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THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FEMINIST NGO's AND
COMMUNAL KITCHENS IN PERU 1980-1990:

Factors, Scopes, Potentials and Limits for Women's Empowerment

A Research Paper presented by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the scope, factors and limitations feminist NGOs might consider when working with grassroots women's organisations and wishing to adopt an empowering perspective. Its point of departure is my working experience in the feminist NGO Centro de Estudios "Mujer" (the "Woman" study centre CEM), and its working ties with the grassroots women's organisation Fanny Abanto Calle Communal Kitchen (FAC). Both are in located in Chiclayo, a trading town on Peru's northern coast. I belonged to CEM since it was founded (1980), until 1988. CEM worked with FAC between 1982 and 1989.

The reason I took the FAC communal kitchen as the starting point of this thesis, is that communal kitchens are a well-developed part of the popular women's stream in Peru, often receiving backing by co-financing agencies and feminist NGOs. The popular women's stream is one of the three mainstreams comprising the women's movement in Peru. The other two are the feminist stream per se, and the stream composed of women allied to political parties and other sectarian groups. This women's movement, with its three mainstreams which do interact at some points, is one of the most dynamic and articulate in Latin America today (Vargas 1991).

Many conflicts arise in the relationship between feminist and popular women's organisations, mainly around the question of whether gender or class are the most significant source of women's oppression. I contend that gender is not the only factor shaping women's identity and status in society, but that rather both identity and status are influenced by the articulation of gender, class and ethnics, and as such are grounded upon socioeconomic and cultural contexts (Scott 1988; Jansen 1991).

1.1. Motivation

I want to contribute to the strengthening of Peru's women's movement by identifying "politics of empowerment", regarding the relationship between feminist NGOs and grassroots women's organisations. From both theory and practical experience, I know certain factors hamper these relations and can also limit the empowerment potential of grassroots women's organisations:

a) When feminist NGOs work with grassroots organisations, it does not always mean they work from the perspective of the grassroots;

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b)   There is a recognition, at the level of rationality and spirituality, of dominant assumptions such as those reflected in the attitude of many NGO professionals, who behave as if they alone possessed and transmitted knowledge, ignoring the living experience of the grassroots and bypassing local expertise.

c)   As researchers/facilitators we must be aware of crucial issues such as power and knowledge (Marshall et al 1989).

Therefore I decided to systematise my working experience as a feminist activist, looking critically at and evaluating this experience in order to learn and draw lessons from it which could be useful to feminist NGOs, grassroots organisations and others concerned with grassroots empowerment and development.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1)   To understand and get insights about the potential of women's empowerment as a process and as a goal;

2)   To identify the elements conducive to grassroots women's empowerment or disempowerment, and to assess its scopes and limitations;

3)   To develop an adequate theoretical framework for analysis and evaluation of women's empowerment, which places feminist NGOs work within a more dynamic context.

1.4. Research Questions

The above objectives may be translated into the following research questions:

-     Which factors should be considered by feminist NGOs to further the empowerment of women from grassroots organisations?

-     What are the scope and limitations for feminist NGOs working with grassroots organisations, from an empowering perspective?

1.5. Methodology

The perspective of this research derives from my position as a feminist activist and researcher from the South. I see the feminist movement in Latin America and the Caribbean as a dynamic, ever-growing process, part of a wider women's movement. This involves recognising that women may have different interests but be united in a shared struggle, the struggle to put an end to women's subordination. The need to address other power relations which pervade and disempower women and are the result of sexist, racist and classist societies prevalent in Latin America must also be acknowledged.

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The methodology of this MA thesis is based on one of the major contributions of feminism, namely the building of theory from practice.

Working along such guidelines means that I must locate myself both at an in-position and at an out-position.

My in-position stems from the fact that I was a founding member of CEM in 1980 (an account of how CEM developed will be included in Chapter Four), and its coordinator until 1986. Analysing CEM's working experience thus also means analysing my own practices and ideas. My out-position stems from the fact that as a researcher, I must attempt to look critically and scientifically at CEM's experience in relation to FAC.

As such, I found myself both object and subject of this study. To this respect, Haraway and Harding state that feminist objectivity means the recognition of this double location. Both argue for the integration of the object and subject in the production of knowledge, rather than their splitting (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991).

For analytical purposes, in some chapters I use "we", because as a member of CEM I'm part of the data analyzed; in others I use "they" to refer to the experiences and points of view of women from FAC.

1.5.1 Sources of data

This research is based on primary and secondary data, covering the period between 1980 and 1990. During the last two years in which I was no longer actively participating in CEM I had access to written publications, letters and sporadic conversations with facilitators. By participants I refer to members of the grassroots organisation FAC, and by facilitators I mean members of feminist NGOs with whom I met in order to confront my own assumptions and thus advance the evaluation of CEM's work.

1. Primary data:

a.   My personal experience with Peru's women's movement, which includes participant observation while working with FAC, and personal notes related to this experience, especially during my last visit to the group in November, 1990. I attended a general meeting at FAC and held several individual and group talks with participants;

b.   Fourteen interviews carried out in December, 1990, by a participant of FAC, in the form of extensive dialogues with open questions. Twelve are

with participants who had been at FAC since its founding and were still active in it. Two interviews were carried out with husbands, one being a community leader. All the interviews and testimonies were recorded and fully transcribed;

c.   A survey amongst families in Pueblo Joven "El Bosque", done by the Board of the neighbourhood organisation in 1988;

d.   Book of minutes and notes of CEM from 1980 to 1988;

e.   Two testimonies of participants[1] in 1990;

f.   One testimony of a facilitator[2] in 1992.

g.   Supporting graphic material, such as photographs charting the history of CEM's experience with FAC.

2.   Secondary data:

This data is provided by a review of the relevant literature on issues dealing with existing theories, concepts and major findings. Although this review is by no means exhaustive, it covers the following issues:

a.   Feminist theory on gender, sexual division of labour, class, empowerment;

b.   The women's movement in Peru;

c.   Communal kitchens and the popular women's movement;

d.   Popular education.

To answer the research questions has involved the systematisation of women's experiences as participants and facilitators, including my own experiences related with the topic researched. In order to do this I have followed these steps:

-    The use of interviews and testimonies to gain information about the development of the experience, methods, problems and contradictions throughout its evolution. I also want to provide a space for participants in the evaluation of the/their experiences and to confront my own assumptions.

-    The analysis of the experience within the Peruvian context. Perusing existing relevant literature has broadened my own understanding of the processes developed in the relationship between feminist and grassroots women's organisations, and helped me to clarify other points. This

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[1]   These testimonies were set down during a workshop about popular communications and radio programs, organized by CEM and supported by CELADEC (Comision Latinoamericana de Educacion Cristiana), P.J. El Bosque, 1984.

[2]   It was required by the researcher in order to confront her own assumptions and to further the evaluation of CEM's work.

analysis was done using the main theoretical and methodological concepts and tools guiding this research.

-   The process of systematisation of this experience has also involved discussion of key points with supportive staff members of different institutions and friends who made helpful comments and criticisms.

1.6. Limitations

My double position as both activist and researcher are the basis for both the strengths and limitations of this study. There are also external factors to be considered, such as events in the past two years that have had great impact on Peruvian society. To take one instance, six leaders of communal kitchens have been assassinated in Lima by Sendero Luminoso (Shiny Path, the Maoist guerrilla group). Without doubt, these murders and the general atmosphere of repression and threats that still exists influence the most recent practices and relations of communal kitchens and feminist NGOs. It must be kept in mind that this analysis corresponds to a specific "historical moment", for a particular context. It is also important to consider this context and the framework of analysis, to understand that the exploratory nature of this MA thesis does not allow making generalisations.

1.7 Context

The relationship between feminist NGOs and communal kitchens forms part of a broader context and can only be understood within the framework of the current political scenario, both nationally and internationally.

At the international level, it can be mentioned that the economic world crisis of the Eighties heavily influenced Peruvian society. To the country's internal economic problems were added the structural adjustment policy of the World Bank and the IMF, which resulted in a reduction of government expenditure on food, education, etc.

Between 1983-1986 the number of NGOs and projects for women's promotion (among them survival projects, income generation, credit and training projects) greatly increased (Ruiz 1987). The number of communal kitchens also increased significantly (Huaman 1988).

At the national level, electoral conditions contributed to an increase in the number of communal kitchens. During the 1984-85 electoral period many communal kitchens appeared, linked to political parties or to the state. When

APRA won the presidential elections in 1985, communal kitchens became part of the government programme on food policies, through a programme called PAD (Direct Assistance Programme; Huaman 1988). Another contributing factor on a national scale is the specific character of Peruvian society, in which the dominant mestizo culture and male authority as social system legitimise and reproduce inequalities both between different groups in society, and between men and women.

Peruvian society is authoritarian, and this authoritarianism crosses the boundaries of gender, class and ethnicity. Sexism, racism and classism are present in all of Peru's institutions and organisations (church, school, government, political parties, etc.). This authoritarianism affects all aspects of Peruvian society and does not leave unaffected the work of NGOs and feminist and grassroots organisations. Although many of these continue struggling and resisting this kind of dominance, in practice it is not an easy task. Building countervailing power needs a severe redefinition of the existing structure of society.

1.8. Organisation of the Paper

Analysis of the relationship between communal kitchens and feminist NGOs is presented in six chapters. This introduction is Chapter One. Chapter Two contains my theoretical framework and provides the concepts and criteria guiding this research, such as the articulation of gender, sexual division of labour and class, as well popular education and empowerment. Chapter Three presents the background of communal kitchens and feminist NGOs in Peru, their mutual relationship, potential and limitations. A specific working experience between a feminist organisation and a communal kitchen is analyzed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five evaluates the scope and limitations for feminist NGOs to further women's empowerment with the insights gained from the literature and case study. Chapter Six provides a summary and draws some main conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARTICULATION OF GENDER, SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR, CLASS AND EMPOWERMENT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contains my theoretical framework and provides working definitions of the concepts gender, sexual division of labour, class and empowerment. In it are discussed the validity and applicability of the major concepts or analytical tools I am dealing with. I will use these concepts in my analysis of the relationships of a specific type of NGO (feminist/women-oriented) with grassroots women's organisations (a communal kitchen), considering they exist in specific contexts where their relationship interacts with other relationships based on class, gender and sexual division of labour.

The empowerment approach I use acknowledges the existence of power struggles. My objective is to contribute to reflection and awareness of power relations when we look for strategies, for alternative ways of working with grassroots women's organisations in order to facilitate their empowerment.

2.1. Gender

In the Seventies women's status became a more pressing issue on a growing international agenda. This shift in attitude towards women was preceded by increasingly active women's movements demanding women's rights in diverse and broad cultural settings, and leading to events such as the Women's Decade (1976-1985) and the Nairobi Conference (1985).

Within this context the emergence of women's studies made it possible to analyse, question and reexamine theories, predominantly created by males, which did not allow a full understanding of the nature of women's oppression and subordination.

Different themes have attracted the concern of feminists: women's work, sexual division of labour, power, gender relations and lastly the emergence of the empowerment approach. These neglected areas, in which politics and power relate to women, needed to be analysed. Feminism offers new themes to scientific inquiry, and feminist theory has provided important analytical tools in an attempt to understand the variety of positions women occupy in society, and the persistent inequalities between men and women. Feminist scholars not only developed new theories to understand existing unequal gender

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relations, they also wanted to change them. During the debate on notions such as nature, culture, production, reproduction, etc., the concept of gender entered feminist theory.

Peru's women's movement has debated extensively the priority of both class and gender, both in projects and platforms. There are two identifiable groups in this debate. The first is the feminist stream, accused of prioritising gender; the second group is accused by the feminists of prioritising class. The current debate holds that the problem is not in the priorisation of one above the other, but rather that it lies in the articulation of both, and in analysing how women experience this relation together with other relations such as ethnicity, culture age, religion, etc. I believe there is a new perspective that recognises the importance of considering the other relations women experience, and the interactions of these relations. It is strategically important for the women's movement because it provides a basis for collective actions throughout the Third World in the struggle for social change.

One of the great advances of introducing the gender concept is that it does not focus only on women. Instead it implies analysis of the past "relationships between male and female experience", also linking the past with current social practices (Scott 1988: 31). The reference to gender involves examining how gender works with other relationships, and gives meaning to the perception and organisation of knowledge. As Foucault held, gender is the knowledge about the relationship between the sexes (Scott 1988: 2).

Scott's definition of gender has two propositions. First, she sees gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" (1988: 42). In other words, gender is a fundamental element present in relationships, unto which different social qualities are allocated to the relationship between the sexes.
Secondly, she states:

> "Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. It implies that to speak about social relationships means to speak about power, which involves that in the old and basic relationship between men and women (gender relations) power takes meaning or representation. Changes in the representations of power have correlation with changes in the organisations of social relationships" (Scott 1988: 42).

Scott considers four elements to be mutually interacting: cultural symbols,

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normative concepts, subjective identity, and gender relationships linked with politics and social institutions. She refers not only to specific cultural historical contexts and social roles for men and women, but also to the forms and meanings gender takes in the articulation with specific contexts (Scott 1988: 55).

Following Scott's definition of gender as an analytical tool for change, we must consider three elements. The first is that gender relations differ in different social and political contexts. Although one could state that unequal gender relations are an almost universal practice, the forms inequalities take are not universal. The second element is that a historical perspective is interwoven in the concept of gender, which means relations are dynamic, not static or fixed. This insight is of utmost importance for the feminist movement, as it offers a possibility for change. Thirdly, the concept of gender allows us to study the other power relations women are affected by besides sexual inequality. It gives room for analysing and questioning unequal relations that stem from class, race, culture, age, etc., and shape women's identity, often implying conflicts and contradictions. When developing strategies for change, we have to take all these aspects into account, recognising the contradictions and differences.

In my own view, and in the case of the Peruvian women's movement, gender offers a common conceptual ground for women from different sectors of society struggling against subordination. Further complexities arise as unequal positions in society are linked with power relations derived from class, ethnicity, age, region, etc. which in turn reinforce women's subordination. The question remains: to what extent can the concept of gender help women to improve their situation? Furthermore, how far can it question or change this gender subordination?

2.2. Gender and the Sexual Division of Labour

For feminists, the concept of sexual division of labour is important. In spite of ideological differences among feminists, the recognition of hierarchical, oppressive and exploitative relationships has united them in the search for strategies to end such relationships. The outcome of this search for strategies by feminist scholars has provided us with knowledge about the origins of a sexual division of labour, and what the ideological assumptions used to justify it imply.

