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Participatory and Healing Methodologies with ANFASEP Women: A Collaborative Learning Project

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Abstract

Based on collaborative work carried out with women, family members and volunteers of the National Association of Relatives of Kidnapped, Detained, and Disappeared of Peru (ANFASEP), we aim to present and analyze the development of a collaborative and healing methodology emerging from the dialogue between indigenous and urban identities. More specifically, members of ANFASEP and ourselves - the researchers – worked together to develop a deeper understanding of their collective, relational, and personal political agency within the framework of various projects conducted between the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (IDEHPUCP) and ANFASEP from 2017 to 2023.



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The projects focused on three main areas: (i) capacity building through political education programmes, psychosocial support, and communication; (ii) advocacy for public policies and strengthening ANFASEP's relationships with its surroundings; and (iii) socially responsible research. The interventions began by engaging the members and their families, eventually leading to a deeper involvement of the members, resulting in a university certification – offered by the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) – as emotional supporters in the search for missing persons. Finally, we note that in the last stage, the members, their members' families and ANFASEP volunteers took on an active role in designing and implementing projects as a result of the previous knowledge exchange between the organization and academia, transforming social and institutional relationships and collectively contributing to the advocacy for missing persons' search policies.

On the one hand, this process has allowed for the identification of the personal and collective knowledge and experiences of the ANFASEP members, leading to the creation of a participatory and healing methodology from their own agency to strengthen their exercise of citizenship. On the other hand, it raises questions for academia regarding its formative processes, methodologies, and approaches to indigenous communities, offering a decolonial analysis from diversity, interculturality, and recognition.

Introduction

The Internal Armed Conflict (IAC) was one of the bloodiest periods in Peru's recent history. According to the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) (2003), the violence from 1980-2000 resulted in 69,280 fatal victims. The main culprits were the self-proclaimed organization Communist Party of Peru, Shining Path (PCP-SL), responsible for 54% of the cases, and the



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security forces with 38% of the cases. The Final Report highlights the differential impact of violence on Peruvian society, based on economic, ethnic, and gender inequalities, with the greatest impact on the most excluded and impoverished regions of the country such as Ayacucho and Huancavelica, where 83% came from rural backgrounds and 75% had Quechua as their mother tongue (TRC, 2003). This reflects that Peru is a country characterized by economic, social, ethnic, and gender disparities that demonstrate the difficulty of building an integrated community with a historical narrative and a shared horizon of expectations (Portocarrero, 2015). There exists a pattern of discrimination, racism, and exclusion stemming from multiple systems of oppression inherited from the colonial period (Manrique, 2002) and still present today.

The IAC left direct consequences not only on victims and their families but also on the relationships and organization of communities. Violence had long-term effects, as it also affected subsequent generations, who inherited this as part of their family and communal history (TRC, 2003). Thus, it also sparked processes of struggle and resistance, such as the adoption of new roles, community participation in social organizations, community mobilization, and, above all, the development of active participation by the victims of violence, particularly women. They decided to organize and mobilize as a response to the extreme violence they faced, mainly due to the detention and/or disappearance of their family members. This was the case for women, who took on new roles and found themselves in different spaces to have a voice in the search for their disappeared relatives and in the development of organizations demanding truth, justice, and reparation (Ruiz-Bravo and Velázquez, 2003). Thus, the search for their disappeared family members also generated a process of leadership development among women.

According to anthropologist Mercedes Crisóstomo, 'in these organizational processes, women leaders transmit and shape understandings, meanings, values,



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and frames of interpretation about politics and society' (2014: 1). Women occupy public spaces in pilgrimages, memorials, squares, marches, and community centres to support each other in the quest for justice and reparation. They have formed organizations for affected, displaced, and family members of IAC victims. The most influential, due to its local and national impact, is the National Association of Relatives of Kidnapped, Detained, and Disappeared People of Peru (ANFASEP), founded in 1983 and still active today. This organization created its own Memory Museum: 'So It Won't Happen Again,' in the city of Huamanga, and has taken on a leading role in the search for missing persons, emotional support, monitoring reparations, and, particularly, the management of the Memory Sanctuary La Hoyada, in Ayacucho.

