to share their unique and valuable knowledges. In a quick interview following the second workshop, I initially began by asking three women about their thoughts on the workshop, and then I asked how they see what they learned in the workshop applying to their lives. From there, one of the women began talking about conserving and preserving the health of their water, which in the case of these women’s village mostly came from collecting rainwater, and that led to a 5-minute conversation about the water in their communities. As my questions became more specific (e.g. “What happens if it doesn’t rain?”), it became apparent that a fourth woman, who was seated across the room with her son, was the most knowledgeable one on the subject. And so, the fourth woman, Gladis, shared some of her knowledge

as well. Below is a photo of the first three women I interviewed, followed by a transcribed excerpt of this video interview. Eloida and María Guadalupe are from the community of Tirol, and María Lucero and Gladis (who appears later in the interview) are from the community of Montebello.

I provide the following transcript, not for the purposes of analysis, but rather as an example of the deep sort of response that was gained after spending several hours together, bonding and *conviviendo* through our theater experience. I cannot claim causation – i.e., I cannot definitively say that because we did this workshop, the women provided a more specific, higher quality response to their issues and knowledge about water in their communities. However, what I can testify to is that we did bond, and I visibly saw these very women go from being extremely quiet and soft-spoken in the beginning, to opening up and appearing to and commenting on feeling comfortable at the end. Moreover, the organizers who came for the workshop (Olivia, Cynthia and Citlalli) commented on how different this workshop was from other earlier training experiences they'd had with these same women. Here I offer this conversation transcript to highlight some of the valuable knowledge that these women shared with me during the post-workshop interview.



Fig. 13 Screenshot of Eloida, María Guadalupe and María Lucero from interview video after Day 2 workshop.

I asked, how does this workshop apply to your lives and/or your work with the

Mujeres Brigadistas?

Eloida:

...Podemos también cuidar el agua lo que tomamos, lo que servimos para no, pues, causar problema con el agua. Tomamos agua que no nos, no nos, este, conviene pues, para el estómago, ¿no? No está en buena salud, ¿verdad?

Eloida (at the end of her response):

...we can also take care of the water that we drink, that we serve, so as to not, well, cause a problem with the water. We drink water that isn't—isn't good for us, for the stomach, right? It's not healthy, right?

Caro:

Esa iba a ser my próxima pregunta. Rapidito, ¿me pueden contar un poco de cómo es el agua en sus comunidades? ¿De dónde la sacan? ¿Cómo la usan?

Caro:

That was going to be my next question. Real quick, can you tell me a bit about the water in your communities? Where do you get your water from? How do you use it?

María Guadalupe:

En mi comunidad, bueno (pointing to Eloida), en nuestra comunidad (Tirol), que es la misma, nosotros acaparamos lo que es la lluvia. Ponemos canal a lo largo de las casas, de la lámina, y eso va directo al tanque, es un almacenamiento. No tenemos casi fuente. Tenemos un arroyito, pero es muy poco lo que nos

María Guadalupe:

In my community, well (points to Eloida), in our community [Tirol}, which is the same one, we catch rainwater. We installed a channel along the houses, made out of laminate composite, and that goes straight to the water tank, it's a silo. We hardly have a spring. We have a small stream, but it

bastese. Entonces nosotros ya tuvimos que, este, ingeniarlo, o las personas más grandes que nosotras, para tener nuestra propia agua que es lo que viene de la lluvia.

yields us very little water. So we had to, well, engineer it, or rather those elder than us, so that we [our community] could have our own water, which is what comes from the rain.

María Lucero:
Sí, incluso al menos ellas tienen su almacenamiento, tienen un arroyito donde agarrar. Nada más en la comunidad de nosotros. Incluso, hay personas que no tienen donde almacenar agua. En el caso de nosotros, o sea cada quien, o sea, a costo de uno mismo se hace su almacenamiento. Nosotros sí no tenemos, mas que todo, esperanzados al agua, pues, que llueva pues.

María Lucero:
Yes, well at least they have a water tank, they have a small stream to collect water from. In our community we don't have that. We even have people who don't have anywhere to store the water. In our [community's] case, each household is on their own, in other words, each household is responsible for the cost of their water storage tank. We don't have one, we are mostly hopeful for the water, well, that it will rain.

Caro:
Y ¿qué hacen cuando no llueve?

Caro:
And what do you do when it doesn't rain?

María Lucero:
Pues incluso nosotros hemos hasta comprado, pues, el agua, pues. Y a veces, incluso, como le comentaba a las demás compañeras que no pudieron [This indicates that they've been sharing?] bajar las pipas de Berriozábal por-- el mal camino.

María Lucero:
Well, we have even had to buy it, water. And sometimes, like the other women mentioned, they weren't able to get plumbing installed from Berriozábal because—of the bad roads.

María Guadalupe:
--el mal camino. Y ahora por un precio carísimo.

María Guadalupe:
--the bad roads. And now it [water] is at a very expensive price.

María Lucero:
Sí. La compra del agua.

María Lucero:
Yes. Purchasing water

Gladis, who is sitting across the room and has been participating in the conversational interview from a distance, then goes on to explain a bit of the everyday water practices in her home.



Fig. 14 Screenshot of video interview with Gladis, with her young son standing next to her.

Gladis:

Pues, sí, porque ahí he vivido toda mi vida, no? Pues, este, bueno, antes, sí, llovía más. Este, subíamos un poquito menos pero ahorita las lluvias se han retirado, pues solo tenemos almacenamientos pero son pocos. Y como, ya mi familia ya gastamos agua. Sí, economizamos, pero, se nos va el agua y si no llueve, ahí es donde sí que sufrimos. Porque de ahí agarramos para tomar, para lavar, para todos los servicios.

Gladis:

Well, yes, because I have lived there my whole life, right? Well, um, before [in the past] it did rain more. So, we shipped in a bit less but now the rains have subsided, well we only have water tanks but they are few. And well, my family, we use a lot of water. Yes, we do conserve it, but we use it up and if it doesn't rain, well that is when we suffer. Because that's where we get the water to drink, to wash, for all of the services.

Caro:

Y ¿cómo economizan el agua?

Caro:

And how do you conserve water?