In her work "Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale" (1986), Maria Mies questions the universality and fixedness of the tasks women perform. She firmly criticises these assumptions, showing that men and women perform tasks according to their specific socio-historic and cultural context, which means their skills are neither fixed nor universal, but more socially constructed. Mies questions the 'biological destiny' used in dominant western paradigms of the Twenties, such as functionalism and positivism to portray the sexual division of labour as natural and predetermined.

From the point of view of positivism and functionalism, the sexual division of labour is a simple division of different tasks between men and women. Men's tasks are seen as human labour which is conscious, planned and productive, whereas women's tasks are seen as determined by their (biological) nature. These concepts hide the fact that such relationships are asymmetric, hierarchical and exploitive, not simple divisions of labour between equal partners (Mies 1986: 46). The questioning of dominant theories involves the decodefication or redefinition of concepts such as work, class, nature, power and sexual division of labour itself.

Mies highlights the benefits of the current practices of sexual division of labour for the capitalist system. She states that life and subsistence production, largely non-wage labour mainly done by women, should be defined as work. This work stakes out, taps, exploits people and is appropriated by the capitalist system for production purposes and the creation of surplus value (Mies 1986: 47). Mies clearly shows the links between sexual division of labour and economics, politics and power. The sexual division of labour is not only a problem related to the family, but a structural problem of society as a whole. The hierarchical division of labour between men and women and its dynamics form an integral part of dominant production relations, that is, the class relations of a particular epoch in society, and of the broader national and international division of labour (Mies 1986: 49).

Mies underlines that activities such as producing children and milk are truly human, conscious and social activities, crucial for feminist theory. One of the great obstacles of women's liberation is the lack of acceptance of the human side of these activities, still interpreted as purely physiological functions comparable to those of animals (Mies 1986: 53-54).

Following Mies and Scott, I consider as a sexual division of labour all socially constructed norms, images, symbols and social practices legitimising the allocation of different tasks to men and women based on assumed 'natural'

skills, relegating women to the home as their suitable place, ignoring women's work and making it invisible. Men instead are portrayed as the rightful breadwinners. They are supposed to be strong and suited to outside work, which in fact means being paid for working.

To summarise: gender as well as the sexual division of labour are socially constructed relationships between males and females within a specific socio-economic and cultural context. These relations are intersected by power relations. The sexual division of labour existing in the world is gender discrimination applied to work, resulting in culturally constructed divisions of labour which reflect and reinforce unequal power relations.

2.2.1. Importance of the concept of sexual division of labour

Women in communal kitchens in Peru became organised as a group through a survival strategy based on a traditional division of labour (cooking, shopping, etc.). Cooking, first confined to the domestic domain, has been transformed into a public and political issue by the women of Peru's communal kitchens. The practice and ideological assumption of sexual division of labour had until then restricted women's mobility outside the household even more than it is now. This also often translates into restrictions for women by their partners against joining groups such as the communal kitchens. Currently the sexual division of labour in Peru's slums hinders women's participation in community work, their development and consciousness raising. This works against women's empowerment. If women don't want to accept the limitations of the existing sexual division of labour, they run the risk of 'creating' conflicts in the household. These conflicts can have two possible outcomes: either women drop out of grassroots organisations due to male aggression (verbal, physical, emotional), or they continue to face conflicts and contradictions, bargaining for their mobility outside the household. One of the arguments women have opposed to male resistance is that joining a communal kitchen benefits all household members.

In practice, the sexual division of labour has several contradictory consequences for women in communal kitchens (see, for example, Backhaus 1988). On the one hand, making this work collective makes it much more visible. The collective practice of women and the acquired visibility of traditional tasks have positive effects on women's sense of self-worth. Their participation in this kind of group allow them to escape their isolation and increases the weight of their presence in the community (Backhaus 1988: 44). On the other

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hand, I have observed that work in the communal kitchens increases women's burdens in relation to cooking, helping run the organisation, training others, etc. They often cook 4 to 10 hours in shifts, under extremely bad conditions, without sufficient water, energy or proper tools. There are many other consequences, such as women's exhaustion, aggravated by the pressure and guilt feelings for 'neglecting' their own children.

It is important that the issue of the sexual division of labour be recognised by the women organised in communal kitchens, so that they begin to democratically redistribute tasks in their own households, or to find group alternatives. It is also important for middle class women[3], many of whom are facilitators of women's projects, to confront this issue. None of this, of course, takes away from the fact that males and the state must should also shoulder their share of responsibility in revaluing and reallocating labour relations in their society.

2.3. Class and gender

Class is a fundamental concept in sociological literature concerned with social structure. The concept has been widely discussed since last century, while that of gender emerged more recently. It has been applied in studying the development of industrial capitalism as well as in the analysis of social change in less developed countries.

Marxists define class as property relations in relation to the means of production and productive forces. Classes vary according to the mode of production. This Marxist definition, focusing mainly on economic relations, has been criticised from the feminist perspective as economic reductionism. Class as a concept has male biases. Scott says that class was offered as a universal category with a masculine construction. One implication was that men supposedly represented the working class. The aim of feminist scholarship is to underline that the working class is also constituted by women and children, who also have roles in the economy, in the division of labour, and in the production and reproduction of human resources (Scott 1988: 64).

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[3] It is a big contradiction for most Latin American feminists who want to promote change in gender relationships, but can not achieve it for themselves due to the structure of societies like Peru. By hiring other women, middle class women are not only not questioning the unequal sexual division of labour in their home but also liberating males from having to share the responsibility for these tasks. In that way SDL is reinforced and reproduced. This example shows how SDL is connected with gender, class and ethnic issues: the majority of women employed for this work are working class women with Andean roots.

What is the importance of this concept for feminism and what is the relationship of both concepts? We will see their validity in understanding women's status. One of the approaches of feminism is to use class and gender in an effort to link power relations i.e. women's subordination within the family and society. This approach comes from the perspective of socialist feminism. For socialist feminists, understanding the interrelation of gender and class is crucial. They hold that women are entrapped between two systems of oppression. They are part of a class, and as such are affected by the norms, values and instances of oppression of that class. Women also experience male oppression coming from the power hierarchy of patriarchy. Women's oppression, for socialist feminists, is not only related to the family but also the responsibility of a society dominated by the ideology of patriarchy.

Therefore for socialist feminists it is important to identify links between the two systems of women's oppression: the capitalist and patriarchal systems. Women's oppression does not just stem from capitalism. Other power structures are also responsible for it.

Scott argues that in understanding women's unequal position in society, gender cannot be analysed without taking class into account or vice-versa.

> "Each is necessarily incomplete without the other ... The link between gender and class is conceptual; it is a link every bit as material as the link between productive forces and relations of production" (Scott 1988: 66). It is not possible to analyse politics without gender, sexuality and family (Scott 1988: 60).

The definition of class I will use is part of the new perspective which perceives class as relationships between large groups of people who share similar positions in an economic system. I perceive class as being related to social processes. It is one more relationship to be considered in any sociological analysis, when we develop strategies for change. I consider class as groups of people who share more or less common positions in society, based on economic power relations, which leads them to share collective identities and some political and social experiences. Here I am referring specifically to women of the communal kitchen as working class women.

The importance of considering the articulation of gender and class without overlooking ethnic issues became evident from the practices of women in communal kitchens, in order to seek emancipatory strategies for women. The women of communal kitchens got organised as a response to the shortage of

food. This need derives from their class position in Peruvian society. Their responsibility for family reproduction and household tasks as defined by gender-oriented ideologies pressed them to seek alternatives to their traditional household tasks (see also Grandon 1987; Huaman 1988).

Another example of this gender-class articulation is that the common interest as squatters and as women facilitates the organisation of women at regional and national levels, as in the case of communal kitchens. Another reason is that in a hierarchical and class structured society like Peru, there is a wide gap between rich and poor, which has a differentiated impact on women. Lastly, in the interrelation of feminist NGOs and grassroots women's organisation, women from different sectors are working together. Gender subordination is complex, and does not have the same meaning for all women. This must be considered when working with grassroots women's organisations.

Class is not a unitary category. There are a variety of groups or segments of class, i.e. among classes there are gender differences; among women there are class differences. Women from the same class have differences due to other circumstances (age, culture, race, etc.). This diversity is represented in different practices and identities. In other words, 'oppressed women' as one single, unified category do not really exist.

In Peru different classes and segments of classes have been identified, i.e. a middle class or white collar, petty commodity producers, working class. In rural areas a differentiated peasantry is dominant but there is a growing class of landless labourers. These classes have different groups among them. In the working class of urban settlements we might find, on the one hand, an informal sector with markets and street vendors, whose situation varies according to their sex, access to capital, the products they sell or produce. There are also repairmen, motorised tricycle drivers, women doing community work in exchange for food. On the other hand we find the wage earning proletariat employed in the modern sector of the economy, especially in manufacturing. I have said that, due to the power relations in Peruvian society according to class, ethnic and gender, women have varying status in society. Women have access to or are excluded from valued resources which establish differences among them in relation to housing, education, job opportunities, etc. If we look at women's work or employment, there are class differences among women, even if class is not the only significant factor.

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The implications of class for working-class women are mainly political. Class is an element in their identities and it can provide them with a common platform for collective actions and organisations through which they can apply social pressure. In a group of women from the same class, however, we find differences based on race, region, education and culture which offer a variety of interests. In daily life the impact of a variety of relationships shape people's identities.

2..3.1. The importance for feminist theory to study gender and class

My point of view is that gender and class can be useful analytical tools for feminist theory, but they must acknowledge the existence of other power relations which are potential points of conflicts, such as ethnicity, culture, nationality, religion, age, etc., and sources of women's multiple identities and interests. Therefore any strategy undertaken by women's movements should consider this variety of relations and contradictions which can also provide a basis for collective actions among women and with other social forces by identifying common goals against inequalities.

As I have already mentioned, women as a unitary category do not exist. Women have a variety of positions in society i.e. women in the shanty towns don't all experience the same gender relations. Not all women have the same position and opportunities in the Peruvian society. If we analyse gender, it will become clear that women are also shaped by other experiences such as class, ethnicity, culture, ages, religion, etc. So we cannot speak of a unitary relation for all women. It is important to understand the differences , and contradictions among women in order to identify our own needs, to have the ability to find common points of interest in our struggle.

2.4. Empowerment

Power relations are responsible for the impoverishment of women. Poverty involves not just a scarcity of food, but also lack of self-esteem, lack of control over one's own body and sexuality, lack of political participation in society, etc. This is reflected in the hunger of women not only for food, but for organisation, participation, self-confidence, knowledge, income etc. These are aspects considered in the empowerment strategy I am presenting.

The origins of the empowerment approach come from the emergent feminist writings and grassroots organisation's experience of Third World women. It recognises that feminism is not simply a recent Western, urban, middle-class

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import. It identifies power in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength (Moser 1989: 17). The approach of "Development Alternatives Women for a New Era" (DAWN) comes from feminists from Third World countries. It links organising and empowerment. They consider that through organisation women can be self-empowered. For them women's subordination is closely linked with equality, peace and development (DAWN, 1985, in Moser 1989: 17).

Feminist movements from developing countries are dealing with power relations and structures in specific cultural and socio-political contexts, in their effort to challenge dominant hegemonic systems and to look for an end to women's subordination and oppression. Therefore, in the process of building feminist theory and questioning dominant paradigms, I see the need to discuss and clarify concepts such as gender, sexual division of labour, class and empowerment, for three reasons. The first is a theoretical one, to see the validity and applicability of these concepts for feminist theory and practice. The second reason is that by applying these analytical tools creatively and critically, feminists from 'Third World countries' can contribute to feminist epistemology from their specific cultural and political context of practices. The third reason is practical: there is a need to develop political strategies because we are dealing with power relations in our everyday lives. We need to counter this with empowerment as an alternative way of reconstructing identities, organisations, relations, values and improving women's status and conditions in all aspects of society (economically, physically, spiritually, politically and culturally).

I consider women's empowerment all individual and collective actions aimed at strengthening women to become active agents of social change. As mentioned above, in these actions the socio-political context and specific factors such as class, race, religion, culture, should be taken into account.
The self-empowerment of women is not a goal, it is a means and a process for changing society and oppressive relations among human beings. Self-empowerment is a necessary stage or pre-condition for a broader change of society. It is a learning process: by doing it in practice (i.e. by being organised as a member or leader, by building collective actions, by developing democratic and solidaire practices, etc.), people empower themselves.

Empowerment is not only an Utopia. It is also a working methodology which has the following principles: allowing people to make their own choices,

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respecting their space, facilitating them a place to become leaders and get teaching and learning experience. At the same time empowerment is not a linear process. It can be unclear and have contradictions.

Empowerment as a practice is multidimensional and requires multiple conditions, rather than one condition in particular, for its implementation and continuity. From this perspective I consider five dimensions of the process of women's empowerment: subjective, physical, economic, political and cultural dimensions (Schrijvers 1991). Schrijvers' autonomy approach, adopted by the Dutch government, considers empowerment as one aspect of women's autonomy. She cites four dimensions of autonomy which are mutually interconnected: the physical, implying the control of body and sexuality; economic autonomy, meaning equal access and control of the means of production; political autonomy, referring to basic rights such as self determination and the freedom to organise for pressure groups; sociocultural as the right to have an independent identity and sense of self-worth.

This empowerment process can start in one or more aspects of women's lives: women's self-esteem, rediscovering women's inner energy and spirituality, self-consciousness, the ability to make decisions according to their own interests, the questioning of imposed women's identities or stereotypes, the reappropriation of women's own identity in a particular socio-economic and cultural context.
In relation to empowerment, the theoretical conceptualisation I am proposing for this MA thesis is based on one of the major contributions of feminism, that is: building theory from women's experiences.

As away of conclusion I want to say that gender is not the only element that shapes women's identities. There are other power relations that shape identities, practices and relations among women. Power relations takes meaning in specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts. According to the status women have in society, women have different needs and interests. We need to consider this when we discuss strategies for women's empowerment.

