

# **Buscando con amor: existing in relational logics**

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1. List of members of “Buscando con amor”

Appendix 2: Original consent form in Spanish

## **List of Acronyms**

CEV	The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition
CNMH	National Center for Historical Memory
ELN	National Liberation Army
FARC–EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - people's army
JEP	Special Jurisdiction for Peace
SIVJRN	Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition
SRC	Subjects of Collective Reparation
UARIV	Unit for the Attention and Integral Reparation of Victims
UBPD	Unit for the Search for Disappeared Persons
URT	Land Restitution Unit

## **Abstract**

This Research Paper focuses on understanding some of the ways in which the *mujeres buscadoras* in Norte de Santander, Colombia deal with the social suffering of the disappearance of their loved one in a collective way even when the law defines them as individual victims. The main findings of this work are drawn from the field work carried out with the theater group "Buscando con amor" in the city of Cúcuta, Colombia, where focus groups, an analysis of the script of the play as well as the presentation of the play and unstructured interviews with the leaders of the "Corporación Construyendo Poder, Democracia y Paz (PODERPAZ)", who have helped guide this project, were conducted.

The findings reveal the creation of common spaces through the possibility of creating knowledge from subaltern spaces such as everyday and embodied experiences where they are not represented by hegemonic discourses but build voices from subalternity. In addition, it shows the capacity of artistic practices as a tool to discover the multiple facets of *mujeres buscadoras*, not only from victimization, but from other possibilities of being. And finally, it highlights the ability to create new communities outside the circle of "Buscando con amor" through the experience of sharing not only opinions and emotions, but exercises and lessons learned to make visible their work and search paths.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Colombia is a country that for more than half a century has lived in a situation of constant violence and the most evident consequence of this is the more than 10 million victims of the armed conflict, therefore it is fundamental to talk about the search for peace and justice. Given the institutional delays and shortcomings in the implementation of the Victims Law (STCIV, 2021), this paper seeks to highlight the processes that are taking place at grassroots levels that are not recognized under Law 1448 as forms of reparation but which, through the recovery of the social fabric, certainly help to think in small steps towards healing and the search for justice.

## **Keywords**

*Mujeres buscadoras*, relationality, communal spaces, (other)knowledge, forced disappearance.

## Introduction

Enforced disappearance in Colombia is a mechanism of violence. It has been used since the 1960s by illegal armed groups (guerrillas and paramilitaries) as well as state agents. This practice consists of detaining people against their will, subjecting them to all kinds of humiliations, torturing them and disappearing their bodies. The purpose of this practice is the denial and disarticulation of the victim's humanity. However, forced disappearance not only affects the disappeared person, but this exercise of violence also affects life projects, reconfigures territories, destroys social ties and breaks family configurations.

This research arises from the need to honor the stories of families who have suffered this scourge, who have lived their lives searching for their loved ones and who, along these search paths, have found similar steps to walk hand in hand with other searching relatives. According to the CEV (2020) approximately 84% of the organizations, collectives and groups searching for the disappeared have historically been led by women, therefore, I consider it fundamental to honor their stories and their paths of search and resistance.

Colombia has a long history of legislation<sup>1</sup> that has sought to recognize the different forms of violence suffered by Colombians throughout the national territory. Undoubtedly, the Victims Law (Law 1448/2011) is one of the most relevant proposals as it recognizes 13 victimizing events - forced disappearance being one of these events - and seeks to guarantee comprehensive attention to the victims of the conflict. This law recognizes the need to repair victims insofar as they have suffered individual damages. However, it also considers that there were collective damages in the territories; however, this collective recognition is given under the figure of the Subjects of Collective Reparation<sup>2</sup> who, through the creation of a Comprehensive Collective Reparation Plan, begin a process of administrative, political, material, and symbolic reparation. Thus, according to Law

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<sup>1</sup> Law 387 of 1997 and its regulatory decrees 951, 2562 and 2569 of 2000, which adopted measures for the prevention of forced displacement. Law 418 of 1997, extended by Law 548 of 1999, regulated by Decrees 128 of 2003, 2767 of 2004, 395 of 2007, 1059 of 2008 and 1980 of 2012, amended by Law 782 of 2002. Law 975 of 2005 or the Justice and Peace Law allowed members of illegal armed groups who were perpetrators of crimes that could not be pardoned or amnestied, such as crimes against humanity, to be treated for reinsertion and reincorporation into society..