Gladis:

Gladis:

Pues, nosotros no nos bañamos con regadera, sino con copetitas pequeñas. Poca agua (smiles). Tratamos de economizar todo, para lavar, traste, todo.

Well, we don't bathe with a shower; we use small cups of water. Very little water (smiles). We try to economize every bit – for washing, doing dishes, everything.

Of course, it's impossible for me to tell if the women opened up any more than they would have if we hadn't done the workshop, but my experience teaching theater workshops to folks who are completely new to the process provides me the confidence to say that the entire air about the women changed noticeably from the beginning of the workshops to the end. Approaching the activities and the strangers cautiously at first, after experiencing some shared activities, laughing at many points throughout, the women looked much more comfortable by the end and were much more talkative with me, as well as with the other facilitators, in addition to with each other. It was apparent that, through our theater exercises and our *convivencia*, the discursive and physical space of sharing water knowledge had been nourished, primed for further collaborative activities – for the next *encuentro*, even if that occurred without me, Debra, or Erika (which ended up being the case due to several factors including the COVID-19 pandemic preventing travel and ultimately contributing to the premature end of the *Mujeres Brigadistas* project). To put it briefly, I don't think the level of detail and extensiveness of the conversation I presented above would have been possible without the workshops, or even with the sort of hierarchical, instructor-based workshops that are historically held in these situations.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the intersection of gender, relationships, and power both in the communities that the *mujeres* live in, and in the workshops themselves,

based on the data collected from the workshops and plática-style interviews. Utilizing these theater interventions, as was affirmed by the facilitators and the mujeres participating, facilitated trust, respect and even friendship (“hasta amigas”). Another conclusion I draw from the aspects of the project discussed in this chapter are that the relationships, connections, and empathy that were formed during these workshops will remain past my interaction with these women and this project. Exploring this collaborative art experience in a women-centered space, both physically and discursively, also supported the comfort of the women to participate and share their experiences and their knowledges. Beyond that, enjoyment and fun played a significant role in the deep bonds that were created in the workshops, and I will continue to explore humor and fun in the next chapter.

In conclusion, as Audre Lorde (1984) affirmed, indeed it seems that the connection between puras mujeres, the humorous and the serious, as we experienced in these workshops and as was described by the facilitators, is resisted by the patriarchy because it is feared by the patriarchy – a patriarchy that, as was demonstrated by Olivia’s story of the midwife, may be upheld by men and women alike at times. Creating spaces for las mujeres to create collaboratively in safe and dedicated spaces is a form of resistance, but one that can be facilitated through the arts – and theater, in particular, allows for opportunities for shared imagined futures and realities, as is discussed in the next chapter.

For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world. Only within a patriarchal structure is maternity the only social power open to women. Interdependency between

women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative.

Audrey Lorde (1984),
“The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

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CHAPTER 4

“COMO MUY DE VIVENCIA” / “LIKE VERY MUCH OF EXPERIENCING”:

CO-CREATING IMAGINARY FUTURES THROUGH THEATER

Yurene:

A mi me gustó más donde dijimos los cuentos, bueno pues lo que nos pasó. Eso me hizo recordar muchas cosas de lo que me pasó cuando estaba chiquita y lo que me sigue pasando. Y la obra de teatro.

Tomasa:

Igual, me gustó mucho la obra de teatro. Ser la protagonista y que las compañeras escogieran mi historia de que <<Ah, no, no, ¡va a ser la niña que se cayó!>> y sí, sí me encantó. Como que reviví ese momento de que yo dije, <<Me estoy ahogando. ¡Ayúdenme!>> y en realidad pues estaba yo bien y no pasaba nada... Ese privilegio de que me escogieran a mí.

Yurene:

I most enjoyed telling our stories, well what happened to us. That made me remember many things that happened to me when I was little and things that keep happening. And the play.

Tomasa:

Me too, I really liked the play. To be the protagonist and that the compañeras chose my story. “Oh, no no, it’s going to be the girl who fell!” And yes, yes, I loved it. It’s like I re-lived that moment in which I said, “I’m drowning. Help me!” and in reality, well, I was fine and nothing was happening... That privilege that they chose me.

The quotes above are from two of the women who participated in the first workshop. At the time of this interview in 2019, Tomasa was the only Mujer Brigadista who was on a Comité de Agua (water committee) for her village. She was noticeably more outspoken than the other women, as well as having a job at a restaurant and her own transportation (a motorcycle), both of which were not common for women in these communities. She and her friend Yurene lingered after the workshop was over and were interested in exchanging phone numbers, taking a photo together, and talking a bit more. As we chatted, they described their limited previous experience with theater; Yurene, in particular, had actually acted in a play as a child

and carried herself with confidence during the theater games, which also set her apart from the other women. They shared about how much they appreciated the workshop and had been looking forward to it and Tomasa said that she had taken the day off from work in order to attend because she heard teachers were coming from “el extranjero” (another country) and there was no way she was going to miss the workshop. I thanked them both for their enthusiasm and then asked if I could do a quick interview to ask about their experience with the workshop and about their



Fig. 15 Yurene, Carolina and Tomasa after Day 1 workshop

current experiences with water in their communities. I will discuss the transcript of this interview later in this chapter.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that there is something very specific about theater that lends itself perfectly to knowledge sharing and co-imagined futures by mujeres doing community development work. This chapter explores three main ideas: 1) Sharing a story, guiding the process of dramatizing it in the form of a tableau vivant, and then seeing it and being a part of acting it out re-creates the original experience in a safe way that also allows the storyteller to process the experience in a new way as director and spect-actor (Boal), and can also encourage further storytelling and knowledge sharing (see quote above from Yurene); 2) For groups of women/

people doing community development work, both participants and facilitators, story-based theater practice can provide a unique and deeper understanding of each other's lived experiences and has the potential to facilitate empathy, which can make for stronger collaborative community development work. Since one of the goals of this particular project is to help the women in strengthening their voices in order to share their water knowledges for the purposes of contributing to their village committees and water policy and water health practices, story-based theater in this case helped the women to relate to each other in terms of the participants themselves, and also with the facilitators. It also helps that the theater format itself is enjoyable and useful, according to the participants; 3) And practicing the creation of story-based theatrical scenes can be a point of departure for co-creating scenes based on other past and present experiences around water. Playing with theater in this way allows for the next step, which is co-constructing futures. This is a generative work that I see falling under what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017) labels as the positive aspect of Epistemologies of the South, a key element of the decolonial academic project.