I am presenting the elements of feminist methodology and popular education in Chapter Three. My view is that they not only complement each other but that they are mutually necessary when wanting to work with grassroots women's organisations from a feminist empowering perspective.
My objectives are to apply and link concepts, methods and techniques of

popular education with a feminist perspective[4] and method[5].   Because the popular education approach contains a gender bias, there is a need to adapt its techniques, group dynamics and games.   Grassroots women's organisations (also women from other sectors) face power relations, power structures and social hierarchies in their daily lives. To counter these problems, feminist NGOs can use as a strategy the empowerment approach that has been developed from the perspectives of feminism and popular education.

2.4.1. Five Criteria for Evaluating Women's Empowerment

Systematising the working experience between CEM and the FAC communal kitchen has provided insights to understanding the scope and limitations of working with grassroots women's organisations on the part of a feminist NGO. It poses theoretical questioning to the traditional methodology and pedagogy. Even more, it challenges our own theoretical assumptions about power, knowledge, education and gender. It has practical implications by forcing ourselves to review not only the content of these topics, but also the practices and processes that we as part of external organisations develop in relation to grassroots women's organisations.

While writing this thesis I have faced limitations in my academic training. I was missing tools for the evaluation of women's empowerment. They are necessary for a new understanding of political change in which women's personal change is essential and has multiple dimensions (abilities, feelings, ideas, self-image, identities).   Therefore I am proposing the following criteria for evaluating women's empowerment from grassroots organisations. They must be understood as guideline criteria rather than fixed and/or excluding criteria. The criteria have five levels, on each of them I propose possible strategies to be further developed:

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[4] "Feminism as a mode of analysis relies on the idea that we come to know the world, to change it, trough our daily activity. The focusing on daily life experience makes it clear not only that we are active in creating and changing our lives but that reality itself consist of "senses human activity, practice" (Hartsock 1981: 36).

[5] "Feminism as a method makes us recognise human activity is also self-changing. A fundamental redefinition of the self is an integral part of action for political change. But our selves are social phenomena, and take their meaning from the social whole of which we are a part.... The power of a feminist method grows out of the fact that it enables us to connect every day life with an analysis of the social institutions which shape that life" (Hartsock 1981: 36).

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a) **Subjective dimension[6]**: Reconstructing women's self-images. Validation of women's life experiences, intuition, feelings, emotions are crucial elements here. This involves bringing women in contact with their inner energy and spirituality.

Strategy : Questioning women's imposed self-image implies working on women's self-confidence, self-worth. It also involves rediscovering inner energy and spirituality.

b) **Physical dimension:** To have the power (energy) to make one's own choices related to our own bodies (sexual preference, fertility, parenting).

Strategy : Awareness, reappropriation and control of our own bodies.

c) **Economic dimension:** Material and social welfare. For women living in poor urban areas this means basic services (water, electricity, sewerage, housing), schools, child-care centres, transport, food supply, income and medical care[7].

Strategy: Women's struggle for well being. A basic and first reaction of poor urban women is organising survival strategies and searching for alternatives to improve their economic situation. 'Committees for basic services' are an expression of this. In poor urban areas of Peru, collective actions and demands for well-being imply the following strategies:

- social pressure, negotiating, bargaining with authorities to get services;
- providing services themselves;
- a mixture of both strategies where, for example, women provide the labour, and the authorities provide financial and technical support.

d) **Political dimension:** Autonomy of women for establishing their own agenda based on their own needs, both for their organisations and for themselves as individuals. Decision making without interference. Personal change is a central element of political change aimed at societal transformation.

Strategy : To build up a space in which women's consciousness-raising can take place. The analysis and self-reflection of women's life experiences should

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[6] I am considering the dimension of spirituality/subjectivity because changes to power relation take a long time, and the first changes operate at a subjective level (images, emotions). I thus consider this dimension to be an important space to work out our fears, angst and internalised repressions. (Pederson 1988).

[7] For Sara Hlupekile, material welfare and equal access to land, labour, credit training, marketing facilities and public services benefits, are components of the two first levels from a total of five levels of women's development criteria (welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, control) (Sara Hlupekile, 1991 151).

lead to social action, changing life practices and concepts. As Harstock has concluded, it is not only necessary to understand the roots of our powerlessness, the most important thing is to change it (Harstock 1981).

e) Cultural dimension: Reappropriation of women's identities. This involves the validation of women's culture, language, experiences, knowledge, regardless of race, class, culture, sexual preference, age, etc.

Strategy : Questioning the oppressive elements of the dominant culture, but also of the native cultures, and the way dominant knowledge are constructed. In order to value culture differences and the nuances based on race, class, sexual preference, etc. as positive, we need to assume and confront them, not neglect them.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LINKS BETWEEN COMMUNAL KITCHENS AND FEMINIST NGOS

This chapter presents the analysis of communal kitchens, feminist NGOs and their mutual links. It contains four parts. In the first part I will show the context that has influenced the relationship between communal kitchens and feminist NGOs. The second part bears some assumptions about communal kitchens, regarding the following aspects: origins, types, features, and the debates existing at the inside of the women's movement in Peru about their role. I intend to assess the scope of their empowerment potential by reviewing critically the analysis of feminist NGOs and pointing out some flaws, contradictions and contributions. The third part presents a general background of feminist NGOs. In the fourth part attention will be paid to the relationship between feminist NGOs and communal kitchens, focusing on the analysis of women's projects and their methodology. From the literature review, I will see to what extent feminist NGOs can facilitate or limit the potential of empowerment of grassroots women's organisations.

3.1. Part One: the Context
3.1.1. International
The following international events have had impact on the national context:
a.   The women's decade, which made way for three crucial international conferences (Mexico, 1975, Copenhagen, 1980 and Nairobi, 1985.
b.   The economic crisis in Latin America, and the debt problem.
c.   Development approaches in use, and how these affect women.

Ad a. The women's decade
Women became part of the international agenda once the decade was underway and due also to the conferences and other meeting spaces it facilitated. The decade also made an impact on women's visibility in the media, on laws and political discussions emanating in Peru's institutions. Some concrete manifestations of this shift in government focus, for example, were the creation of COTREM (Comite Tecnico de Revaloracion de la Mujer, 1973) and CONAMUP (Comision Nacional de la Mujer Peruana, 1975). Later on, spaces for women to work together in and relate to one another and to the public sphere arose, with the creation of women's and feminist NGOs, either along the lines of existing NGOs or with newly constituted ones.

Ad b. The economic crisis

The application of IMF policies (reduction of public services, frozen wages, elimination of subsidies to main food products) has worsened the living and working conditions of people from low income sectors. Women's social conditions and labour, either productive and/or reproductive, have been affected drastically, which leads, among other things, to an extension and intensification of female work (Suarez & Vilma Vargas 1985: 151-168). The decrease in purchasing capacity and the rise in unemployment, the lack of basic services (water, electricity, sewage, health facilities), resulted in the fact that women became more visible in the struggle for life. Women participated massively in mobilisations and national strikes, thus contributing to Peruvian democracy (Huaman 1985). The collective and working activities of grassroots women's organisations took place under these circumstances, which shaped, and also were transformed by them.

Ad c. Development approaches in use and how these affect women

COTREM and CONAMUP came into being during Velazco's government (1968-1975), within the framework of integrating women into development by stressing their marginalisation rather than their subordination. This developmental approach failed to improve women's conditions and status. The strategy of 'basic needs addressed to the poorest (women) mainly throughout survival projects (housing, food, health)' appeared during the government of APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), communal kitchens being one of them. Feminists critical of the assumptions behind this approach affirm that it reinforces the existing sexual division of labour, transposing reproductive tasks from the domestic to the communal sphere. Women's 'activities' annexed as part of their 'natural' tasks are still not properly considered work. The main implications of this assumption are that women's income and working conditions as contributing factors to improving women's conditions are neglected in the conception of this strategy, and women's subordination is ultimately reinforced.

Increased support for women's projects by international cooperation led to an increase number of NGOs and the institutionalisation of existing ones. This happened just as the economical and political crisis of Peruvian society, which rages on, was taking place.

3.2. Communal Kitchens

3.2.1. Origins

Communal kitchens are located in the barriadas[8], mostly in urban areas of Peru. In the cities, between 65% and 75% of the population live in barriadas. Most barriadas lack basic services (water, electricity, transport, parks, health centres, etc.), because the fact is that the state has not provided them. The inhabitants of these barriadas continue either struggling to obtain them, or demanding them from the state. Some barriadas have acquired services through communal actions.

Women have always been present in the collective and communal actions undertaken since the origin of the urban popular movement in Peru. Since the mid Seventies, women of the popular sectors play an active role in the struggle for better living conditions, women's rights and democracy, among other demands (Huaman, Villavicencio 1989; Ruiz 1987). Women are the stable, constantly available occupants in the barriadas. When a new barriada is created through invasion, it is mainly women who are present in the whole process, staking the homeplace they have chosen[9].

The women's popular movement has roots and linkages with the urban popular movement. This is the outcome of a long social process which has had several stages. The popular women's mainstream developed little by little, starting from women's general participation to their protagonic role in the urban popular movement.

Women have organised in different groups, developing different practices and relations. They participate in mixed organisations, for example as inhabitants demanding or working towards the obtention of basic services (in central boards, pro-water, electricity, school, pavement committees, etc.). In mixed groups, women usually implement activities and are not leaders. In women's groups (such as committees, mothers' clubs, women's association, communal kitchens), they also have the scope to be leaders.

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[8] Barriada is the living place of dwellers; poverty and lack of housing is the common and general characteristic they share. Barriadas are heterogeneous by the way it is created as well by the social composition (ex-peasants without land, workers mainly from the informal sector, unemployment, impoverished middle class etc.) and the geographical origins of their inhabitants. Barriadas are named also "pueblos jovenes", UPIS- Popular urbanization of Social interest, Pro-housing Association, Human Settlement, Invasion etc.

[9] The squatters of a new barriada commit themselves to having at least one member of the family who will remain at the new site 24 hours a day in order to prevent being thrown out by the police, and this is usually done by women.

Communal kitchens[10] are part of the women's popular movement, which is an important social force and forms part of the broader women's movement in Peru. Some communal kitchens have incorporated both class and gender relations in their struggle, although this is not always clear and sometimes remains contradictory.

Communal kitchens have their origins in the `olla comun'[11] (communal pot) (Sara-Lafosse 1989: 191). What initially was an issue pertaining only to trade unions on strike, became an issue involving groups of women from the barriadas, as a way of counteracting the difficulties of their living conditions, stemming from their position in society (gender, class and ethnic) within the context of the economic crisis. Communal kitchens are also intrinsically linked with the ancestral Andean practices used for building communal services, such as bridges, roads, houses, etc. (Wesemael-Smit 1988). After these practices, cooking and drinking together were a tradition catered to by women.

The growing indebtedness of Peru and its economic crisis by the end of the Seventies is one of the factors that has moulded and spread the practice of founding communal kitchens[12] as a survival strategy. In this context, communal kitchens emerged reproducing the existing sexual division of labour, which places on women's shoulders the survival of their families as their major responsibility.

3.2.2. Definition

Communal kitchens are grassroots women's organisations in which actions of production, consumption and services are integrated. Women buy and prepare food collectively to reduce food costs. Such kitchens take various forms. There are distinct differences according to how they were created and how they are run. Many communal kitchens are a product of a collective decision related to subsistence and survival and basic family needs. The fact is in communal kitchens, women as centres of domestic reproduction have transferred their activity from the domestic and individual sphere to the collective and

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[10] and also part of the Peruvian urban popular movement.

[11] Cesip 1987: 5-8.

[12] The firsts communal kitchen appeared at the north and south i the barriadas of Lima, between the years 1978 and 1979.

public one. This strategy has been institutionalised and promoted by international agencies and backed by different institutions (religious, government, feminist, etc). Some communal kitchens go beyond this function, taking into account women's other needs and demands and developing a variety of activities[13] in the way of courses, lectures, workshops and seminars, grounded on the group's everyday practices. Communal kitchens have the scope for collective, democratic practices (Huaman, Montes, Sara-Lafosse 1989: 277).

3.2.3. Types and Characteristics

Communal kitchens are diverse and complex. There is no one established model, although they can be grouped somewhat loosely into two types, dependent and independent communal kitchens[14]. To analyse the features of both types of communal kitchens, attention will be paid to:

    a. The kitchen's model of organisation and functionality

    b. The kitchen's relation with outsiders

    c. The kitchen's origins

a. The model of organisation and functionality

Dependent communal kitchens: Into this category fall so called family kitchens and people's kitchens. Their structure, functions and management are controlled by PAD (Direct Aid Programme), the government programme. Sharing and rotating of collective tasks is less common (42%), compared with independent communal kitchens (86%); 26% of dependent communal kitchens do not carry out any other activity except cooking. In exceptional cases, their major activities centre around small incomes (40%) and training (18%).

Independent communal kitchens[15]: To join an independent communal kitchen means for women to join a collective strategy with self-government, that provides space for collective learning, practices and democracy. These aspects are expressed by preparing food together, having shifts, sharing tasks among the members, holding periodical and rotating elections of leaders (Montes, Sara-Lafosse 1989; Grandon 1987). Independent communal kitchens have

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[13] On health (education on nutrition, reviewing patterns of consumption and promoting the use of local or national products with the same caloric and protein value), on sexuality (birth control methods, self-confidence, body images), leadership training, management, communication, group roles, other projects like communal gardens, etc.

[14] For more information about communal kitchens and autonomy see Van Wesemael-Smit, 1988.

[15] The glass-of-milk programme might be included here but this type of women's organisation was created as part of the UI's municipal programme (United left coalition). Although it is relatively autonomous, in more than one case women from glass-of-milk committees have mobilised in favour of their increased autonomy.

two times more training activities that dependent communal kitchens (41%). Independent communal kitchens only centres 3% of its activities on cooking (Huaman 1989: 169).

b. The relation with outsiders

Almost all communal kitchens have links with one or more institutions (outsiders), church, state, political parties and women's NGOs. The link is established through food and supply support and/or through training. Political parties from the government like APRA and AP (Accion Popular) established a patron-client relationship. Through State policies dependent communal kitchens were promoted.

Training: Activities in training and support service play a key role in independent kitchens. Organisation and survival are the themes stressed (Grandon 1987: 34). Women's matters, as a specific issue, covers only 6% of their activities (Huaman 1989: 167). The main initiative for training and counselling activities comes from women themselves, and in the second place from the church. Independent communal kitchens give training and advisory work through their federations in a proportion of 16%, which is the same percentage for NGOs. When we compare this with dependent communal kitchens we see that a high percentage (51%) does neither advisory services nor training. When advisory services are offered, it is usually through a political party (APRA covers 37%). Women play an important role in deciding and motivating activities in the independent communal kitchens (Huaman 1989: 146).