Through their active involvement in the search for their family members, women have developed experience and knowledge of state policies on transitional justice, achieving a position in political and social discussions post-TRC (Crisóstomo, 2014; Guillen, 2018; Jave, 2018, and 2021). In general, indigenous women, in the post-conflict context, have participated in various social and state events to demand truth, justice, and reparations, building processes of collective memory and assuming a role as political actors in their regions.

Over the past 20 years, victims' and relatives' organizations have gained greater skills to actively participate and influence improvements and changes in state decisions through various alliances with other civil society institutions that have provided them with training opportunities and strengthening of their own leadership. Consequently, they have undertaken advocacy actions to promote public policies on reparations, memory, truth, and justice. In this process, their relationship with the State and society has transformed into a dynamic of acquiring resources that has allowed them to develop their own agency through dialogue, negotiation, visibility, and advocacy. Thanks to this, they have been able to influence the

formulation of public policies related to their demands for justice and reparations (Jave, 2021). For example, they played a significant role in the promulgation of Law No. 30470, the Law for the Search of Disappeared Persons during the 1980-2000 violence period, and in the National Plan for the Search for Disappeared Persons, approved by Ministerial Resolution 363-2016-JUS. Both regulations were the result of the advocacy efforts of victims' organizations, in dialogue and alliance with human rights organizations and the State (Jave, 2018).

Thus, these victims' organizations – which were born in precarious and dangerous conditions during the IAC – have transitioned from assuming a social role to a political role, defined by active participation that places them as direct interlocutors with the State, representing the demands of their organizations, which strengthens and legitimizes their participation. They enter the spaces of interaction occupied by civic actors who, without the need for formal spaces of political representation, reproduce representative links of democracy. Furthermore, women have developed a set of strategies in pursuit of well-being. These are various acts of healing (Velázquez, 2022) characterized by the use of art to affirm identities, dialogue with the environment and nature, and a communal nature. Through collective action, women develop participation, community organization, recognition, political advocacy, and well-being with social justice.

Thus, this article suggests that academia can also play the role of social transformation agent. Working with communities is not just an act of university social responsibility; it is an educational commitment focused on an active participation role, involving recognition for populations that do not receive attention and education, seeking transformation towards social justice (DARS, 2019). In this case, providing online education on human rights and mental health to victims' and relatives' organizations of the IAC. This process, which we present and analyze in this article, assumes, following Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021,



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p.2), that the quest for a broader narrative about decolonizing research requires respect, responsibility, and humility in academia to ensure that we do not minimize anyone's struggle through inappropriate contextualization or comparison.

Furthermore, this article poses a challenge to academia regarding its formative processes, methodologies, and approaches to indigenous communities, offering a decolonial analysis based on diversity, interculturality, and recognition. Kovach (2010) asserts that creating a decolonizing academia involves creating space for decolonizing perspectives. This responsibility should not rest solely on the shoulders of researchers but also on the institutions they work for. Additionally, research classifications are often measured by peer-reviewed publications rather than other parameters, such as contributions to society. As Tuck and Yang (2014, p. 238) mention, individuals supporting decolonization are inclined to move away from conventional structures of the academic world. As noted by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021, p.6), seeking a role that combines the academic and the activist can thus entail making sacrifices in terms of traditional academic career paths.

Analysis

The methodology employed – developed as a process – has transcended its pedagogical contribution and has become a tool for building trust and legitimacy. Over five years (2017-2022), through a training intervention between the team from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and ANFASEP, efforts were made to construct these bonds through the training activity, going beyond a new way of relating and promoting participation through active listening. All of this allowed for a positive transformation in social relationships, both at the community level (internal) and externally (in partnership with other institutions such as the university).



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The intervention with victims' and relatives' organizations took place within the framework of the project *Indigenous Governance and Political Participation in Peru: Search for Disappeared Persons – New Narratives and Capacities for Political Advocacy for Peace*¹, between 2017 and 2022. The aim was to identify differentiated strategies for searching for missing persons through active participation, dialogue among various actors, and support for victims' organizations in two regions of Peru: Ayacucho and Huánuco.