In the excerpt that begins this chapter, Yurene starts by saying she liked the storytelling and that that process helped her remember other experiences that she could share if given more time (she said this in a different part of the recording), as well as remembering current experiences. This statement indicates to me that, given more time or a subsequent workshop, re-interpreting contemporary lived experiences would be an organic and natural transition with these women. Tomasa further expresses her own appreciation of the theater exercises, and the tableau vivant exercise in particular. She reflects positively on being chosen – having the experience of being

the protagonist of a story. This is what Boal calls being the “spect-actor”, which I will discuss later in this chapter. At the end of this excerpt Tomasa repeats the joy of being chosen, and describes it as a privilege. Although I don’t know her well enough to know if this is a part of her specific story, I do think, based on my conversations with the facilitators and Erika, that for many of these mujeres, being chosen and being the protagonist of a narrative is not a common experience. Tomasa also describes the experience of re-experiencing a moment of her childhood – to re-live that scary moment in the safety of a group of supportive compañeras who were holding her experience at the center of their collaborative creative work.

Presentar y Re-presentar / Presenting and Re-presenting

In these theater workshops, we provided an opportunity for the participants – the mujeres – to re-present the thematic universe²⁴ (Freire, 1970) of their own experiences themselves. This is the value of combining a feminist approach to theater with pedagogy of the oppressed. According to Freire, “...it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others—must constitute that practice” (Freire, 1970, p. 108). This research project demonstrates that the theater workshops and the process of doing story-based theater provided an opportunity for these women to “rethink their assumptions in action”. The action of telling a story and then either re-interpreting your own story or that of a compañera, not just “consuming” it, opens space for the women to enable and co-create change, specifically the potential to be agents of change in water usage and policy in their villages. Also, in these workshops the

²⁴ I will discuss this term later in this chapter.

mujeres have the experience of quite literally “acting” upon the ideas that they co-create with each other – as they continue working together more on issues having to do with water management, the scenarios and ideas that they act out could have the liberating potential of leading them to enact their own collaboratively imagined solutions.

For the facilitators, as well, the act of re-presenting co-created versions of each other’s water stories was impactful, as the next excerpt from a plática with Olivia and Citlalli demonstrates.

<p>Olivia²⁵: El conocer tu historia, que es lo que es: si tu interpretas la vida o la experiencia de alguien más, has de cuenta tú estás viviendo o estás representando lo que vivió. Y eso hace que tú reacciones. Cómo puedes hacer tú un gesto? O como puedes puedes tú representar un dolor o una risa? Porque a todos nos puede dar risa. Puede que su caso me de risa, pero puede ser que a mí me duela también su caso. Creo que eso es lo que hace que nos vayamos uniendo de alguna manera...Para mi es algo muy representativo.</p>	<p>Olivia: (the act of) Knowing your story, which is: if you interpret the life or experience of another person, it’s like you are living or representing what that person lived. And that causes you to react. How can you make a gesture? Or, how can you represent a painful moment or a laugh? Because all of us can laugh about it. It might be the case that it makes me laugh, but it can be that their situation pains me as well. I think that that is what makes us unite somehow... For me it’s something very representative.</p>
<p>Citlalli: Como muy de vivencia.</p>	<p>Citlalli: Like, very much of experiencing.</p>

Of note is that in this segment, Citlalli uses the term “vivencia”, the same term utilized by Trinidad Galván (2015) and others as a Latina methodology, to describe the process of existing with each other and living together in an everyday way, which

²⁵ File Name: Olivia Citlalli 2 5 / Time: 15:25 / Speaker: Olivia

was how we nurtured the atmosphere for creating and performing the tableaux vivants. And Olivia expresses that the experience of re-creating another woman's experience and feeling what that other woman might feel or what Olivia herself might feel in that position, which could equally be to laugh or cry, that experience is what may bring us (the women working together in these workshops) together. Sharing in a woman's experience so deeply, as with experience the empathy of possibly feeling what she might feel, is a significant step towards the sort of deeply collaborative connections that was a goal of the Mujeres Brigadistas program.

Tableaux Vivants / "Las Obras" – Re-presenting Experiences and Co-creating Meanings

When developing workshops for beginners who have little to no theatrical experience or who I think may not have much of an interest in performing, I have utilized frozen scenes or "tableaux vivants" as a simple way to create a theatrical representation without needing to develop dialogue. The term tableau vivant, which translates from French to "living portrait", describes a common theatrical style that has a firm position in Western/European theater dating back to 1761, which was the first time the technique "in which figures pose to imitate a work of art" was used with this name in Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *L'Accordée de Village* (Boucher & Contogouris, 2019). However, if we consider the technique in a wider sense as people holding frozen scenes as part of a performative exercise, then it can be traced back to ancient Greece (ibid) or, one can assume, other non-Western ancient civilizations where performative events were practiced.

Most of the women called the tableaux vivants “las obras” or the plays. Upon reviewing the recordings of the workshops, I realized that when I introduced the activity, I referred to the tableaux as “mini-obras” (“mini-plays”), so this term seems to have stuck. It delighted me to hear the women call the tableaux vivants “obras” because it demonstrated to me that they were taking the activity seriously, as a “real” theatrical work (a play), and that they were invested in the activity. The fact that a significant number of them listed the obras as their favorite part of the workshop also supported this idea. This is important, among other reasons, because it demonstrates that this type of theater activity was successful in providing a medium for women to express their experiences in a way that is accessible and enjoyable to them, and thus can be utilized for further knowledge sharing about their present experience with water in their daily lives. They got to put their scenes (based on their stories) together and rehearse them and then “presented” (re-presented) them to us.