Support: Huaman's study states that independent communal kitchens have diversified their sources of support. They are mainly supported by the church - Caritas - with free food products (36%), and also got 53% low-price products through the municipality (during the IU programme in Lima). These kitchens have shown capacity to generate self-support for instruments and supplies (with implications for women's work and health), although political parties and government don't really provide enough support to them, and international food aid has been considerably reduced.

Dependent communal kitchens get government support and are better implemented with pots and infrastructure, but 73% don't get food aid. Although dependent communal kitchens receive more materials and outputs, it must be said that both kinds of kitchens don't get adequate support for their services

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(financial, food products, instruments and basic services). External support covers only 40% of the costs of a meal. As a result, women use 5-8 hours per day in the production of the services in 56% of the communal kitchens (Huaman 1989: 153-168). This means it is basically women who are sustaining this survival strategy through their creativity, energy, time and work.

Dependent communal kitchens were formed by political parties. The communal kitchens formed by AP were called 'family kitchens'; APRA named them 'people's kitchens'. Later on they became part of the PAD programme. The common feature of these communal kitchens is their dependency with political parties. The leftist coalition IU (United Left) from the municipalities also promoted the FOVIDA programme (Fomento de la Vida). The previous programmes appeared just before the 1985-1986 municipal and presidential elections in Peru (Paredes and Tello 1988: 185-219).

c. The origins of communal kitchens

Huaman[16] (1989) divided communal kitchens from Lima in 1986, into three groups according to the year of their founding, and the founding agents involved: the old (1979-1981), the medium (1982-1983) and the recent (1984-1986). Within these categories, Huaman distinguished between dependent (D) and independent (I) communal kitchens.

	I	D
old	27.2%	2.4%
medium	34%	8.15%
recent	38%	89.5%
total	100.0	100.0

The above scheme shows both types of communal kitchens have increased differently. The independent communal kitchens emerged during the three periods with a slightly increasing tendency, whereas dependent communal kitchens almost did not exist in the old period but drastically increased in the recent period (almost 45 times).

With regard to the agent of formation, Huaman found that independent communal kitchens are seen by women as a product of their own motivation and decision, a role that increased in the last two periods. Although the church was the most significant source of motivation in older communal kitchens, women in

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[16] Huaman intended to know if the formation of new communal kitchens was a product of external initiative (political parties/government, church, NGOs, or if they arose from the people's direct needs.

such kitchens no longer perceive this presence, saying it was necessity that motivated the kitchen's formation.

Neighbourhood organisations also played a role in founding communal kitchens, when the initiative came from established groups such as mothers' clubs, health committees and other neighbourhood-based organisations. In this type of organisation, the practices and objectives of communal kitchens go beyond cooking (Flores 1989: 134-135).

The presence of NGOs in the formation of independent communal kitchens emerged in the last period (9%) (Huaman 1989: 152). When communal kitchens are formed by outsiders, their establishment is usually faster. The objectives of a given institution, whether it be church, NGO, party, etc., influence how a kitchen is run. Administration and control are the major functions of this type of kitchen, in which control is established through a system of sanctions (Flores 1989: 135).

3.2.4. Potentials and limits

Reviewing literature, different authors have referred to the following aspects with respect to the potential of communal kitchens:

1. Communal kitchens as grassroots women's organisations offer the creation of women's space for participation in politics with domestic reproduction as a starting point (Sara-Lafosse 1984; Montes 1989). Such a space allows women to share more actively in their communities, undertake collective learning, self-management, learn decision taking skills and leadership, improve communication skills, carry out collective exchange of experience, express their own ideas and develop democratic and solidarity relations (Cordova and Gorriti 1989; Grandon 1987; Ruiz, 1987; Huaman Villavicencio 1989).

2. Communal kitchens form part of the so called new social movements which have developed new types of organisations with a new kind of female leadership. This means they have brought a personal dimension into their organisations. This personal dimension is represented in the following aspects: friendship, solidarity and democracy in the struggle for everyday life (Vargas 1989).

3. Another positive aspect is that independent communal kitchens are organised at three levels: the basis, the Federation (district and department) and a more centralised national commission. The process of becoming centralised strengthened the organisation at the base. It mobilised women and made public demands be expressed, in relation to state food policies, women's income,

autonomy and respect for women's groups[17]. This process is not yet totally developed, but it is slowly increasing. Its potential is that it allows women to act as social pressure group with the capacity to mobilise and organise.

The limits of communal kitchens as a survival strategy have also been pointed out by some authors, especially from the feminist movement:
1. There is a risk that the new collective practices of this survival strategy reinforce and promote the existing sexual division of labour Backhaus 1988).
2. Only a small number of women leaders join mixed neighbourhood organisations, which are the proper instances for representation and decision taking in regard to community development. These instances are still mostly under male control and authority. Thus some authors affirm that groups constituted by just women are only serving to keep women encapsulated (Boggio 1989).

The assumptions about sexual division of labour and women's domestic work are not only legitimised within the family but also in the community. This implies that the work of women in communal kitchens, since it remains unpaid, is undervalued, and will in practice only transplant this problem from the domestic to the public sphere. This survival strategy places on women's shoulders the responsibility for providing services which must be demanded of the state, and in which males and institutions in Peruvian society must share (Backhaus 1988; Anderson 1989).

3.3. Feminist NGOs
3.3.1. General background of feminist NGOs
At the end of the Seventies four groups[18] of women in Lima formed an informal coordination (Ruiz 1987: 104). Its members were professional women, some of them militants of leftist parties and disappointed with the working methodology of the leftist parties towards women and organisations (Vargas 1989: 18-19). Initially they had a period of discussion and tried to acquire a common understanding about women's problematic. At this time they placed feminist issues on the Peruvian public agenda (Vargas 1989). By the time of the Second Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter in 1981, the coordination had divided into two streams. The differences concentrated on

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[17] The National Coordination negotiated that members of communal kitchens also members of PAIT (Governmental Aid Program for Temporary Income) could participate in cooking shifts without losing the day's pay.

[18] These groups were Flora Tristan, Manuela Ramos, Alimuper, Frente Socialista de Mujeres.

the question of which aspect to prioritise in women's projects: gender or class. The discussion still goes on and shapes the projects and images of feminists and non-feminists alike.

The next moment in the formation of a feminist movement was named 'the encapsuling period'(1981-1983). This meant internal discussions and the elaboration of a theoretical framework wit the main ideas of Peruvian feminism (Vargas 1989). For this reason it was an important period.

The next period (1984-1986) was an opening of feminist groups to the public and political arena. By then many grassroots women's organisations were active and working from local to regional and national levels. Feminist organisations began to work with popular women's organisations, with the notion of a shared solidarity, but their methodology as well as their starting point for working (gender instead of class) did not really match those of lower class women, who had to cope with poverty in the first instance: "The protagonic role of women in the barriadas, questioned the type of relationship of the feminist movement with the women's movement" (Ruiz 1987: 117).

Among feminist groups there are differences in size, actions or institutionalised groups and regions. Only since the late Eighties have feminist NGOs recognised the needs of popular women, and step by step the cooperation between these two women's mainstreams is fitting together.

3.3.2. Debates about communal kitchens
One of the major debates concerning communal kitchens is in relation to the practices they developed. According to Grandon, there are two streams of thought and action[19], both of which are extremes: the first overlooks women's protagonism in the communal kitchens (Colectivo Feminista El Zorro de Abajo, N. 5, 1986, Barrig 1986 in Grandon 1987), the second one glorifies it (some promotors and collaborators).

The first one devalues the centralisation of practices that communal kitchens use to solve survival problems, although all forces of communal kitchens aim to do so. This perspective views communal kitchens as efficient mechanisms to alleviate poverty. It considers only practices linked with strategic

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[19]These approaches are explained in Grandon et al, 1987.

gender objectives. This means that this stream doesn't view women in regard to other systems of oppression like class, ethnic, etc., although they say the opposite. Since women have different interests, negating them means not accepting the legitimation of these different interests women have according to their different insertions in society.

The second one is regarded overly optimistic. It sees in the massive multiplication of women's popular organisations and new practices like communal kitchens alternative characteristics that will change gender relations at home. According to Grandon, these analysts only see what they wish to see, rather than the reality of the organisations. Grandon considers that both views don't adjust to reality. She finds the causes of both these approaches are, in the first case, remaining distant from the process and trajectory of communal kitchens, and ignorant of the meaning women themselves give to their own struggles and participation. In the second case, she believes objectivity has been lost because promotors and supporters make their analysis with a deep emotional compromise which distorts their judgement.

In relation to the debates about the sexual division of labour in communal kitchens, Backhaus (1988: 146-183) has identified three opinions about the kitchens:

a. Communal kitchens as a new organisational practice they have somewhat changed traditional roles (women are economic providers; they save time; they give less personal attention to preparing food for their partners).

b. Communal kitchens are a new and different way of organising domestic tasks collectively, without affecting the sexual division of labour. Domestic tasks are more recognised and valued as a result. It could lead to a change of roles between men and women.

c. The communal kitchens are an extension of domestic tasks from the family to the community. Women's work is organised around communal services.

3.4. Links between communal kitchens and feminist NGOs

Communal kitchens are, for feminist NGOs, a source for research, actions, organisations and policies, but also a source of confrontation with respect to feminist theory, practices and methodology. To analyse Peru's feminist methodology implies an analysis of popular education. In the following part I will refer to the definitions, limits, methodology of popular education and its common aspects and differences with feminist methodology.

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3.4.1. Popular Education

> "Popular education" is a form of critical pedagogy that accompanies a process of self-discovery; when people discover their own capacity to challenge collectively the forces that oppress them, and to transform their own reality, starting from their own interests and constructing their own alternatives (Doris Marshall Institute 1985).

According to the van Leer Foundation, popular education is a process geared towards the transformation of society. Its basic premise lies in the perception of the nature and role of education. It perceives education as not neutral[20] , but rather participatory. It must involve self-reflection and critical thought about the individual and society. When the foundation states that popular education is political and class oriented, it implicitly wants to link analysis with social action.

The methodological principle of popular education related to education is that it considers education as an activity based on a group process of consciousness raising, with the aim of enabling the participants (learners) to understand the realities of the societies in which they are living. For such purposes this methodology involves the following techniques: games, theatre, puppet shows, role plays and, most importantly, participants' own experiences.

Why popular education? Because working with grassroots organisations makes us realise that class as well as gender are equally valid aspects shaping the experiences and identities of working-class women. Popular education focuses its analysis of power relations based mainly on class and ethnics as an effort to validate the knowledge, experiences, language, and culture of working class people. Feminism also focuses its analysis on gender (and class) relations. I think for working with grassroots women's organisations it is helpful to apply a methodology that takes into account elements of the popular education and feminist methodology according to the participants' specific context. As I intend to show they are not opposed but rather can complement each other. CEM has applied both when working with women around self-confidence. In relation to gender, feminist methodology has developed excellent principles, and even games, to question dominant assumptions about women's sexuality and help women get to know their own bodies and sexuality, to explore, love and

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[20] When the Foundation Bernard van Leer claims education is not neutral it means a pedagogy that considers the learning process from the point of view of the oppressed, which is "the point of view - the social reality - of the learners, as opposed to teaching from the point of view of the teachers as representative of authorities [dominant knowledge]" (Newsletter, 1990: no. 57, 1).

have better control of their own bodies. In relation to class and community organisation, I find the games and techniques developed by popular education useful for questioning and analysing authoritarian leadership and group conflicts.

My main critique of popular education is its male bias. It does not acknowledge hierarchies and unequal relations between males and females of the working class; behind the term 'people' are subsumed the specificity of working class women. This has practical consequences, because it does not consider social actions that can challenge and even come to modify asymmetrical gender relations. On the other hand, not all streams of feminism acknowledge in theory and practice the presence of power relations based on hierarchies among women. Due to the efforts of black feminist writing and feminists from the South, diversity and contrasts among women are now being taken more into consideration. Currently there is a tendency in feminist writing to value diversity as positive.

3.4.2. Elements for a comparative analysis between the methodologies of feminism and popular education in Peru

Feminist Methodology
a)   It is gender oriented;
b)   It states power relations are related to asymmetrical gender relations;
c)   It is an attitude and a conception of life;
d)   Consciousness raising is focused on gender relations;
e)   It considers individual and group reflection and the analysis of women's own experiences as part of the process of consciousness raising;
f)   It attempts to validate the knowledge, experiences, emotions and feeling of women in general, not of a specific group of women;
g)   It seeks to enable women to be aware of their situations and status in societies and to act upon their reality.

Popular Education Methodology
a)   It is political and class oriented;
b)   It states power relations focus on class inequalities;
c)   It is a way of doing things;
d)   Consciousness raising centres on class relations;
e)   It seeks groupal, not individual analysis of reality.
      Self reflection of experiences is a crucial element. Collective

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discussion allows finding collective options;

f)   It seeks to validate the knowledge, experiences, language, values and culture of working class people

g)   It enables disadvantaged people to analyse their own life in order to interact better with their environment and to be aware of their position in society.

3.4.3. Feminist methodology

Pedersen points out the methodological principles the feminist methodology and popular education have in common:

> "To create learning spaces, to break with authoritarian education, to have women's problems and experiences be a point of departure, to establish democratic and horizontal relations, to stimulate processes of reflection and awareness and to seek out the active participation of the participants" (Pedersen 1987: 57 in A. Backhaus 1988: 94).

Pedersen adds that in feminist work the commonality between participants and facilitators is the shared condition of margination and subordination, although there may be class and ethnic differences among them.

In programmes for women's training, the differences among women - how class and ethnic articulate with gender - incite on the interaction between participants and facilitators. Pedersen supports analysing the role of individual subjectivity in educational programmes of feminist NGOs:

> When dealing with the role of the capacitator, the following elements cannot be overlooked: the relationship between giving and receiving, power, assistencialism, privileges, the sense of guilt, oral and body language (Pedersen 1988: 233).

For me this means the analysis of one's own assumptions about power in relation to class and ethnics, education, conflicts.