As Wa Mungai (2022, p. 338) states, research can play a fundamental role in allowing the recovery of society's self-knowledge. In this context, efforts were made to provide these organizations with greater capacities for political advocacy through the implementation of a training program for female leaders from organizations of relatives in each region, as well as the organization of informative sessions with relatives and the exchange of experiences between officials and organizations between Colombia² and Peru. Additionally, joint efforts were made to create awareness and information materials about the participation of relatives in search processes³.

¹ The Project, developed by the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (IDEHPUCP) with the support of the Ford Foundation, comprised three components: research, training, and advocacy. Although it began in 2018, the year 2017 was conceived as a space for knowledge and building trust relationships with ANFASEP. The reflections guiding this work are focused on the training component.

² The comparison with Colombia was carried out in the context of the implementation of the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace. This led to the creation of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition, as well as the implementation of the Special Unit for the Search for Missing Persons in this context and because of the Armed Conflict (UBPD) (Mendoza 2019).

³ The materials mentioned above can be found at the following link:

https://idehpucp.pucp.edu.pe/lista_proyectos/gobernanza-indigena-y-participacion-politica-en-el-peru-busqueda-de-personas-desaparecidas-nuevas-narrativas-y-capacidades-para-la-incidencia-politica-por-la-paz-fase-2/



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This experience is studied here from the following analytical axes: (a) participation; (b) recognition; and (c) memory. To do this, we will consider the individual and collective knowledge and experiences of relatives and victims of the IAC and the methodology designed, implemented, and transformed in the development of project outputs. The intersection of the analytical axes with the proposed dimensions concludes with a challenge to academia, which we present because of this analysis.

Participation as the Central Axis

Programs were developed targeting organizations of victims and relatives of the Internal Armed Conflict (IAC) in Ayacucho and Huánuco, regions marked by the highest impact of violence. In Ayacucho, over 40% of victims were recorded, while Huánuco recorded the second highest number of missing persons (11%).

The initial challenge was posed by the educational level of the participants – elderly women (average age 60), Quechua speakers, of rural origin, and with basic schooling. Following coordination with the university team, the members of ANFASEP based in Ayacucho decided to offer the Diploma Program in 'Indigenous Governance and Political Participation in Peru' to their sons and daughters, who form part of the organization called 'Youth ANFASEP.' Senior members of ANFASEP argued that it was too specialized for them, and they wouldn't be able to endure the long hours of classes. Their goal was to educate the youth to take up their work in advocating with the state.⁴ Thus, the Diploma Program was exclusively directed at

⁴ In that edition, the adult women agreed to attend a two-day workshop aimed at enhancing their leadership skills. Given their fears, both the design and dynamics of the workshop were developed directly with them. This marked the inception of implementing a participatory approach in the training.



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30 students, both men and women, who were the sons and daughters and grandchildren of ANFASEP members.

This experience was delivered traditionally, with the development of a program validated by 20 ANFASEP members, following a hierarchical relationship between students, teachers, and administrators. In the Diploma Program, 100% of the participants spoke Spanish, with an average age of 32, and they had completed secondary education or higher studies. By the end of the program, 75% of the participants successfully passed, and the top 10 students had an immersion session in Lima. As a result of this experience, the Youth ANFASEP believed they gained the methodological resources to become actors in the promotion and defense of Human Rights. The Diploma Program was seen as a space for recognition, linking their personal stories with their role in the association, and upon receiving certification, they could access jobs related to the subject. Below, we present some testimonies collected during the closing of the diploma program:

'This Diploma Program is important, because it helps us broaden our panorama and be an active participant in the promotion and defense of Human Rights.'

'The Diploma Program is important, because it teaches you to understand public participation, project development, political advocacy, human rights, etc. All of this allows us to improve our reality with those who are committed to a new and egalitarian society.'

'The Diploma Program is important, because it allows me to learn the fundamental concepts about public policies and their relationship with the protection of Human Rights and the victims of political violence. It will allow me to have adequate



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*academic training on public policies, which I will be able to apply permanently in my work.'*⁵

Given the positive outcomes with Youth ANFASEP, senior members expressed their interest in pursuing a training process themselves. However, the previous experience required changes in the program's design and implementation. Thus, a new Specialization Course in Participation Strategies for the Search for Missing Persons was proposed for the senior ANFASEP members.