In his instructional book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Theatre of the Oppressed creator Augusto Boal (1992, 2002) describes a game called “Image of the word: illustrating a subject using other people’s bodies”, as part of his Image Theater form, that is very similar to the process we utilized for creating tableaux vivants. In our case, I, as the workshop facilitator, played the role corresponding to that of Boal’s “Joker” and the woman whose story from the Story Circle is being represented is the equivalent of Boal’s “sculptor” or “spect-actor”:

“The Joker asks a first volunteer to illustrate the theme proposed by the group, using the bodies of other members of the group. This sculptor [or also a ‘spect-actor’] chooses who to use and places them in relation to each other to form a single image composed of several bodies... “the other group

members collaborate and come to an agreement... “At every point the group should be consulted, as it is ultimately the ‘constructor’ of a collective image on the proposed subject.” (Boal, p. 181)

Boal also explains the benefit of using images and not words, which I see as applicable to the case of the tableau vivant in the workshop with the mujeres: “Of course images don’t replace words but they cannot be translated into words either – they are a language in themselves. They connote words just as words may connote images – they can be complementary.” (Boal, p. 175) Images, in this case the specific images achieved by using their bodies, allowed the mujeres to communicate the stories



Fig. 16 Olivia’s group workshoping their tableau based on one of the mujeres’ story.

they previously shared in a completely different medium (the story circle) and, thus, provided a depth and link to their own experiences, both for the woman who had the experience to begin with, as well as for the group of women who are re-

presenting that experience in the tableau vivant. I see this process as relating to what Citlalli referred to previously in this chapter as “como muy de vivencia” (like very much of experiencing). What started off as a 25-second story of falling while crossing the river turned into a 15-minute workshoped scene that was then presented as an “obra” (work) of theater/art.

In the following section, I will present a transcript of the original story with an analysis of that data, and a photos that captures the tableau-making process as well as



Fig. 17 Citlalli's group workshoping their tableau based on one of the mujeres' stories.

the completed tableau vivant. The tableaux vivants were a simple way to create a complete scene that represent a moment in time, often the climax, or most dramatic point, of a story or scene.

Furthermore, because they involve no dialogue and only one motion/pose, tableaux vivants are accessible to participants who have minimal experience with theater work or dramatic play. A good tableau vivant involves visible relationships between characters, including power dynamics, based on the postures and positions of the actors. Playing with vertical levels and body movements can accurately and clearly portray the emotions and action of a scene.

Fig. 18 Tomasa's group workshopping their tableau of her story, with transcription of her story in Spanish

Tomasa:

Mi historia es que cuando tenía yo siete años, me pusieron en la escuela, pero tenía yo que caminar. Era en otra comunidad, en otra vía la escuela, y entrábamos a las 8. Y en mi casa nos mandaban a las 6 a caminar y teníamos que caminar como dos horas en pura montaña para llegar a la escuela. Y ya ese día estuvo lluvioso pero llovió y como vinimos a una planada, pasamos y, pero el maestro era bravo bravo, que si no llegábamos nos pegaba y teníamos miedo. [27:45] Y entonces miramos que el río se estaba--tapó--o sea, megó(?), claro que ahí el agua estaba que sube. Ahora, mi hermano, estaba el más grande, y “bueno,” dice, “traigan las mochilas”, éramos yo, mi hermana y mi hermano. “Traíganme las mochilas pues yo lo voy a pasar”. Bueno, pues encaramo las cuatro mochilas y cuando pasó mi hermano.

Y ahora, mi hermana, pasa ella también. Y agarro yo. Y, pues, era yo la más chiquita, pues tenía yo siete años, y yo tenía yo miedo porque el agua estaba negra. [28:09] y le dije, “yo voy a pasar también ahí, si o qué?” “te mojas y luego te vas a secar!” Bueno, y paso pues y yo con miedo y de repente piso una piedra y ¡fúm! Me fuí hasta abajo porque estaba pues la... y pues a [hace de llorar] “me voy a ahogar! Sálveme!” Y dice mi hermano, “No. ¡Párate, párate! No está... está bajo!” Pero yo, como no sabía yo nadar, pues yo decía yo pues que yo me estaba ya ahogando pero no. Ah, me pare. [I, and others, laugh].

Caro: Pensaste que te estabas ahogando--

Tomasa: Ajá, pero como me resbalé pues me caí ya y ya empezé, si a nadar si capaz. El lodo estaba pegado encima de mi, pegado. Y mi hermano, “No! Párate! Ya, camina!” No, pues, y ya empezé a caminar.



Fig. 19 Tomasa’s group presenting their final tableaux of her story, with transcription of her story in English

Tomasa:

My story is that when I was seven years old, they put me in school, but I had to walk. It was in another community, the school was on another route, and we started at 8am. And in my house they sent us to start walking at 6am and we had to walk about two hours through the mountainous paths to get to school. And that day it was rainy, it was raining, and we arrived at a flat area, we passed



and... But the teacher was very, very mean, and if we didn't arrive [on time] he would hit us and we were very scared. And so, we saw that the river was overflowing, of course in that place the river gets higher. Now, my brother, he was the oldest and, "Alright," he said, "give me your backpacks." We were me, my sister, and my brother. "Give me your backpacks and I am going to cross." Well, we piled the four backpacks and my brother passed. And then, my sister, she passed too. And I start off. Well I was the youngest, I was seven years old, and I was scared because the water was black. And I said, "I am going to cross too, ok?" "You'll get wet and then afterward you will dry off!" Well, I pass and well, fearfully, and suddenly I step on a rock and, phoom! I went to the bottom because it was... and well [makes sobbing sounds], "I'm going to drown! Save me!" And my brother says, "No. Stand up, stand up! It's not... it's shallow!" But, since I didn't know how to swim, well I said, well, that I was drowning but no. Ah, I stood up.
[We all laugh]

Carolina: You thought you were drowning—

Tomasa: Uh-huh, but since I slipped, well, I fell then, and then I started to swim to see if I could. The mud was sticking onto me, stuck on. And my brother, "No! Stand up! Just walk!" No, well, then I began to walk.

In the 35-second-long video²⁶ of the women setting up the tableau vivant of Tomasa's story presented above, Erika and Nina extend their arms across from each other to play the river. Meanwhile, Sandra, who later plays Tomasa crossing the river in the final tableau, chases after her small son (pictured crouching in the process photo) to play the rock that Tomasa trips over. In the end, the little boy decides that he does not want to participate, and Sandra returns to the scene. Tomasa, who can be seen in the first photo with her arms straight in the air as she coaches Sandra on how she felt and looked during her story, later plays her own older brother carrying everyone's backpacks, in the finished tableau. María, playing Tomasa's older sister, follows behind and turns around, with her back against the brother, with her hands clenched to her chest in a look of horror as she watches Tomasa nearly drown. In the second photo of the completed tableau, Sandra has her arms up in the air, but not quite as outstretched as Tomasa had demonstrated in the process photo. These photos and the transcription of Tomasa's story indicate the level of commitment and detail that all the mujeres demonstrated in creating their scenes, as well as the readiness with which these women took on an activity that was completely new to them with women who just an hour or two earlier were complete strangers to them. In turn, this highlights the implications of story-based theater for the liberatory potential of the women's ongoing collaborative organizing work.