Backhaus (1988) made a significant evaluation of women's promotion projects in Lima, criticising the lack of gender dimensions in projects for women's promotion. She interviewed 337 women from three types of projects: communal kitchens, income generating projects and feminist training. Backhaus states that in the objectives of communal kitchens and income generating projects, what is necessary is to link women's more pressing needs, such as food income, housing, with those that have to do with their condition as women, like self-esteem and social spaces of their own. The problem she identifies is that there is a tendency to look at female roles per se, even on a broader scale, but without really questioning these roles and how they affect women. For

this author, feminist training must always have the perspective of change and seek integral development of its trainees. Pedersen has pointed out some limitations in the feminist methodology of the groups she studied. One is the absence of examining properly and with the due respect the differences among women. The need to be pedagogic and direct leads feminists many times to oversimplifying explanations. There is also the hidden taboo of the subject of racism and ethnic differences, surrounded in secrecy and fear.

Another aspect is the need to provide a space, and to have respect for women's learning processes. This includes time for questioning and self and group analysis, which means not interfering as much as possible in the process of creating knowledge, and always being aware that educators are not neutral and bring with them their own authority and values.

The potentials of feminist methodology as affirmed by Pedersen (1988: 232), lay in its creativity to question authority, to validate women's personal experience and build a bridge among women from different sectors.

Feminists are viewed by participants as committed to a feminist proposal on individual and political levels. Feminists in the first instance are working inspired by their own subordination, and from this should stem their solidarity with grassroots organisations.

Another important aspect that Pedersen concluded was that the feminist groups were doing a permanent self-reflection and self-criticism as part of their process of building up a feminist methodology.

3.5. Conclusions

I would like to mention that women's participation in survival strategies has contributed to confronting the collective conditions of women's subordination and oppression and have led to the formulation of valid opinions on behalf of women themselves regarding their situation.

The methodology of feminist NGOs also has potentials and limitations. Feminist NGOs are in condition to contribute to women's gender awareness, since they have developed methodology for consciousness raising in relation to gender (Grandon 1987: 47). But this happens in theory. In practice feminist methodology has to consider the challenge of including the differences among women, and give enough space and time for the experiences of grassroots women to also be present in the consciousness raising process and the production of knowledge (Pedersen 1988: 101).

The phenomenon of communal kitchens has opened the debate to new sectors of Peruvian society about new and old issues like gender relations, the place of feminism on the political agenda, ethnic relations, the collectivisation of domestic work, the sexual division of labour, etc.

The practices and relations women from feminist NGOs and from grassroots organisation establish among themselves are influenced by international politics and by the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Peru, which is also a political issue.

There is a need to provide major, or at least more financial and material support and training for women in communal kitchens, in order to alleviate the burden of this work and facilitate gender awareness.

Communal kitchens are spaces created by the participants themselves, and they have their own potential and limitations. Grassroots women's organisations allow women to develop their skills and express their ideas and feelings, articulate their demands, take decisions and develop leadership qualities. They also provide an opportunity to question gender roles, norms and values. However, their limited scope and the relatively short time in which they have functioned do not enable the women ascribed to them to deeply transform the prevailing sexual division of labour.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY: A WORKING EXPERIENCE OF A FEMINIST NGO
WITH A GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S ORGANISATION

This chapter has two objectives. The first is to present and analyse the impact of CEM's[21] working experience, as a feminist NGO, with the communal kitchen of the women's group FAC[22], by pointing out empowering and disempowering factors. The second objective is to assess the scope and potential for linking popular education within a feminist perspective, as a working methodology for grassroots organisations, used by CEM. Because through training feminist NGOs establish ties with grassroots organisations, feminist methodology is an important component in the analysis of their mutual relationship. Members of both groups have been asked how they perceive the relationship between FAC and CEM.

4.1. Actors and social setting

There were two types of actors in this experience: members of CEM, who I will call facilitators, and members of the communal kitchen Fanny Abanto Calle, whom I will refer to as participants. They were not homogeneous groups of women. On the contrary, there were big differences between the groups, although similarities as well. I also will describe the characteristics of the place and the economical, political and social situation.

4.1.1. Facilitators

CEM's composition was heterogeneous: there were students from the local university, secondary school teachers and public servants. It had ten members in total, five who were directly involved working with the communal kitchen during the first years. The five of us were students from the local university who attended two faculties, sociology (4) and nursery school studies (1). We were mestizas, middle and low middle-class women, the latter with a working class family background. Our average age was 25; only two members were married and had children. Most of us where from the surrounding region, living in the centre of Chiclayo. Three of us lived in the oldest

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[21] As I mentioned in Chapter One, the "Woman" Study Centre CEM worked in Chiclayo, to the north of Peru, in the Barriada "El Bosque" between the years 1982-1989.

[22] Fanny Abanto Calle is the name of women's group and not of the communal kitchen. In order to avoid confusion I am referring to FAC as the communal kitchen, because CEM is also a women's group.

Barriadas[23] incorporated to the town centre.

4.1.2. Participants

All the participants were working-class women living in the barriada El Bosque[24]. Most of them were migrants of Andean roots from different rural areas in northern Peru. The women were between 25-40 years old, and most had between one and five children. Five from this barriada attended the first meetings. Later on, the group grew to 20 members, and by 1990 the communal kitchen had 50 members. The number of participants varied according to the country's socio-economic situation and to the specific organisational period in the life of the group (i.e. if the socio-economic problems increased, the number of members increased). When the group was organised, two of the women who became leaders were also at that time leaders of their neighbourhood central organisation.

4.1.3. Characteristics of the place

The barriada "El Bosque" is located in the District La Victoria (Chiclayo-Peru). "El Bosque" was created on the 14th of December of 1978, during a period of many invasions taking place in the province of Chiclayo at the end of the Seventies. It was the only place where squatters were allowed to stay after a long struggle. They came from poor rural areas in the north of Peru to the cities near the coast. Now there are approximately 1000 families living there who do not have basic services of electricity and sewerage and who get water from only two fountains (one of them built by the women of FAC). The place can be reached by bus.

4.1.4. Socio-economic and political context

Here I refer to two important factors in Peru between 1982 and 1988, which made an impact on the course of this working experience. One was the increasing economic crisis of the Eighties, and the second the application of two state programmes, PAIT and PAD. Both were discussed in Chapter Three. Here I will limit myself to analysing the impact of both issues on the work between CEM and FAC.

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[23] These barriadas already had all basic services, including schools, transportation and parks.

[24] My first contact with inhabitants of "El Bosque" was in 1978, when they asked support from FEDEPJOL (Departmental Federation of Pueblos Jovenes of Lambayeque). By then I was chairperson of my own barriada "San Martin" and leader of FEDEPJOL. In 1982, as coordinator of CEM, I established institutional working relations with women from "El Bosque".

4.2. CEM: Centro de Estudios "Mujer"

CEM started as an action group of ten people, with some other part-time collaborators. It was founded on the 10th of February, 1980. In the structural organisation of CEM we can distinguish two levels: the General Assembly (all members) and the Board (five members), constituted for five posts as follows: coordinator, sub-coordinator, economic secretary, secretary for minutes and archive, and secretary for press and public relations. The work was done basically in Chiclayo. The CEM office was located in the town centre of Chiclayo (capital of the department of Lambayeque).

We divided ourselves into five working teams. It is important to consider that CEM was a small action group attempting to undertake its internal process through discussion and sharing of testimonies and experiences. We were trying to internally homogenise the members' perception of women's situation, criteria for working with women, establishing priorities and strategies, but we never defined or labelled what we were trying to accomplish. It was a painful and joyful experience. Painful because in the exchange of life experiences (individual, political, sexual, etc.) we encountered many examples of male power over women, and uncovered many instances of previous control and manipulation. This practice is institutionalised throughout almost every "serious" institution of society. It was joyful because we were constructing a space with our own hands and that we could control. We were really fighting for our autonomy.

We perceived ourselves as group independent from political parties, the state or other institutions. Political militancy was accepted if this did not mean using CEM for other purposes than its institutional ones. Most of us had experienced manipulation, male arrogance, and the neglecting of women's problems as fundamental problems of society. We had lots of discussion in order to define our work with women. By then, working for and with women was considered by the leftist political parties as a distraction from other fundamental problems, and as a way of dividing the poor instead of working towards change or revolution.

We wanted to work differently from leftist organisations, not trying to control or manipulate the women but allowing them to think and make their own choices in the process. We did not want to push them into accelerating their own process. We also disagreed with the discourse of the left which used abstract categories to codify daily life. People don't understand about

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categories, people live concrete lives. There is more potential in working from the starting point of people's lives than from abstract categories.

We centred our work and resources around women of the Fanny Abanto Calle, and developed different projects and activities. We also worked together with several groups at departmental and regional levels. In general CEM's working areas were education, organisation and public relations. Some activities were broadcasting a radio programme, holding workshops and developing training projects. We had a division of internal tasks but tried to rotate some responsibilities, ie. representing CEM in meetings, joining training workshops. Also seminar courses in the capital were assumed by different members of CEM.

4.2.1. Objectives of CEM

The main objectives of CEM were:

a)   To promote the discussion of women's problems in a specific context, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally;

b)   To contribute to strengthening women by supporting their organisations and the events these carried out;

c)   To draw projects and plans that could lead to fulfilling our objectives;

d)   To look for dialogue with other institutions and organisations with the aim of promoting the knowledge about our own problems as women, and as a way of exchanging and learning from other experiences.;

e)   To express our standpoint by making declarations about important local, regional, national or international issues about women's interests;

f)   To publish a bulletin (Book of minutes CEM 1981: 4).

4.3. Historical background of the "Fanny Abanto Calle" women's group

When CEM members visited community leaders and some women in "El Bosque" in 1982, there was no women's organisations[25] in operation. The central neighbourhood leading committee was partially active, among them two female leaders. Then our strategy, step by step, was the formation of a women's group, which was founded in 1982.

In the first year participants developed activities focusing on raising funds,

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[25] Although at the time "EL Bosque" was founded there was a women's committee that had supported the actions of the neighbourhood organisation to stay in the place.

getting health services and organisations (first aid, medical attention, the popular medicine cabinet). The women's group FAC had already set down the incorporation and formation of a communal kitchen to their activities one year later. As Juana expressed in her own words:

> It was a Rotary Club group that was working with the parish that located us, they came and told us they needed people who were organised to run a dining room, we didn't know anything about the children's dining rooms, but what we did know for sure was the urgent need our children had of being feed, and we accepted their offer. Juana, participant.

Founding a communal kitchen to care for children was an outside motivation that found echo in the nutritional needs of women in "El Bosque" and their families. The communal kitchen began with twenty members, and now has fifty. Like many independent communal kitchens, in the beginning they used resources belonging to their members, like a room, pots, the kitchen itself, instruments, etc. Later on the church donated a kitchen.

The population of "El Bosque" have built the communal house together, in which the women of this communal kitchen develop their activities. At first the communal kitchen was perceived by participants and facilitators as one more activity, but it soon became the main activity which consumed most of the time and energy of the women's group. CEM helped FAC's communal kitchen to develop other activities like a communal garden, courses about primary health care, nutrition, training for leadership, skills about communication and radio programmes, workshops on body awareness, sexuality, self-esteem, etc. As it happens in the FAC communal kitchen, many women who joined literacy and leadership training programmes are now leaders of the group and of the community.

With the formation of this women's group, its members created a space for women's participation. The process of running their own organisation and learning collective practices, can be seen as a potential for women's empowerment.

4.4. Interaction of feminist NGO with the grassroots women's organisation
4.4.1. Objectives of CEM for Fanny Abanto Calle
General objectives:

a) To support the efforts and initiatives that women from "El Bosque" made in order to get organised and take action in their community;

b) To raise consciousness among women in this group about their personal

situation, within a broader socio-political context;

c)   To support and link the survival strategies of women from this area with their own organisational process.

d)   To validate the knowledge, experiences and culture of women from popular sectors.

Specific objectives[26]:

a)   To develop activities enabling women to develop self-confidence;

b)   To provide channels through which women can exercise and develop analysis and decision making skills.   Self reflection of women's experiences here is a key element;

c)   To provide a space where women could express and formulate their ideas, feelings and needs;

d)   To motivate women positively to assume active membership and leadership within the group and amongst the community.

Around organisation, survival and feminist topics, activities were developed for and with women in FAC, mainly covering the following themes: health, sexuality, family planning, self-worth, leadership, small income generation, gender and political consciousness, women's rights and women's roles in Peruvian history.

These working themes were developed through workshops, lectures, informal talks, group discussions and community activities.   Our methodological strategy involved methods and techniques of popular education within a feminist perspective. Themes were implemented with the help of group dynamics, games, theatre, informal visits and talks.

There are three phases of the existence of CEM.   In the first phase there were between ten to fifteen members who held several meetings and organised several activities in the town centre.   Consciousness raising through internal discussion and exchange of life experiences characterised this beginning. During the second phase the most important aspect of CEM's work was moving to the barriadas.   The third phase was to strengthen CEM's support for the FAC communal kitchen (this MA thesis is about the second and third phases).

The priority of CEM was to build up women's groups as a way of contributing to strengthening the women's movement.   We were inspired by the existence of

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[26] While working we could make our objectives more specific as we were influenced by feminism and popular education, in what they referred to women's self-empowerment.

other movements (labour, settlements). We were aware of the difficulties women encountered in reaching the town centre. We didn't stop working in the town with i.e. our radio programme, but it was not a priority. For us it was a growing and learning experience to move to the barriada. By this time within our idea of constructing the women's movement was that we wanted to see women speaking about themselves, speaking at meetings, organising and convincing others and breaking with their silence.

In the beginning the field work with the FAC communal kitchen was done directly by five CEM members; gradually two took it over. The training was done by the other three, and they shared work over health issues, consciousness raising, education and child care. Child care and the selection and preparation of the games were rotated for the first meetings. Training was discussed by the whole group during CEM's weekly meeting, in which advances and obstacles were also evaluated. These meetings were in two parts; one referred to CEM's work (administrative matters and collective discussion of a theme) and the second part was an evaluation about FAC and what the next working step would be.

In general we perceived that our personal, organisational and political experiences had marked us. This led us to make contact with women at grassroots levels, searching for alternative ways of constructing a women's movement, searching for change. My early experience contributing to the centralisation[27] of the settlers's movement was a personal stimulus. As a group we felt that we had a role to play in the process of building the women's movement by supporting grassroots organisations in their empowerment. With the emergence and strengthening of women's groups we could later work towards the centralisation of the women's movement.