This presented a second challenge, which involved identifying the most suitable methodology for this audience: female leaders with extensive experience in the search for missing persons, experience in influencing subnational and national state matters, and a sense of agency developed within their own organization. What kind of training could they receive that aligned with and dialogued with their own experience? How could their own trajectories be recovered to offer a course that would provide new learning?

Thus, the training program influenced the construction of processes for institutional, community, and collective strengthening, through active participation. In this process, the citizenship of the participants was recognized, which involved relating as equals during the exchange of knowledge and symbolic reparation – the certification provided by the country's most important university to ANFASEP: it was the first time they were considered students of a higher education institution.

The Specialization Course in Participation Strategies for the Search for Missing Persons had a total of 51 in-person hours, targeting 21 representatives from victim

⁵ These testimonies are found in the following report: <https://idehpucp.pucp.edu.pe/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/informe-final-ford-anfasep-1.pdf>



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and family organizations in the Ayacucho region. The program was based on recognizing the experience and trajectory of family members in support and search strategies to enhance these skills and complement their work in their organizations and communities. As Wa Mungai (2022) states, this reclamation of self-knowledge is based on rediscovering oneself, both individually and collectively, as individuals with a history connected to others and the world. This recognition was not only internal, pertaining to the participants themselves, but also external recognition, particularly considering that the state has tended to adopt the perception that victims and their families could not themselves participate in missing persons search processes due to their supposed position of 'victimhood'.

This program differed from the Diploma Program offered to Youth ANFASEP because it stemmed from a need expressed by ANFASEP members themselves during a series of spaces facilitated by IDEHPUCP attended by victims of conflict: Social Actors Meetings organized in Lima, with the participation of leaders from organizations, state representatives, and academics. These meetings sought to identify the needs and expectations of the first group for the development of a missing persons search plan to be constructed by the state.



Figure 1: Students from the Diploma programme speak with Salomón Lerner Febres, who was President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The development of this ad-hoc methodology for teaching topics related to public policies, transitional justice, participation mechanisms, and emotional support strategies was crucial for ensuring that the course met the needs and demands of the target group. For the program's design, workshops were conducted with ANFASEP members to jointly build the thematic modules. Furthermore, it was important for the program to have legitimacy, which is why the content was validated by ANFASEP's board of directors on behalf of the members. The university contributed by selecting teachers who presented and discussed the methodology developed for the program. This process was carried out in collaboration with an educator and a specialist in community psychology.



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This experience allowed for the replication and improvement of the training program for leaders of victim organizations from the Ayacucho region in Huánuco. The course was named 'Memory Processes for the Search for Missing Persons.' To accomplish this, a participatory ad-hoc methodology was developed for the training proposal: as such, the curriculum included an educator and a communicator to help teachers create their content and build trust with the students. A tutoring space with four tutors who accompanied the students in the course work was introduced, and audiovisual materials and a printed workbook were created to reinforce the learning and content provided by the teachers. It was noted that the methodology developed for this purpose might be replicated in other training spaces with vulnerable adults, which also represented a form of recognition for the women who experimented with this format.

Recognition of the Companions

The individual and collective knowledge and experiences of the participants were vital to the implementation of the training program. ANFASEP itself was strengthened through the content provided to its members, and initiatives were coordinated with leaders from Huanta and Cangallo, with whom initiatives were articulated, such as the itinerant exhibition of the Museum or regional meetings convened between organizations. The active participation of the students, through innovative activities such as dramatization, singing, the creation of figures, or narration, allowed them to learn about each other's abilities, identifying and generating previously unrecognized leadership qualities and capacity. This training program aimed to capture participation experiences to empower the population and provide them with better tools to intervene in the implementation of the search policy.



Figure 2: Recreation in plasticine of participation spaces in which ANFASEP members participate, prepared in one of the sessions of the training program.