Learning and Liberatory Pedagogy through Re-presentation

Citlalli:
Al momento de representar ya no
tuvieron miedo de hacerlo. Osea, estaban
tan entregadas de que <<lo vamos a

Citlalli:
At the moment of representing, they [the
women] weren't afraid to do it anymore.
In other words, they were committed to

²⁶ IMG_1324

hacer.>> Osea, nunca dijeron <<no, no lo voy a hacer porque nunca lo he hecho.>> No, al contrario. Están como muy disponible a eso. A aprender. Yeso, para mí, en la vida, lo personal es de seguir aprendiendo. Todos los días aprendemos algo nuevo y entre más aprendamos, yo siento el compromiso de compartirlo.

“we are going to do it”. Like, they never said, “no, I am not going to do it because I’ve never done it before.” The opposite case was true. They were very available to do it. And to learn. And that, to me, in life, the personal aspect is to keep learning. Every day we learn something new and the more we learn, I feel the commitment to share it.

The word that Citlalli uses to describe the women’s commitment to the artistic process, “entregadas”, literally means something the equivalent of “giving themselves to” the process – it describes the complete commitment the women demonstrated to the collaborative co-construction of each other’s stories. During the tableau activity, their stories get mixed together and they contribute to each other’s stories. Citlalli relates this to her own commitment to learning every day, and the obligation she feels to share that learning. Citlalli, Olivia and I at different times embody Freire’s dialogical teacher:

“The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe by their investigation is to “re-present” that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and re-present” it not as a lecture, but as a problem.” – Freire (1970, p. 109)

During the workshops, I offered a tool, in the form of theater games and activities, which allowed the participants, the mujeres and facilitators, to explore their own experiences as problems to resolve by the dramatic re-telling of each other’s stories, as well as the reflection on the process, thus achieving or at least approximating critical consciousness. Santos (2017) writes the following about

decolonizing, emancipatory knowledge, reciprocity, and solidarity: “Colonialism consists in the ignorance of reciprocity, in the incapacity to conceive of the “Other” as other than an object. Solidarity is the knowing obtained in the ever-unfinished process of one becoming capable of reciprocity through the construction and recognition of intersubjectivity. The emphasis on solidarity converts community into the privileged sphere of emancipatory knowledge.” (p. 61) The reciprocal nature inherent in the story-based theater making process lends itself readily to this privileged sphere.

Having Fun Playing with Re-presentation and Implications for Imaging Futures

During the Spider Web activity, three women reflected on the theatrical activities, particularly the Tableau, by joking about it. This is what they said:

Mujer 4: Lo que a mí me gusto fué que no pudimos levantar al que se estaba ahogando. (everyone laughs)	Woman 4: What I most liked was that we couldn't lift up the one who was drowning (everyone laughs).
Mujer 6: Lo que a mí me gusto fué que no pudieron sacar del río, no tenían fuerzas, como que no comieron. (everyone laughs)	Woman 6: What I most liked was that they couldn't get me out of the river, they weren't strong enough, like they hadn't eaten. (everyone laughs)
Mujer 8: A mí me gusto todo. Pues lo que más me gusto fué que me dijeron burro y era un caballo.	Woman 8: What I liked most. Well, what I liked most was that they called me a donkey but I was a horse. (everyone laughs)

Laughter and joking around is contagious. Once one woman made a joke, others joined in as well. Watching the women play on each other's jokes in this way, to me, demonstrated not only enjoyment of the activity, but a certain comfort level with the creative work. The act of playing, just on its own, as an adult, is something we don't typically do in any of our home communities / society. Playing with theater

(also can be thought of as pretend play) provides a unique opportunity to manipulate our reality so that we can see it in a different light, and sometimes that can be humorous. Humor can relieve tension and can also lead to other sorts of possibilities, as well as, as has been discussed in the previous chapters, in helping us get to know each other better and feel more comfortable to collaborate. As I demonstrate in this study, adults – women as is the case here – playing together with theater created discursive and epistemological spaces to co-create possibilities for collaborative approaches to resolve very serious issues, as is the case with water in this situation.

“Unidas Todas Fuertes” / “Uniting Together with Strength”: Mujeres Looking Forward

“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should be and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, instead of just waiting for it.” (Boal, 1992, p. 16)

Like the excerpt that started off this chapter, the data below is from a video interview I did with two of the participants from the Day 1 workshop with Mujeres Brigadistas. The interviewees, Yurene and Tomasa, who also appear at the beginning of this chapter, are both from the Divisadero community, where they live with their husbands and children. As I did in Chapter 3, here I end with quotes from them reflecting after the workshop on Day 2.



Fig. 20 Still shot from a clip of a filmed interview with Yurene (left) & Tomasa (right), Mujeres Brigadistas from Divisadero community (Rt. 3) at Day 1 workshop

What are your initial thoughts on the theater workshop?