4.5. Building an Empowering Methodology
4.5.1. Origins
There are three aspects that can help explain the origins of CEM's methodological principles. First there is the personal background of the members and our posterior experience. We had organisational experience and skills by having worked earlier in students organisations, cultural clubs, Christian community group bases, barriadas providing health campaigns,

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[27] It is the process of organising grassroots settlers' organisation from the local level to a second and third level i.e Federation (provincial, departmental, regional) and Confederation or national coordination.

organising cultural activities or being members and/or leaders of these organisations. Most of the members also had political experience. When CEM started we had already started a process of questioning the methodology and practices of leftist and aid organisations in relation to their work with women in grassroots organisations (i.e. imperialism as a starting-point of the analysis of working class women rather then women's experiences). We needed to understand these two aspects (political and organisational skills) within a context of Latin American societies with deep inequalities. Social practices in this situation acquired political connotations.

Secondly there was the influence of popular education. CEM members from the beginning of the Eighties got training in the principles, methods and techniques of popular education which influenced CEM's work with FAC.

A third factor was the influence of feminism. In the Eighties two of the biggest feminist groups were set up in the capital of Peru. Feminist literature and practices had growing impact on Peruvian society. They influenced CEM clearly to acquire feminist literature, discuss it and relate it to the experiences of its members, and motivated CEM to attend feminist workshops and events.

4.5.2 The methodological principles of CEM's work

Within the methodological principles of CEM we can recognise the common elements of feminist methodology and popular education mentioned in Chapter Three.

a) To build up a women's space. This means a physical space were women can find support, solidarity and courage. We believe that there is a legitimate need for working-class women to become organised in order to break with their isolation and their silence.

b) The knowledge of women, their experiences, emotions, need to be considered in the process of organisation and consciousness raising of working class women. Self reflection based on own experiences is a central element.

c) Autonomy in our work, autonomy from political, state and religious organisations. This does not mean that we were not open to dialogue and that we didn't coordinate specific activities with other organisations. Our autonomy was ideological. We wanted to have organisational independence, to take decisions on our own and allow others to make their own choices. We wanted to prevent external interferences and manipulation. In other words, we were against co-optation.

d)   To promote the self confidence of women (participants and facilitators) by facilitating questioning of the negative value about themselves that most women have internalised from society. We worked from the conviction that women had to learn to value their own ideas, emotions, feelings and experiences, that they have the right to have their own space. We considered self-esteem as a basic element to reconstruct women's subjectivity in a positive way. We have to consider here Peruvian society which is not only patriarchal but also sexist, racist and classist.

e)   To motivate women's active participation in their groups and communities.

4.5.3.   Practice as a learning process

In the first meetings with the women of FAC we met with silent women who just nodded their heads when they agreed or disagreed with what said. Only two or three of them were able to express their ideas clearly. Therefore the first thing we figured out was that women need to speak out. They need as a precondition self-confidence, and to feel that we respected them, their ideas, space and their own rhythm. They needed to feel that their opinions and thoughts were important.

Another aspect of our work was consciousness raising of women, placing women as subjects, as points of departure relating to others and analising their own realities. From this analysis we tried to let them perceive the link of their own situation with the community's own situation, analysing community problems and placing them within the wider context of Peruvian society. From here they were encouraged to find alternatives. To facilitate the analysis of their own problems and the decision making process is what we perceived as autonomy.

Self-confidence, the ability to speak out, autonomy, and consciousness raising are not isolated issues. On the contrary, they are closely interrelated and overlapping. Sometimes we have worked them out simultaneously, other times consecutively, but basically we started always by dealing with self-esteem. Those are elements of empowerment as a learning process.

4.5.4.   Analysis of the experience

I am considering the four basic elements mentioned above for the analysis of the experience focusing in the methodology. To stimulate the participants' self-confidence we used games at the beginning, and paid close attention to

their attitudes and their words. Through games they introduced themselves and spoke of their motivation and expectations in joining the group. Thus we figured out what the participants wanted to share and how we could support them in their needs and expectations.

At first we asked them not to introduce themselves but the woman sitting next to them (name, address, number of children, etc.). The following time we asked them to do the same but now listening more carefully, presenting her with respect and enthusiasm and adding more information (what she likes: food, hobbies, values, etc.). The participants felt freer talking about other people: introducing a neighbour was less uncomfortable than presenting themselves to the whole group. For the introduction game women did not have to stand at first, or go to the middle of the room. I have to say that going to the middle of a room to talk to the rest was not an easy task for women, but they could find confidence, respect, and warmth in a friendly atmosphere, and eventually they were able to do so. We publicly congratulated the women on their efforts and progress. Another technique used was sitting in a circle, which also included CEM members. We didn't have special places. It was very important for us to let the energy of women flow in this way, to look to our faces and bodies, to feel connected. We knew hierarchies could block instead of facilitate women's participation.

Games were played at every subsequent meeting. Facilitators also took part in them. This was important because games reduced the tension between participants and facilitators, and also among participants themselves. Another way of reducing the distance between the women was using games with physical contact. Games were implemented gradually in order to motivate participants to develop their abilities (i.e. speak out). We encouraged women to voice their ideas and disagreements, and when there were questions we listened carefully. This was an exercise in which they could identify with each other. We facilitated women to speak out with self-confidence, because we saw that in grassroots organisations as well as in formal organisations, to speak is to have power. Another reason is that Peruvian society is mainly an oral society.

Regularly, but not systematically, we were evaluating the participants' progress by means of how the image they projected, their posture, physical and emotional attitudes, articulation, confidence, embarrassment, etc. For consciousness raising we considered the participants point of view. This means

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that the analysis of their situation starts with their own life. Not from categories such as the left has traditionally "made conscious", speaking about imperialism, capitalism, abstract categories rather than speaking about the work women do in everyday life. With participants we talked about their long working hours, about the violence of their husbands, the importance of being organised and learning. But by changing their lives, individual actions are not enough to change oppressive and hierarchical relations. A community should seek collective alternatives to its problems rather then to seek individual solutions. Therefore we used the methodology of popular education for reflecting on people's own experiences and taking alternatives. We wanted them to apply this and change their own lives and realities, being agents of change rather than passive actors.

By autonomy we mean letting people make their own choices. Considering this criteria women themselves decided the name of the group[28] and the kind of organisation they wanted to form[29].

Out of four aspects - self-confidence, the ability to speak out, autonomy and consciousness raising - we later applied to a project on leadership training and promoted women's active membership.

The Meetings

The women's group constituted by CEM and FAC held a weekly general meeting. The first half hour women played a group game in order to break tensions and facilitate their integration and participation. The following hour of the meeting was used for a lecture on a topic previously chosen by the women themselves. In the last hour we discussed aspects related to the communal kitchen as well task distribution (i.e. shifts for cooking or working in the communal garden). The meetings were planned with the head of the FAC communal kitchen, who also had a weekly meeting to prepare the weekly assembly. Before the meeting they would prepare it in order to be able to lead the meeting by themselves.

Contradictions and disagreements also occurred during the meetings. It was very important for all of them to talk or say something, to agree or disagree.

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[28] Women themselves proposed, discussed and decided the name of the group. The suggestions were: Virgen Maria, Micaela Bastidas and Fanny Abanto, who was a leader of a local Christian Community and the local trade union of teachers [SUTEP]. She supported many squatter activities.

[29] The different forms of women's organizations, its objectives and limitations, were explained such as mother's club, ladies' committee, Health's committee, women's association, women's group.

Speaking out was not only for the purpose of empowerment, it was also a healthy way of running an organisation. Keeping problems and disagreements to one self accumulates anger and generates problems. It blocks individual and groupal communication, which can lead to conflicts and problems. So group conflicts and how to deal with them are a very important aspect of group and leadership training.

4.6 Limitations and problems of CEM

Lack of funds was one of the obstacles CEM had to face in order to carry on with its activities. It was run with very little resources, mostly coming from its own members and from fund raising activities[30]. This shortage of funds had several implications for CEM. Its members had to pay their own travel costs, which resulted in only two facilitators having been able to continue working with FAC during the last years. Other facilitators assumed management and public relations functions, thus responsibilities were split and not rotated. As an alternative to the lack of financial resources CEM developed a network among professional friends[31] with it CEM members were able to carry on with their work achieving their plans and objectives. In that way the sources and resources of other institutions were used creatively. In sum, by networking CEM maximised available local resources.

CEM members did not draw up productive projects for three reasons: lack of financial support, lack of skills for this type of activity, and awareness of resistance to the conditions many co-financing agencies impose in order to support projects. This has two sides: first we were not able to offer an economic alternative to women from FAC to improve their situation. Second we could work with autonomy guided by our own objectives and tried to respect the women's own pace. This is much more difficult in projects that have time limits measure results quantitatively (how many women benefit) rather than qualitatively (how far it contributes to women's empowerment).

The lack of funds and its bias towards activism influenced CEM's lack of systematisation of its working experience. The need to establish mechanisms were both participants and facilitators could evaluate and follow up training activities was also deeply felt.

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[30] Activities such as raffles, solidarity bonds, making handicrafts and selling them at national and international events.

[31] This network was made up of people working at the local university, the municipality or ministries. Also doctors and lawyers provided support in materials, i.e. papers, printing, posters, loud speakers, rooms for seminars, and professional assistance, and contact with the mass media to divulge CEM's ideas and activities (a weekly radio programme of 10').

4.7. Impact

Women of the FAC communal kitchen were asked in December 1990 to view themselves retrospectively as of eight years back, and compare this with how they viewed themselves at the time of the interviews. All of them mentioned that in one way or the other their previous self-image was as silent, shy, isolated women who had little or no self-confidence. This, they reported, has changed. Changes which have involved questioning the women's imposed identities also meant beginning to question dominant norms and values.

> I was shy and did not speak. I learned a lot during these meetings. There at last I realised that I was a woman, because before I had considered myself an instrument; now I know I am very important to myself, to society and to my children. I know how to defend myself wherever I am, because thanks to the women's group Fanny Abanto Calle I know I count. Susana, participant

It is important to note that she is linking specifically the changes and validation of herself to her participation in the FAC communal kitchen, which indicates that in most cases independent communal kitchen are an empowering experience for their participants.

In the process of working with the communal kitchen FAC, CEM was defining a methodology which adapted the methodology of popular education from a feminist perspective. CEM members felt that this was an open and dynamic learning process, not lineal. This methodology allows us to identify the needs of women related to the work of CEM and to strengthen parts that needed to be developed, for example leadership training, alternative menus with local products. The main aspects of the methodology are mentioned by Rita:

> Now, for example, we want to make a working plan, and we looked up the pamphlets, we looked up what they used to tell us in our notebooks, sometimes we realise that we are doing what they told us without even knowing it, because we realise that in our practice we are putting into effect what they taught us in theory. We also contribute a lot, when we had our workshops we also would tell our experiences, we all tried to find alternatives, solutions from all we pooled together, they would guide us, they taught us how to make a good working plan, they taught us how to be good leaders, how one had to be in order to be a good leader, how a meeting had to be conducted, they have taught us almost everything we know, what our group knows. Rita, participant

The impact of the potential of FAC for women's empowerment and the empowering elements of CEM's methodology could only be seen after years of work. One of these results of this joint effort is that the women's group FAC became a space in which participants felt solidarity, support, friendship and fun and learned about women's rights. Many of them learned leadership and decision

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taking skills.

Another result of the experience is that some women from FAC are now participating in communal and regional events: four women belong to the direction of the "El Bosque" community. They are also members or leaders of mixed organisations fighting for basic services. We find them representing their community at the departmental assembly of popular organisations, and in the assembly of the departmental Federation of barriadas and urbanisation. Some of the women are leaders in the departmental federation of communal kitchens. Another six are working to organise other women's groups and as a partially paid job they take part in training workshops at the departmental level and promote family and communal gardens. One has joined national and international events (training workshops on popular education and home gardens, the III Feminist Encounter of L.A and The Caribbean in Brazil in 1985, and a Woman's Exchange Programme in USA in 1989).

When participants were asked by the researcher in December 1990 what they had gained in the women's group FAC, they mentioned many things like awareness of their situation as women, knowledge of the fact that their problems are not individual only, learning reading and writing skills and becoming leaders due to the literacy and training programmes. Other women said that for them, to speak in public, is one of the most valued skills. They also mentioned the fact that they found more friends and had a lot of fun with the games played before their meetings.

Most of the women declared in the interviews their need of productive projects and a child care centre in order to get an income and be able to perform their work at FAC better, and to have less dependency on external support such as food aid. This means the women's need for income has to be met. Working around consciousness raising activities is not enough, and what is more, it limits of participants to further their empowerment.

The women group's FAC has continued to function without the advice or support of CEM since the end of 1989. This shows the strength this group has acquired as it develops.

The women also spoke of other achievements, like sharing experiences, getting new friends, building the communal house (a room) where the group is presently functioning, the water fountain, that the whole community benefits from, and the family/communal garden. They have also established a cooperative system to sell some food products.

Domestic violence, lack of resources and outside interference were the

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problems women mentioned most often. These I consider to be limitations for the participants' empowerment. Women also pointed out the need to strengthen the organisation in order to achieve their plans, i.e. by working out income generating activities like having a bakery, a small industry and building a child care centre to lighten their household chores somewhat.