<sup>2</sup> SRC are peasant and neighborhood communities, ethnic communities and peoples, organizations, groups and social movements that existed prior to the events that victimized them, who suffered collective damages, that is, transformations to their characteristic elements as a collective due to serious and manifest violations to Human Rights and violations to Collective Rights in the context of the armed conflict.

1448, if one is not part of a SRC, one is an individual victim, and the reparation will follow the regular procedures of this category.

Paradoxically, then, many of the victims, the communities that have been vulnerable and have received the damages caused by the confrontations between different armed groups, had to survive and learn to face the pain, death and losses from their own resources and possibilities, since the accompaniment they received corresponded to the individual treatment of a victim. For this reason, it is not only a matter of reviewing individual affectations, but it is also necessary to think about social suffering (Gómez correal, 2022) and the approaches made by authors such as Castillejo (2013) regarding the archives of pain, or Vena Das (2008) with respect to the anthropology of pain or the reconstruction of the social fabric.

Yet it is important to understand that bodies, families and communities were severely fractured by the disappearance of loved ones, but these same bodies, families and communities "open the possibility of temporal relationality, as a form of hope, a form of healing grounded on the possibility to fight oblivion, to recover the memory of what has been erased" (Chávez and Vázquez, 2017. P 42). In this case, coloniality appears as an erasure device. Part of the modern/colonial project contemplates the implementation of homogenizing models that eliminate difference; in Colombia, the political and economic development model has followed this logic and therefore war and violence as well. In this sense, the actors who inflict violence (inside or outside the law) through forced disappearance have been reproducers of exclusions and discriminations in an unequal power relationship with the victims of disappearance (CEV, 2022). Likewise, another mechanism of erasure has been the social stigmatization of the disappeared and those who have undertaken the search, stripping them of their rights in an exercise of 'social disappearance' (Gabriel Gatti, 2016).

Nevertheless, before the disappearance there were ties, there were affections, there was memory and, without forgetting the victimization, the decolonial appears under the sign of the return, in the possibility of overcoming the suffering through the memory of what was there before and of the new relationships that are created with their disappeared loved one and with the other women with whom they walk together in the search.

## **1.1 Research problem**

Due to the above, the starting point of this research is precisely from the understanding that many collectives and groups were formed long after their victimizing events, that they found in the victimization something that unites them and therefore, before the institutions they are not SRC and are not repaired as such, but institutional reparation only covers aspects of individual victims. The proposal of this document arises from the interest of understanding the implications of how *mujeres buscadoras* in Norte de Santander, Colombia deal with the social suffering of the disappearance of their loved one in a collective way even when the law defines them as individual victims. Additionally, this research seeks to understand how their organizational process was and how from the enhancement of relational processes they rebuild community ties through artistic practices. In this order of ideas, it is relevant to understand the transition from the individual to the collective and relational as a possibility to heal the wounds of war. With this research I want to recognize that the theatrical group "Buscando con Amor" formed by *mujeres buscadoras* in Cúcuta, Colombia that through emotions, passions and the body have established relationships that reorganize what was dismantled by violence.

## **1.2 Research question and objectives**

The research question that will guide this Research Paper is "What role does the collective 'Buscando con Amor' play in the lives of *mujeres buscadoras* for the (re)generation of community ties in Norte de Santander, Colombia?"

The structure of the paper is as follows - the second chapter is devoted to methodology and theoretical considerations. The following chapters emulate the development of a play trying to create a distinction between three moments that I consider relevant: The before (Behind the scenes), that is, the construction of the script and all the processes that were previously developed. The during (Break a leg) where a brief analysis of the staging is made. And the after (Bravo!) which navigates a little about the possible effects of the play on the women and the environments they inhabit. The last chapter, the conclusions, draws from the previous chapters to link findings and I reflect on areas uncovered during this process that can be explored further in future research.