<p>Yurene: A mi me gustó mucho porque con esta experiencia vamos a ayudar a la comunidad... que importancia tiene el agua... para que no tengan alguna enfermedad.</p>	<p>Yurene: I liked it a lot because with this experience, we are going to help the community...the importance that water has... so they don't get sick.</p>
<p>Tomasa: Más bien, que [la comunidad] nos apoyen porque ahora vamos a las Mujeres Brigadistas para ver sobre el agua a hacer más bien un laboratorio. ¿Qué agua consumimos en realidad? Porque no sabemos que agua consumimos y cuidarla lo más que se pueda porque el agua es sagrada. No hay que pelearla tampoco y hay que compartirla pero más bien de que nos apoyen y como comentaban las compañeras hay que estar unidas todas fuertes con ganas de seguir adelante. Y de trabajar juntas y que nadie se desanime para seguir adelante</p>	<p>Tomasa: Or better yet, that the community will support us so that we are going to Mujeres Brigadistas to learn about water and maybe make a laboratory. What water do we consume in reality? Because we don't know what water we consume and to take care of it the best we can because water is sacred. There shouldn't be any fighting over it and we must share it but also that they support us and as the compañeras (fellow women) commented we (women) have to be united, all strong with willingness to move forward. And to work together and that nobody lose their willingness to move forward.</p>

After discussing their experience with the workshop, which are the quotes that started this chapter, I asked the women about how they see this theater work relating to their water work with the Mujeres Brigadistas and how it might contribute to their water work in their communities. The women share the importance of their work in helping their communities understand the importance of water. After describing some of the challenges they have of their water, they speak of their future work, stating that they imagine having their own laboratory to study the water. They acknowledge the need to work together, “todas fuertes” in order to gain the support of their communities for their important work. In listening to them, I myself imagined how, in turn, future theater workshops could help co-construct plans for these laboratories – these water knowledge spaces. As I will discuss in the next chapter, these spaces are an example of Santos’ (2017) “epistemologies of the South”.

In the interview excerpts above, Yurene captures an important result of the workshops: “with this experience, we are going to help the community... the importance that water has... so they don’t get sick”. As I have mentioned, because these workshops were meant as a pilot for future workshops, we started by focusing on general water stories, which, as I discussed in Chapter 2, ended up largely being childhood stories of misadventures around the river. Yurene and Tomasa were both optimistic that the story-based theater workshops we carried out would contribute to the outreach they wanted to make within their communities. As I demonstrated in this chapter, the theater work that they did particularly allowed the mujeres to process their own experiences, get comfortable not only sharing their experiences, but also re-

presenting, or performing them, with their compañeras²⁷. This process reflects the leadership work the mujeres would embark on afterwards of building their knowledges, collaboratively working these knowledges amongst the other Mujeres Brigadistas, and then bringing them to their communities.

²⁷ This is a common word used in Spanish for partners in work.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Citlalli:

La verdad es muy importante que este tipo de actividades se puedan dar en las comunidades que sobre todo son las que a veces son olvidadas. Y realmente vale mucho la pena el conocer sus historias porque ellas son las que están siempre en contacto con la naturaleza.

Citlalli:

The truth is that it's very important to carry out these sorts of activities in communities, who most of all are the ones who are sometimes forgotten. And, really, it's very worth the effort to learn their stories because they (the women) are the ones who are always in touch with nature.

As I bring this thesis to a close, I offer here a discussion of the implications and conclusions of this study, as well as some important comments on my approach to this work and how I see my scholarship developing. This study has been the first in what I hope are a series of explorations into the use of collaborative arts-making interventions for women's work around water issues in their communities and lived experiences. Although the Mujeres Brigadistas project was cut short due to COVID and a change in municipal government, I hope to continue this work both in Chiapas and in other parts of Latin America around the topic of women's agency and leadership building around water issues.

Through the process of carrying out the story-based theater workshops, all of the participants and learning partners agreed that, as Citlalli mentions in the excerpt above, the theater workshops did indeed strengthen and support the group-building and empowerment goals of Cántaro Azul and the Municipality of Berriozábal had for their joint Mujeres Brigadistas program, as well as the goal of the women the share their knowledge with each other and contribute to the well-being of their communities. As

demonstrated in this thesis, this is evident from the Mujeres' comments in the post-workshop interviews as well as the Spider Web exercise, which was a reflection exercise we conducted at the end of each workshop. I look forward to learning more about out how women view water and the theater exercises, as well as what other themes and phenomena are present in the data I collect. The ongoing implications of these findings exist for the mujeres, for the facilitators/community organizers, and for the academics participating in this project, as I demonstrated through analysis of the data. For the mujeres, these workshops provided an introduction to collaborative theater making that they were able to learn and put to work immediately, and as they described would work them with their future collaborative water work for their communities. For the facilitators, from the NGO Cántaro Azul and the Municipality of Berriozábal the story-based theater workshops are another tool to add to their toolkit of community-building, leadership development, especially with women, but also with communities at large. As for Erika, Debbie and I, we each came away with our own observations that enhanced our understanding of collaborative work around women's knowledge utilizing theater as a methodology. For me in particular, I came away with the data and the conclusions discussed herein, and thus am able to achieve my immediate research goals that will lead to my Master's degree. It is important, in this collaborative work, to recognize the benefits and intentions/goals of all of those involved.

Moreover, academically speaking, this thesis is contributing to Latina feminist interventions on Freirean critical pedagogy and Boalian theater practice, which is largely missing from both lines of theory. My goal in this study was to make this contribution by combining convivencia methodology, pláticas, and a Latina feminist

theoretical framework to apply Boalian and Freirean critical pedagogies to create story-based theater workshops as a methodology for women's collaborative water work. I present this case study as an example of Latina feminist theater praxis in the context of community development work. By deploying theater in this way, as methodology and as a tool for creative generative and collaborative work, together with my learning partners I was able to shed light on my original research questions and our collaborative questions, which are: 1) what place and what value can theater have to reach the development goal of healthy access and management of water in these communities?; 2) how is women's knowledge of water valued and characterized by their communities, the facilitators of the Mujeres Brigadistas project, and themselves?; and 3) how do women take up theater as a way to access (co-construct/perform) and develop, individually or collectively, their knowledge and voices about water?

Although the research questions evolved through the course of the project, the principal results that I found in this study do address the questions above to some degree, though they incorporate other themes that emerged naturally from the data. These main results include: 1) the phenomenon of shyness as it relates to gender and the power dynamics that can occur in capacity-building workshops and how theater-making approached through critical pedagogy allowed for a re-analysis of shyness and what stands in the way of participation in these workshops; 2) the ways in which Latina feminist methodologies can support deep connections among women working collaboratively on water knowledge, water access, and water governance; and 3) specific ways in which the act of co-creating theater from our own stories can help us

understand each on a significantly deeper level than typical community development workshops around women's leadership and capacity-building.