The women's group is the most active organisation in the barriada. Their work is valued in the community, although they did have to face some opposition in earlier from husbands and male neighbours. In general we can conclude that the women of FAC went much beyond cooking activities. When they became organised, they got strength. However, this is not automatically the case with all women's groups. Within their own limitations, general aspects of CEM's way of working contributed to the growth, strengthening, and somehow the empowerment of FAC participants.
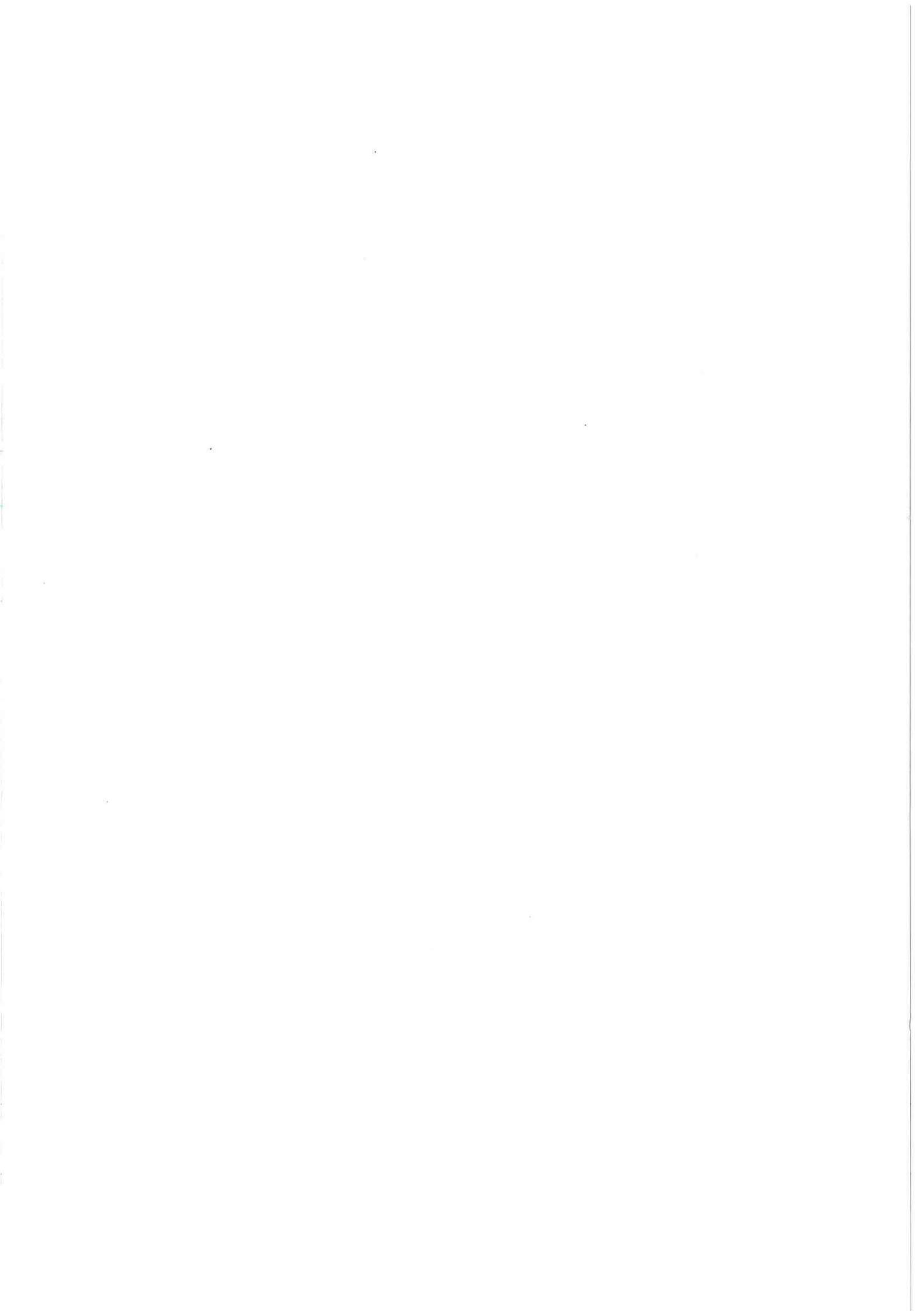
CHAPTER FIVE

ASSESSING SCOPE FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter is to assess the scope of the potential and limits for feminist NGOs by working for the empowerment of women from grassroots organisations, which is based on CEM experience with FAC, and other related experiences drawn from the literature. For this purpose I am applying the empowerment definition presented in Chapter Two; I consider women's empowerment all individual and collective actions aimed toward women's strengthening in order to become active agents of social change, taking in consideration five dimensions (subjective, physical, economical, political and cultural) and the socio-economic and cultural context.

In the present evaluation I am referring to independent communal kitchens because within their limits they have potential for women's empowerment (see Chapter Three). Finally I present, in the last section of this chapter some concluding remarks of this study.

5.1. Scopes, Potencial and Limits for Women's Empowerment.

5.1.1. Subjective dimension

To consider women's subjectivity means to take into account emotions, ideas and images which women have of themselves. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, women face power relations that arise from gender, class and ethnic, which have impact on their identity by imposing norms and values internalised by women but benefitting of men and the dominant system of society.

Different authors have referred to (independent) communal kitchens as a space were women get self-confidence and recover their voices (Grandon 1987; Backhaus 1988; Pedersen 1988; Montes 1989).

During the process of becoming organised, women of communal kitchens open a space in which they recognise their collective subordination and begin to question their imposed identities. This only can take place if there is attention for the gender issue in the training programme for women of the communal kitchen. I see this as a continuing process that should enable women to reconstruct their identities and lead to perceive themselves differently. I believe women, by reinforcing their self-image, are recovering part of their history. Even more they are reappropriating the elements of their new identities. Women's recognition of abilities, self-confidence and self-worth

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are part of this process. CEM has played an important role in this dimension,
as two women of the FAC clearly expressed changes in self-perceptions:

> Many women recognised that they are persons who have the right to
> be treated as persons, as women with dignity, who are important
> and intelligent, and as any other person able to fight and make
> progress. Ines, participant.

> In the group we really learned many positive things about
> ourselves. To know how to value yourself and to know you are a
> woman and that you have your rights. Socially it made me grow.
> Before, I was shy and not able to speak to anyone, I was a
> serious and angry person. Now I speak to everybody, without fear,
> I am always trying to read in order to learn other things, even
> about sexual life. Rita, participant.

Pedersen mentioned in her study about the methodology of the two major
feminist groups in Lima, that when women from feminist NGOs interact with
women from grassroots organisations their interaction has rational as well
subjective factors (Pederson 1988: 47). In a workshop for feminist training
when participants and facilitators interact, their relationships are not only
shaped by the socio-economic and cultural context and the specific life
experiences of each of them, that stem from gender, class and ethnic power
relations, but also subjective factors such as beliefs, values, feelings,
fears, frustrations, dreams and hopes grounded on the context and the power
relations mentioned.

From the experience of communal kitchens women's subjectivity-spirituality is
an important dimension to be considered in feminist training programmes, for
questioning women's imposed identities as well as facilitating relationships
between feminists and women from grassroots organisations.

5.1.2. Physical dimension

Gender awareness is a crucial issue to enable women to have control of their
own body and sexuality. Therefore the questioning of gender relations is a
central issue for women's empowerment. In the case of communal kitchens there
is little attention given in their activities to gender awareness issues
(Huaman 1989). Women from communal kitchens acknowledge their subordinated
situation and want to change it, but this does not mean that we can speak of
gender awareness and changes in the sexual division of labour (Grandon 1987).

In CEM's training programmes sexual division of labour was not worked out
systematically. They organised workshops about women's rights, women's work
and domestic violence and sexuality, but women's conflicts within their

families didn't have enough space to be used as a source of education and confrontation of the contents of the workshops with their reality. Pedersen also pointed out the need of providing enough space for participants experience and pace in the process of consciousness raising.

The ability to express their ideas and emotions is one of the most valued skills women mention (Backhaus 1988; Grandon 1987), also mentioned by women from FAC:

> Yes, it helped me to speak and to have some more facility to speak, because I had never had the opportunity to speak in this way in front of groups or meetings. Now I feel freer because I am able to speak at meetings. Asking permission to speak is important. Before, only men talked, but now everything is changing as far as fighting for our rights is concerned. Miriam, participant.

Throughout CEM's workshops attention was paid to women's ability to speak out as an important skill and tool, when they bargain with their husbands about their mobility outside the household. Women are not only learning to express their needs and interests and to defend their rights as women, within their families, but also in their social life. The fact that Peruvian society has a prominent oral culture makes the process of recovering women's voices as an important issue for leadership training.

Backhaus (1988) stated that women from grassroots organisation which have feminist training, mentioned that they got knowledge related to topics[32] like domestic violence, sexuality, women's work, sexual division of labour, child education, etc. Rita from the FAC communal kitchen mentioned the following:

> In this group I have learned that both women and men have rights as far as sex is concerned. Before women always had to be ready whenever their husband wanted. Now we always have the right to decide about our bodies. Rita, participant.

In the case of FAC some women changed their perceptions about supposed male superiority and recognised not only the inequalities of gender relations, but also believed that women must be equal in relation to men.

> We are not different. We have the same rights as men. What men feel, we feel too and what men desire, we desire as well. Susana, participant.

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[32] Such topics are neglected in official politics, and by organisations working in a traditional way with women and grassroots organisations. Due to the work of feminists these themes have been placed on the political agenda as motivation for struggle.

> Not all the rights which we women have are respected, also not within our families... We have to make clear that we want to be respected in order to be an example for our daughters. We have to be respected by them and by our husbands, within the family and in our work, through which we grow. Ines, participant.

Grandon's study also pointed out that some women expressed they would like to change their situation. But this is still at the level of subjectivity, i.e change in the meaning of the sexual division of labour, without altering gender relations.

Strategies for women's empowerment arise from the specific context, in which domestic violence is part of the structural violence of Peruvian society. The projects of the feminist groups in Lima provide legal assistance for women who are beaten, raped, etc. (Ruiz 1987: 95). Strategies such as policies proposals, public discussions about violence as a political issue and as a violation of women's rights is necessary to prevent and stop violence against women are important aspects in this dimension. Women's grassroots organisations are spaces where women can find support and solidarity.

> I took him to court for these things (referring to her husband's violence) and felt alone, but after having been in the group I felt supported by so many women. I did not feel afraid at all. Now I am not afraid any more and whenever he wants to harass me again I take him again to court. Juana, participant.

In relation to domestic violence, one of the women from the FAC communal kitchen specified the opposition of husbands to the women's group trough different mechanisms i.e. controlling women's mobility, physical and psychological violence, lack of cooperation in household tasks. Some of the women mentioned that their husbands found their weekly meetings too long. This was a cause of conflicts in their households. The women were criticised for abandoning their duties as mothers and partners. Women have built up individual and collective strategies to face their husbands' opposition:[33]

> Our husbands are machista, they always oppose the idea that as women we can surpass ourselves in different aspects, let's say if we want to go somewhere to improve ourselves, to learn even how to treat one another better, then they are always trying to stop us by means of machismo. They don't want us to surpass ourselves, because they think if we contradict them, what they want to impose on us, they will lose their rights over us. As women we

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[33] One way was pointing out the benefits of joining a communal kitchen for all the household members, which has been criticised by Backhaus, because women justify joining the communal kitchen as part of their duties as mothers (1988: 46). Another way was forming committees. They held talks for example about their rights to participate in the communal kitchen. Most of the time women have reallocated their chores among their children, especially daughters, and this affects girls' health and their participation in school (Pederson 1988: 43).

have the duty and the right to overcome that. Nina, participant.

5.1.3. Economical dimension

Women's empowerment at an economic level means better living and working
conditions as well as women's access and control of productive resources and
the benefits from it which will improve their situation. The provision of
services like water, electricity, creches, etc. aims to the alleviation of
women's work (sexual division of labour) and improving women's socio-economic
conditions.

Poverty is the specific social condition which women from communal kitchens
share. Their living and working conditions take place within specific class
and gender relations. The emergence of communal kitchens looks for a solution
to these conditions.

Women in communal kitchens lack basic services and have little material
support, which makes their daily work hard. A consequence is that women have
to invest many hours a day for meal production, which implies health problems.

Women of the FAC communal kitchen identified the lack of material and
financial resources as one the major problems, especially the lack of
government support. One women labelled government support as outside
interference.

> We never had any help from a government organization, as the
> government only helps those groups that automatically lose their
> autonomy and depend on the decisions taken by the government.
> That is why we have always been working with our own funds. Rita,
> participant.

By reviewing the experience of women from communal kitchens in general and
from the experience of the FAC communal kitchen, women are always searching
ways to get an income. They try to maintain a minimum level of family
consumption by joining two or more survival strategies (communal kitchens or
community work in exchange for food). Women are demanding productive projects,
like a woman from the FAC communal kitchen was saying:

> Well, let them listen to us and help us make a workshop [small
> enterprise], to work for ourselves so that we don't have to be
> here and there and can run our own workshop. Miriam, participant.

It is relevant to mention that the national organisation of communal kitchens
has demanded funds from the government for the women working in the communal
kitchens.

There is an urgent need to address the above problem in order to free women
from exhaustive, time-consuming work. Women's time and energy wasted in long,

hard working shifts might be oriented towards activities and actions geared to self-empowerment and organisation. For women's autonomy it is important that they have income. This does not mean that improving the equipment (and income) of communal kitchens will improve automatically women's status or empowerment.

Feminist organisations are in the capacity to channel international aid to implement or equip communal kitchens at the national level, and to negotiate and make social pressure in coordination with women from communal kitchens. Feminist NGOs need to consider women's rights to an income in the formulation of women's projects which question women's unpaid work and get recognition of women's work in the family, community and society. This demand, oriented and debated by the main actors (participants and facilitators) will strengthen the women's movement in Peru.

CEM could not provide an alternative to the need of income for the women of the FAC communal kitchen. The main reason was that members of CEM were mostly professionals and students of social science and health. We didn't had members with economic or technical skills. Beside this, CEM worked mainly on consciousness raising. We didn't consider productive activities for women.

5.1.4. Political dimension

Women and their organisations develop democratic, solidarity and collective practices; they develop decision taking, organisational and leadership skills.

Women in the FAC communal kitchen were asked what they gained/learned in the group. What some women most value is the stimulus to become a leader:

> We raised our hands at an Assembly and when we were allowed to speak, we received applause because we knew what we were talking about. We felt very good about it, we felt appreciated. The people in El Bosque are seeing us with other eyes now because they can see that we are aware of what we are able to do, what we women can do. Juana, participant.

Other women valued the organisational skills they got through their experience in the women's group. Many of them pointed out that it strengthened not only their own group but also the community organisation. Some learned how to lead and a few of them went beyond the community organisation. The new female leaders questioned practices and concepts of male leaders (they questioned for example the time that meetings were held at, and the representation of the community by male leaders).

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We can see that the recognition of development of their abilities as leaders and as organizers are important achievements as perceived by women:

> In our group we have six home garden promotors. Most of us participate in the assemblies, in the groups that are formed (for example the pro-water committee) It is women from our group who have been chosen as delegates for different square blocks at any event. Rita, participant.

To build up an organisation for and with women is the first stage in women's struggle. Women's organisations are an important space for women to get strength from and become empowered, but women need to go beyond their own organisation. For CEM members it was important that women have a leading and decision-making status in the community, but in most of communal kitchens only a minority of women are involved in leading positions. It is, however, only the beginning.