The methodology used in the recognition processes had to be innovative and empathetic, as the work involved working with the emotions and memories of the participants. As part of symbolic reparation, a badge with the term 'Yanapaqkuna'⁶ was awarded, recognizing, and certifying their experience in emotional support for their peers. The graduation ceremony itself became an act of symbolic reparation, as it took place in a space chosen by them for its historical significance. The Municipal State of Manuel Eloy Molina Robles in the city of Huanta was used as barracks during the Internal Armed Conflict, subsequently becoming burial sites for missing persons. During the ceremony, the space was appropriated by the students and their families, transforming this memory site into a place of recognition. For women who have traditionally been marginalized by society due to their language,

⁶ Quechua for 'companions'



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level of education, and economic status, receiving certification from a university⁷ of this caliber, an institution from which they may previously have felt excluded, was a significant recognition for them: several explicitly referred to it was a form of 'symbolic reparation.'

To strengthen their knowledge, the document 'Yanapaqkuna Companions: Manual for Active Participation and Emotional Support in the Search for Missing Persons from the IAC' was developed. This work highlighted the importance of the participation of victim and family organizations in the search for missing persons, the forms this participation had taken, the necessary elements for participation, and emotional support as a form of participation. It was constructed based on the experiences gathered from working with ANFASEP's female leaders and the new generations that joined victim, family, and displaced organizations in Lima, Ayacucho, and Huánuco. Thus, 'Yanapaqkuna Companions' is aimed at family members and leaders of organizations that promote their active participation, compiling some of the emotional support strategies used to strengthen community work.

⁷ According to the 2021 QS World University Ranking, PUCP stands as the top university at the national level and holds the 15th position among all Latin American universities and the 432nd position worldwide.



Figure 3: Closing of the training program, in which the students were awarded the 'Yanapaqkuna Companions' badge.

The project team was challenged in this space because routine activities for activities, such as the closing of a training program or the presentation of a guide, could not be carried out without considering the agency of the participants and the context in which the activities were to take place. Thus, with an innovative methodology for both training and research, the implementation of activities required the team to think from the perspective of the members without compromising academic quality. For example, in the final evaluation of the training program, the idea of an exam had to be changed to a knowledge-sharing session because the evaluation triggered negative reactions among the participants. They expressed headaches or a desire to return home due to anxiety about being evaluated, as described in the challenges mentioned in the first milestone. Therefore, the project team conducted a knowledge-sharing session organized in



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groups with materials that allowed evaluation to be conducted orally and based on examples from their experiences. At the end of the evaluation, the participants felt that there was no need to fear it and that they were very comfortable having been listened to by the team.

Reconsidering the meaning of routine activities in a training program or research is a challenge for academia and universities. While there is a theoretical framework for university social responsibility, it is essential for each intervention with a population like the one described to be conceived from the perspective of the participants themselves, taking into consideration their concerns, fears, and expectations.

Memory of the Past, Memory of the Future

While implementing the Indigenous Governance and Political Participation in Peru project, the capacity of ANFASEP to influence political projects or participate in formal discussions of public policies was identified. However, the organization faced the challenge of reaching the Ayacucho population to raise awareness about the importance of searching for missing persons during the Internal Armed Conflict. Youth ANFASEP expressed the need to have strategies to generate empathy in the population, especially among young people. One way to achieve this was through the Museum of Memory 'So It Won't Happen Again.' This led to the development of the 'Memory of the Past, Memory of the Future: Strengthening the Pedagogical Work of the Museum of Memory So It Won't Happen Again' project.

Collective knowledge and experiences of the Internal Armed Conflict are embedded in the spirit of the museum itself. It is considered the first museum built by victims of the conflict. In addition to documenting historical events since 1980 in Ayacucho



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and other regions of the country, it reflects the experiences of individuals affected by the violence from their own narrative and perspective.

In response to the identified problem, support was obtained from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP), the National University of San Marcos (UNMSM), and the Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion (LUM) to conduct an internship in Lima for five museum guides in December 2019. During this activity, lectures and workshops on memory and internal armed conflict, memory places as learning spaces, and mediation strategies in cultural spaces were provided. Additionally, pedagogical visits were made to the LUM and the Yuyanapaq photographic exhibition. This internship allowed for recognition among the institutions mentioned earlier and ANFASEP of the need to strengthen the museum by developing the guides' capabilities in communication tools and the creation of educational materials. Issues with the museum's dissemination materials were also identified in terms of their quality, appropriateness and usefulness.