As I continued working through my data, guided by Maxwell's interactive approach to research design, my analysis would in turn inform my research questions, as demonstrated above. In the end, for me, this led to further questions, some of which are unanswered and which I look forward to addressing in my further research. These questions continue to center women's water knowledges, women's agency and women's leadership around water work, as well as the different strategies that women utilize to recognize and value their own and each other's knowledges and experiences. I will also continue to explore the ways in which creative collaborative story-based theater and other interdisciplinary arts work can continue to support that important work, especially in the time of water crisis that is imminently and currently upon us.

Contribution to Existing Scholarship

The methodologies I describe in this study, both the ones that we use in the theater workshops as well as the ones that I utilize to analyze the data, are founded in the discourse and the spaces of the mujeres with and for whom they are – this is what makes them embodied methodologies, instruments, or technologies. I see this methodological intervention as contributing to the project that Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2017) describes as “cognitive justice”, as part of what he calls epistemologies of the South. Santos (ibid.) describes positive dimension of Sociology of emergences, on of a two-pronged composition of the work of epistemologies of the South:

“...the epistemologies of the South call for a theoretical and methodological work which has both a negative and a positive dimension. The negative dimension consists of a deconstructive

unveiling of the Eurocentric roots of the modern sciences on the basis of which the sociology of absences can be conducted. The positive dimension is twofold: on the one hand it implies the production of scientific knowledge ready to engage with other kinds of knowledge in the ecologies of knowledges required by the social struggles; on the other, it calls for the identification, reconstruction, and validation of the non-scientific, artisanal knowledges emerging from, or utilised in, the struggles against domination. Both positive tasks aim at building the ground for the sociology of emergences...The epistemologies of the South are mainly concerned with the positive, constructive work that is much harder to carry out.” (342-343)

Utilizing Latina feminist methodologies that I connect with, guided by the work of Trinidad Galván, Villenas, and others, my approach to collecting the data necessary for this study felt appropriate, thoughtful and, most importantly, like it embodied the “positive, constructive work that is much harder to carry out”. By privileging the women’s voices and knowledges, and by thoughtfully and critically analyzing their words as data, I am hoping to contribute to the struggle against cognitive injustice, or domination, that is faced by the mujeres in their communities, by those of us who are activist-scholars working towards liberatory praxis, and by women and other oppressed people throughout the world.

This work also has the potential to contribute practiced-based and participatory examples to existing and burgeoning scholarship around the Capabilities Approach, which is based on the work of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Clark et al., 2019), which holds great potential for human-centered development work in a global context. In my ongoing academic work, I hope that I do justice to las mujeres, and am committed to continuing to develop my scholarship from a place of deep respect.

Data – Photos, Faces, Joy...

I hold the images and voices of these women dear, and I thought long and deliberately about whether to include them, about the intrusive, impersonal and, at worst, potentially harmful act of analyzing them throughout this process. In this end, my goal was to let most of the mujeres' words and images speak for themselves. Moreover, there is something deeply intimate about seeing someone's face – their smile, the playful glint in their eyes, their body posture indicating that they are comfortable and feel welcoming and welcomed to participate in the playful process of theater making. Thus, when I share these images and words with you, dear reader, I offer them with care and hope you will also view them and judge them with care.

Recognition and Acknowledgement of Who and What I Don't Know

I acknowledge the complicated stories of theory and who developed it and who gets the recognition and the paychecks. Here, I would like to briefly discuss the problematics, at least within a Latin American context, for example. In researching theory, research papers and other scholarship for this thesis, I am continually finding that what, or who, I thought was true was inevitably more complicated or made up of others who aren't given the acknowledgement. For example, I learned of Guinea-Bassau revolutionary Amílcar Cabral's under-recognized influence on Paulo Freire's pedagogy theory and praxis (Malott, 2021). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui pushes back on the field of decolonial and subaltern studies and the "internal colonialism" that exists within these scholarly fields. Many Indigenous scholars and scholars from historically oppressed groups are working towards what Santos (2017) calls cognitive justice, both in and out of the academies.

Going with the Flow – Inflections, Reflections and New Directions

Since I began writing this thesis, and now over two years after having met her, I have been in touch with Tomasa via WhatsApp messaging and, through these conversations, have learned that they are not doing the Mujeres Brigadistas program anymore. Tomi told me that the Municipality is providing the villages with chlorine and each village/household chlorinates their own water, and that there are other workshops being offered that are mixed gendered and focused on capacity building and conflict resolution.

I would like to conclude this paper with some words from Olivia, the organizer from Cántaro Azul who had a hunger for new methods for community building and work with mujeres, especially an arts-based theater methodology. In the following excerpt, Olivia brilliantly expounds on what specifically these theater workshops offered to the Mujeres Brigadistas project:

Olivia:

Y, bueno, ahora, con este taller que se ha--con estos primero talleres que se empezó a dar con dos grupos de mujeres con la facilitación de [3:32], con la metodología de teatro es estupendo porque de alguna manera hace mayor acercamiento, mayor articulación a las mujeres, que es lo que hace falta. ¿Por qué? Porque también sabemos que en las comunidades, por lo regular, las mujeres no salen a campo, bueno, no salen de sus comunidades, o no se ven, no salen a pasear o a tomar un cafecito de alguna manera. Y en este caso, en la actividad de reconstrucción de historias, hace que las mujeres se conozcan y esto también genera una confianza, que es lo que se busca. Ahora, con estas metodologías

Olivia:

And, now, we, with this workshop that we've—with these first workshops that were started with two groups of women with the facilitation from the theater methodology, it's wonderful because in a way it brings us closer to the women, which is what was missing. Why? Because we also know that in these communities, typically, the women don't go out in the field, well, they don't leave their communities, they don't see each other, they don't travel or meet up for coffee in some way. And in this case, the activity of reconstructing their stories, helps the women to get to know each other and generates a trust, which is what we are looking for. Now, with these methodologies that they are getting

que ellas se vayan conociendo, que compartan su historia que en algunos casos son muy similares pues hace que se genere confianza. Y esto nos ayuda a la mejor articulación, porque no estamos hablando de una sola comunidad porque también se juntan distintas comunidades que es lo que da mayor apertura a toda esta metodología y pues conociendo-- bueno, como mujeres también sabemos que esto no solo se va a quedar interna en ellas porque también van a llegar a compartir y poco a poco van a poder ir motivando a otras mujeres a participar en estas temáticas. Y pues creo que es muy bueno para - si lo que queremos es caracterizar o conocer un grupo de mujeres--y no solo mujeres—se puede aplicar en distintos grupos, pues es muy útil para mí para poderlos integrar.

to learn, they are sharing their stories, which in some cases are very similar to each other's and that generates trust. And this helps gain cohesion among the women, because we aren't just talking about one community because there are different communities that are coming together which presents us with more opportunities for this methodology and well, learning—well, as women we also know that this isn't just going to stay internally within each woman but they are also going to share this experience and little by little it can help them motivate other women to participate in these activities. And, well, I think that it's very good for—if what we want is to characterize and get to know a group of women – and not only women, we can apply this to different sorts of groups, then it is very useful for me to be able to integrate it into [my practice].