I consider that leadership training needs to take into account group conflicts because in the process of building women's organisations we need to deal with power relations. In the case of the FAC communal kitchen, conflicts and lack of cooperation inside the group were the organisational problems women most mentioned:

> I think the organisation should be improved because as far as relations among other women in the group are concerned, there is always egoism. Nina, participant.

> When one is leader, one is the victim of all criticism. Adriana, participant.

Sometimes group conflicts emerge from the context outside the women's organisations, i.e., the presence of political parties who try to control the women's organisation, or feminist NGOs who provide training to grassroots women organisations and select themselves the women who can follow more training. Both examples affect women's autonomy and generate internal conflicts. Therefore Pedersen has argued considering training on group conflict as a necessary element in feminist training (1988: 224).

In Chapter Three I have mentioned the importance for women to participate in mixed institutions, to break the tendency to be isolated as organisations. This tendency is present in some communal kitchens, although women from communal kitchens have faced power relations and struggle for their autonomy against political, social and governmental institutions. Others have faced male power from community mixed organisations who resisted recognising

communal kitchens as part of the organisational structure of the community (Villavicencio 1988: 270). The effort of grassroots women's groups to be organised at a second and third level (Federation and National coordination) needs to be supported by feminist organisations. This will increase social pressure, and strengthen Peru's women's movement. This is a challenge for the Peruvian feminist movement. Women from the FAC communal kitchen said it is important to establish links with other groups mentioning different advantages: centralisation, acquisition of knowledge and training:

> We will learn many other things from other groups because one group alone cannot do anything. When you meet with other groups or institutions you can really achieve something. Maria, participant.

5.1.5. Cultural dimension

In Chapter Two I mentioned the existence of a dominant mestizo culture in Peru. There are assumptions that whatever differs from occidental cultural values is inferior. The elaboration of strategies for women's empowerment in Latin American countries needs to consider culture from a historical perspective. This means dealing with politics, economics and power relations. It involves the link between colonisation and the current cultural practices.

In Peruvian society divisions between men and women exist, and there are divisions among women themselves, due to ethnic and class relations. These divisions hinder building relations among different classes and ethnic groups, but also make it difficult to divulge feminist training that can influence communication and contacts among participants and facilitators (Pedersen 1988: 233). Class and ethnic divisions are present and need to be worked out by looking to the differences. Cultural differences exist also among each of them. Those differences come from language, region, ethnic group, age and education. An example of language and education differences between participants and facilitators was mentioned by a woman in FAC:

> I didn't understand them (CEM). They spoke differently, and for example, thanks to Rita (group leader), I have had guidance, and I know I am worth a lot and she taught me the rights a woman has. Susana, participant.

Members of CEM, with their exposure to popular education, training became aware of differences between the participants and themselves. It was difficult not only to deconstruct the language of CEM members, but also to be open to the use of symbols and to the meaning women from this communal kitchen gave to their lives, bodies, feelings and experiences.

The incorporation of language expressions from grassroots women organisations are important to include in feminist training, those expressions could facilitate participants questioning of power relations, privileges, etc.

5.1.6. Methodology

I have mentioned the five dimensions of women's empowerment. To work these out there are two important aspects to be considered. The first is the specific socio-economic and cultural context in which feminist organisations are working. The second is a pedagogy which needs to be translated into a methodology used by feminist organisations. In relation to the second aspect, feminist organisations in Peru have placed issues like gender relations and sexuality into the political agenda. Experiences from everyday life are valued, the recovering of women voices, horizontal working ties.

This part evaluate the methodology used by CEM which has common methodological principles of feminism and popular education. The following part presents the conceptualisation by women of FAC about the relationship with CEM and its methodology.

In general the women felt they had a good relationship with CEM, mentioning trust, confidence and friendship. Most of the women stressed an individual relation with one or some CEM members rather than the group or institutional one. Many women also perceived the relationship with the group, which provided them support, orientation and better understanding of their problems.

In relation to the methodology, women highlighted its **participatory character** and the teaching-learning process involved. Some examples are:

> It is a great joy because both teacher-learner and we overcame many things. They told us they have learned a lot from us, and I can say that I learned a lot from them. Nina, participant.

Enabling women to develop their abilities was another aspect women indicated:

> They didn't force us but always told us: do it, I know you can do it! I am aware that what we did was not much but they always stimulated us by saying 'you are doing very well, you see you can do it'. In this way many of us women learned to work. Juana, participant.

In the next quotation Juana illustrates the purpose of **collective analysis for collective actions** and its mutual interaction. She denotes the participatory way of working out their own alternatives, as well as the role of their life

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experiences in analysing their problems.

> They were themes coming from our own lives. For example, the
> workshop on rubbish-collection: why do we have rubbish? What do
> we do with it? Why does rubbish not accumulate in Santa Victoria
> a [middle class] urbanisation close to ours. It is important to
> see where these things begin and not only analyse the hows and
> the whys but also to find solutions, to find alternatives and
> always to participate together in the progress of our people.
> Juana, participant.

The ability to make their own decisions, to work for their own benefits, to
find their own alternatives with autonomy, is expressed by Ines:

> I think the work was positive, as they let us act the way we
> thought was best, and we were not obliged to do anything. Ines,
> participant.

They added that games and dynamics facilitated the learning process with joy
and fun.

> Almost all the women who attended the workshops were happy with
> the way we worked, and learned from the games, which were even
> full of laughter, and I do think it was very good. Rita,
> participant.

They also mentioned other achievements, like sharing experiences, getting new
friends, and building the communal house where the group now functions, the
water fountain that whole the community benefits from, the family/communal
garden. They have also established a cooperative system for selling some food
products.

Finally to conclude, the assessment of scope, potentials and limits for
women's empowerment by the five criteria or dimensions presented en chapter
two has been and useful guide line to me to understand conditions and limits
to be consider in the assessment of the process of women's empowerment.

I believe that the formulation of emancipatory strategies for women in
grassroots organisations should take into account the methodological
experiences of both feminism and popular education. Even more, spaces are
needed for women from feminist organisations and women from popular education
to meet and exchange experiences. This would not only open the possibility
of mutual learning but would also maximise their methodological practices.

5.2. Some Concluding Remarks

5.2.1. Theoretical limitations

The conclusions I am presenting do not embody the truth. They represent, rather, the analysis of a given moment in reality, from a specific perspective. This means taking other vantage points and considering other moments in history, the these conclusions might be different. The main points I present need to be incorporated and confronted in future work between women from feminist NGOs and grassroots women's organisations, just as there are aspects which should be regarded in future research.

The interlinkages of gender, sexual division of labour, class and ethnics need to be reexamined in order to understand the specificities of gender subordination among different sectors of women. A clear understanding of the complexity of the subordination of women from different sectors will provide insight into the formulation of emancipatory strategies for women.

During the progress of this MA thesis, the need for a global analysis that presents a structural critique of development strategies for women clearly arose. Long term alternatives are needed instead of short range ones.

Taking into consideration the above, and the theoretical limitations of my own academic background for evaluating the process of women's empowerment from an emancipatory perspective, one of the contributions of this thesis is the evaluation of the potential of empowerment of women as a process, and as goals from a global and emancipatory perspective. This perspective integrates important dimensions (subjective, physical, economical, political and cultural), which are closely interconnected in the lives of women and society. It is theoretically difficult to establish frontiers, since they are integrated into reality. For example, subjectivity with what is physical, social, economic or cultural is also political.

5.2.2. Factors, scope, limitations and potentials of working with grassroots women's organisations

The relations between women from feminist NGOs and women in grassroots organisations, as well as their process of empowerment, are not an isolated process. They take place within a particular socio-economic and cultural context which is also political, a context which needs to be considered when formulating strategies for women's empowerment.

Communal kitchens as a space belonging to women open the opportunity to question the roles of gender, beliefs and norms, but without getting to change fundamentally the existing sexual division of labour. For this to happen not only must the five dimensions of women's empowerment be taken into account, but also an adequate methodology must be found that incorporates not only the common aspects of gender subordination among women, but also the oppressive aspects that establish differences among women, such as class and ethnic, and that continue to reinforce their subordination and oppression.

Women's empowerment is a necessary condition in the struggle to put an end to the subordination and oppression of women. It is also a key factor in the transformation of society as a whole.

From a theoretical perspective, feminist methodology is in capacity to contribute to the consciousness raising of women, but in practice, the differences between participants and facilitators, based on class, ethnic and age, made mutual communication and the relationship difficult at times. To include these differences among women when formulating any kind of project means confrontating with privileges, fears and deep-rooted practices.

The systematisation of CEM's working experience with FAC has provided me with insights which allow me to understand more clearly the scope and limitations of CEM's work as well as its own potentials for women's empowerment. Lack of resources has affected the activities developed for and with the FAC women's group. CEM's inability to incorporate productive projects in the work with FAC women limited the possibility of their self-empowerment. Another limitation was the inability to follow up the work being done due to lack of time, lack of resources and our own activism.

The methodology CEM used with FAC gives evidence of the usefulness of blending the methodological principles of feminism with those of popular education in working with women from grassroots organisations. The changes in women's self-images and in their self-confidence, the facilitating of women's unfolding of their skills at speaking in public, taking decisions and becoming leaders, represent the main achievements of CEM's work.

Communal kitchens as grassroots organisations constitute the creation of spaces of their own for women, spaces that provide them with potentials and limitations. Women's grassroots organisations are valid spaces for the

development of women's skills, such as learning to express their ideas and emotions, expressing in public their needs and demands, taking decisions, and becoming leaders. These spaces facilitate women's participation and their learning of collective, democratic and solidaire practices, from the starting point of daily life, which can be applied to Peru's public and political scenario. All this forms part of the process of empowerment of women, a process in which the experiences and working methodologies of feminist NGOs have contributed to strengthening grassroots women and their organisations, therefore contributing to their potential of empowerment.

To conclude I would like to present the reflections of a participant in FAC's communal kitchen, which gives testimony of the validity of the common, shared struggle between women in grassroots organisations and women from feminist ones:

> I am sure that only through organised struggle between women can we free ourselves of the oppression and injustice we live under, which is caused by both the government and men. We also have within us conservative ideas. It is important to know that we must always try to hold on to our way of thinking, wherever we may go. They may tell us we are crazy, rebels, communists, fools. I believe we should go forward and not let ourselves be influenced by these things. We should know that in this world there are many women's groups and many other women who identify themselves with us and with our way of thinking. We are united by a force called feminism, and I am sure that we will achieve many things because we are very strong and we should do something to achieve even more in the future.

<div align="right">Rita</div>
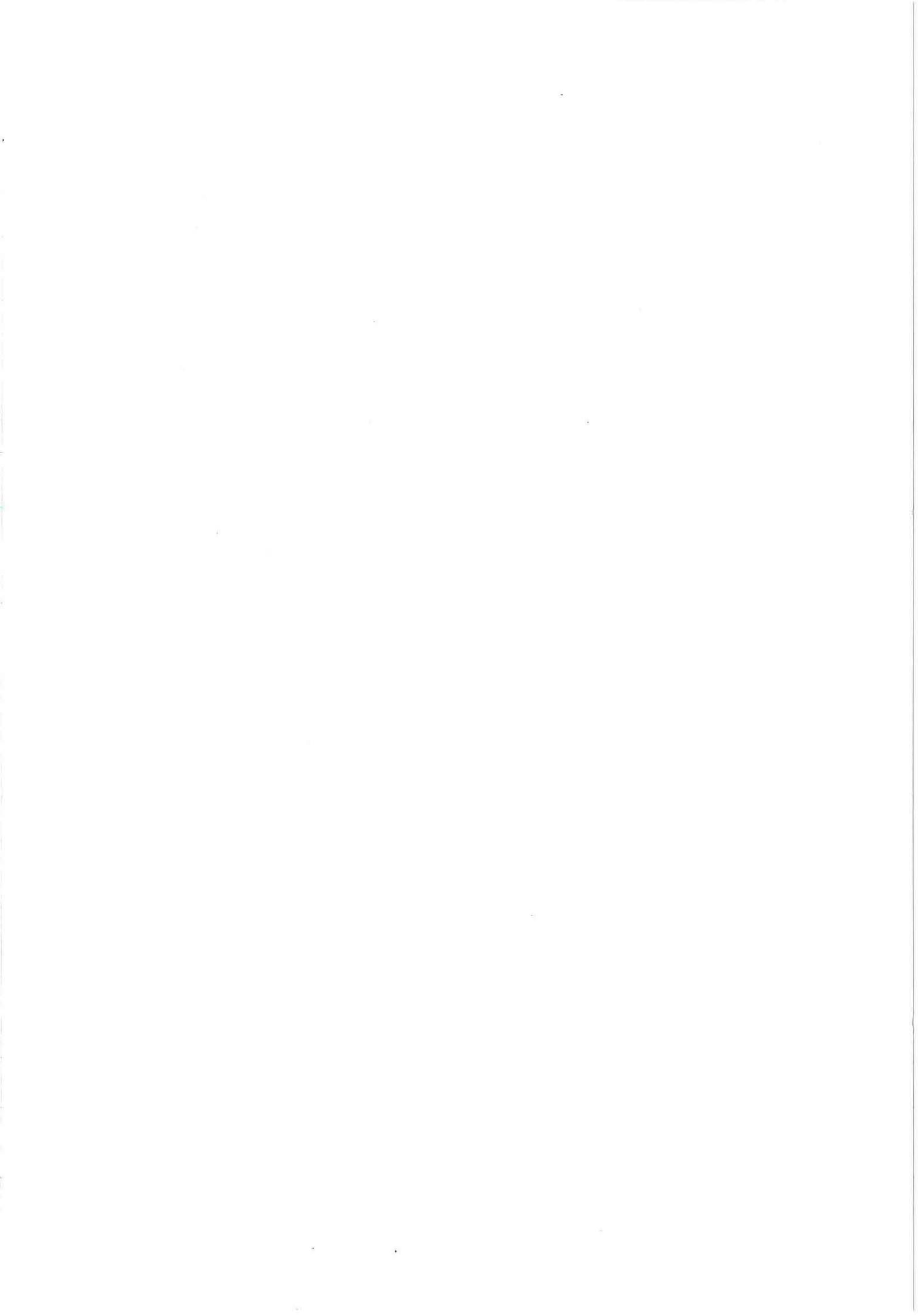
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