As a result of this process, the 'Guide for the Tour of the Museum of Memory So It Won't Happen Again' was developed. This documents the history of ANFASEP, the memory sites that marked milestones in Ayacucho during the Internal Armed Conflict, and the entire museum tour. The guide was created based on the voices of ANFASEP members and guides, who recount their history and key memory events. The facts and data consulted correspond to the Final Report of the TRC (2003), testimonies from ANFASEP members and associates, and recent research on the subject. Its development involved a further series of participatory workshops with ANFASEP members and guides, as well as volunteers who support the educational work of this memory space. Similarly, five students from the Faculty of Sciences and Arts of Communication at PUCP participated. The participatory methodology aimed to encourage ANFASEP and its members, both collectively and individually, to express their demands, proposals, and viewpoints through the museum, promoting

their recognition by making their needs and narratives visible to the wider society (Saffon and Tacha, 2018).

Initially, the project considered conducting workshops on participatory methodologies and communication tools to attract new audiences. However, it was found that this was insufficient, as a constant reinforcement through the construction of shared knowledge was needed. Therefore, four manuals related to participatory methodologies, graphic identity, audiovisual tools, and social media were developed.



Figure 4: Guides and volunteers from the ANFASEP Museum apply participatory methodologies

Participation was also included in the development of the 'Guide for the Tour of the Museum of Memory So It Won't Happen Again.' The museum guides, ANFASEP

members, and the project team engaged in memory exercises to review the content behind the museum's representation. In other words, the work involved seeing the museum as a place for identity construction and self-recognition, accounting for one's own history, demands, and the connection with the community and surroundings.

This initiative contributed to strengthening or inspiring dialogue between academia and victim organizations, viewing them not only as subjects of study but as citizens, colleagues, and peers. Thus, the authorship of the 'Guide for the Tour of the Museum of Memory So It Won't Happen Again' was recognized by the guides and volunteers from ANFASEP. Additionally, the project results were presented at LUM, where ANFASEP representatives gave presentations to an academic audience, students, and the public.



Figure 5: Adelina García, president of ANFASEP, presented the results of the project at the LUM. She was accompanied by Iris Jave, coordinator of the project and one of the authors of this article, and Carla Di Franco, coordinator of the LUM Education Area.

The challenge was to complement ANFASEP's narrative with regional information and historical data to strengthen their own story. Reflecting on this painful history while projecting it to new generations was difficult for ANFASEP members and academia, requiring the establishment of a dialogue based on these new actors. This generated their ability to work in partnership with the university, integrating knowledge and practical experience with and from ANFASEP members and guides.

Conclusions

Participatory spaces, recognition processes, and the development of memory – the three dimensions identified with the participating women from these projects – demonstrate an agency that is both relational and political. This agency has allowed them to resist sources of domination, but, more importantly, it has enabled them to experience well-being. Actively participating in the design and implementation of training courses, being recognized as emotional supporters due to their prior knowledge and experiences and collaborating in the construction of materials and products related to collective memory have been healing experiences for the participating women.

It is necessary to recognize different ways of producing and transmitting knowledge. In this case, through a dialogue based on respect and mutual recognition with women members of victim organizations, we had to challenge the training methodologies and knowledge production methods typical of academia. To achieve this, we incorporated a decolonial approach that promoted participation and agency, as well as the inclusion of emotions, reciprocity, and solidarity in teaching



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and learning processes. This involves acknowledging and combating epistemic violence (Castro-Gómez, 2000), which has long excluded the knowledge and experiences of indigenous women from academic discourse in our country.

As researchers, a continuous and collective self-reflective process was necessary. We embraced the impact of praxis and the relationship with the participating women and were open to mutual learning from a position of equality. Recognizing the importance of context was crucial because delving into different worldviews, both in theory and practice, was necessary to engage in a dialogue with the populations we worked with.



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