When I asked Olivia what the theater workshops meant to her personally, she responded:

Olivia:
Personalmente, a mí me hace como poderme involucrar porque, igual, yo puedo facilitar muchas cosas pero si soy un poco penosa en actuar y creo que el participar, integrarse con ellas también es muy reconfortante porque o sea una, te hace reír, te hace desenvolver y a compartir tu historia personal con esas personas que por lo regular casi no se hace.

Olivia:
Personally, it helps me to get involved because, even though I am able to facilitate many workshops I am a bit shy when it comes to acting and I think that for me to participate, and integrate myself with the women, it also reinforces our work because, well, it makes me laugh and loosen up and share my personal story with these people, which does not usually happen.

Through carrying out these educational theater workshops in the path forged by Freire and Boal, enriched by hooks and other feminist scholars, I find a connection

to the joy and love of this work, that hooks writes about as well. When I revisit these texts with new eyes of experience, I can appreciate the joy and humor in their work. In *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Augusto Boal describes this humorous and poignant exchange with a police officer when he was in Italy doing Forum Theatre. I like to read it to myself in a comedic and dramatic tone:

“The chief of the carabinieri [local police] came to see us mounted on his mule and accompanied by his entire squad (of two), on their bicycles. He repeated his objections: ‘When all is said and done, this man [Boal] is a foreigner; and let’s face it; foreigners can cause social unrest. Who knows what sorts of ideas they have over there – and who’s to say this foreigner won’t harm the citizens of Godrano showing them these ideas?’

My hosts gave a detailed explanation of Theatre of the Oppressed and the policeman listened attentively. It was explained to them that I was not in the least interested in the importation of foreign ideas; all I brought with me was a new way of doing theatre. As for ideas, it was the inhabitants of Godrano who would be supplying them, not me.

‘You mean to say that it will be the local people who will be expressing themselves through this Forum Theatre? You mean these people are going to say what they think, say whatever they like, *they’re* going to “practice the actions they think necessary to liberate themselves”?’

‘Yes.’

‘The people themselves?’ shouted the brigadier who wanted to be heard on the other side of the Bussambra Valley.” (p. 22)

As Boal explains to the flabbergasted police officer, I only bring with me a way of doing theater. Although, on the one hand, I have my own scholarly and personal intentions, research questions, and lessons I hope to learn from these encuentros, and on the other hand, inevitably we exchange knowledges and understandings throughout these workshops, my goal is neither to inject or impart knowledge onto the women (or “put ideas in their heads” as one of the men described

to Olivia) as foreigners are known to do (just ask the chief carabinieri from Boal's story); nor is my intention to extract knowledge from them. As Boal said, "all I brought with me was a new way of doing theater" – that is essentially what I offered to the NGO Cántaro Azul during our first meetings about this collaboration. And, just as the police officer was even more alarmed at the idea that the local people would be expressing themselves through the use of theater, so too did there exist a resistance to the work of the Mujeres Brigadistas.

Regarding women's empowerment, as what we worked on in this project might be called by some, in a more serious tone, Srilatha Batliwala (2007) writes about the problem with the concept "empowerment" in the context of Development. At the end of her article, she makes a commitment in working to build a new language for framing transformative action and research that resonates with me:

"I for one intend to do so not by re-reading Foucault or Gramsci or other great political philosophers, but by listening to poor women and their movements, listening to their values, principles, articulations, and actions, and by trying to hear how they frame their search for justice. From this, I suspect, will emerge not only a new discourse, but also new concepts and strategies that have not yet entered our political or philosophical imaginations" (Batliwala, 2007).

In the 14 years since Batliwala made that assertion, a lot has happened in the post-"right-turn", post-COVID, post-climate crisis reality that we are living, just like a lot of hopeful projects have been born and are being led by historically oppressed people, by Indigenous people, by women, and by youth. However, in 2021, the World Bank is also releasing a Working Paper on the power of participatory theater to

empower women. In many ways, co-opting the language of “participatory theater” as well as keeping the language of “empowerment” entrenched in a neoliberal agenda. So, even though it is almost 15 years later, I also make that commitment to help write a narrative of hope and of action embodied by las mujeres in Chiapas, and wherever my work takes me. The theories and methodologies that I have discussed in my paper including critical pedagogies, praxis, and feminist interventions thereof; (Third World) US Latina feminist epistemologies and methodologies; participatory and feminist development strategies and theories; and Applied Theater / theater as ethnography – these all share that same commitment to centering and honoring the women and the children and the people for whom we say we do this work.

The future direction of my research will strive towards Participatory Action Research (Fals-Borda, 1987) as well as my own adaptations of the feminist Chicana methodology of *pláticas* taught to me by Prof. Sofia Villenas (Villenas & Osorio Gil, 2019), which will keep honing as I continue meeting regularly with Profs. Debra Castillo and Erika Díaz Pascacio, as we dream about once again being with the other *mujeres*²⁸. I am grateful to all of the women who have shared their time, knowledges, and *cariño* in the making of this project.

²⁸ Sadly, due to COVID-19 and a change in municipal government, the *Mujeres Brigadistas* program has been discontinued as of the writing of this thesis, so we will not be able to continue in the form of the *Diosas del Agua* project, but we will continue our work and it is my hope that I will once again have the chance to play with the *mujeres* of the rural communities of Berriozábal.

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APPENDIX

Scene Construction Process Photo / File name: IMG_1316



Tableau Photo / File name: IMG 1339



File path: /Users/yourhighness/Desktop/Masters Thesis Diosas del Agua/Masters Thesis Proper Mac File