## **1.3 Context**

### **1.3.1 International cases**

Forced disappearance has been a recurrent phenomenon in contexts of violence and social conflict, however, the search for loved ones has also always been present as a sign of resistance throughout time and around the world. This search for the disappeared has been characterized for being a tireless struggle for truth and justice, for being symbols of resistance and courage, its capacity to build historical memory and its impact at national and international levels.

Some of the most notable cases in the region are Argentina with the movement of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo who in 1977, these courageous women began their tireless search for approximately 30,000 disappeared. This group of women became a symbol of resistance and justice, fighting to learn the truth about their missing loved ones (Basaure, 2018). Their tireless efforts contributed to the establishment of the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP), which documented the horrors of the dictatorship, and the National Genetic Data Bank (BNDG), which has helped identify many victims. In Guatemala, the struggle led by rural women who, after the civil war and dictatorship, decided to search for their husbands and with this process the National Coordinator of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) was created. In addition, the Community Studies, and Psychosocial Action Team (ECAP) and the Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) work in the collection of evidence and support to affected families (*ibid*). Over the years, these organizations and courageous women have contributed to the search for justice and the construction of a historical memory. The case of Ayotzinapa in Mexico, where mothers and fathers of the 43 missing normalista students in Ayotzinapa led a powerful mobilization in search of answers and justice (Castillo, 2003). Their courage has moved the world, demanding a thorough investigation and clarification of what happened.

### **1.3.2 Forced disappearance in Colombia.**

According to data presented by the entities of the SIVJRN between 1985 and 2016 there are about 121,768 cases of forcibly disappeared persons in the Colombian territory (CEV, 2022; STCIV, 2021). However, given the difficulties in reporting, threats, and contexts of constant violence, it is estimated that there is an underreporting in the universe of victims of enforced disappearance of approximately 43%. In other words, the real number of disappearances would be close to 210,000 victims (CNMH, 2014).

Testimonies collected by the CEV, the CNMH and the UBPD affirm that the region of Norte de Santander was one of the most affected. There, the crime of forced disappearance is the fifth most victimizing events, and an estimated 3,800 victims of disappearance are estimated. Investigations attribute the seriousness of this situation to the presence of illegal armed groups such as the 'Bloque Catatumbo' and the 'Bloque Central Bolívar' (paramilitary groups) and the 'Comando Central del ELN' (guerrilla group) especially in the early 2000s. These groups are also responsible for more than 60 massacres, 5700 homicides and the displacement of more than 40,000 people in the region. However, state agents have also been identified by various organizations and institutions as perpetrators of assassinations and selective disappearances (Cataño, Jiménez & López). According to CNMH (2014) records, Norte de Santander is the fifth region most affected by the scourge of extrajudicial executions, with approximately 300 victims.

### **1.3.3 Recognition of victims in Colombia**

In 2011 in Colombia more than 7 million victims of the armed conflict were recognized following the issuance of Law 1448 "whereby measures of attention, assistance and comprehensive reparation to the victims of the internal armed conflict are dictated and other provisions are issued".

[...] establish a set of judicial, administrative, social, economic, individual and collective measures for the benefit of the victims referred to in Article 3 of this law, within a framework of transitional justice, to enable the effective enjoyment of their rights to truth, justice and reparation with a guarantee of non-repetition, so that their status as victims is recognized and dignified through the materialization of their constitutional rights (Ley 1448 de 2011 - Congreso de la República, 2011)

This law meant then the institutional visibility of the scourge of the consequences of war in the Colombian territory. Thus, since 2011, entities such as the UARIV, URT and the CNMH have been created with the main purpose of complying with the law and supporting the reparation process for victims.

However, later in 2016 the national government led by the former President Juan Manuel Santos signed the Final Peace Agreement document between the national government and the now former guerrilla of the FARC-EP. This document consists of six chapters, each with specific thematic focus and gender, ethnic and territorial approaches are developed throughout the document. Chapter five focuses on the victims of the conflict and proposes the creation of a system of judicial and extrajudicial entities with the

objective of satisfying the rights of the victims. Thus, the CEV, UBPD and the JEP are created, which, together with the UARIV and the URT, become part of the SIVJRN and work together.

An act of governmental recognition, according to Ranciére (2006), legitimizes the state order in which the individual is recognized, i.e., acts of recognition are configured insofar as the subjectivity of the one who is recognized is transformed by a "recognizing entity", which in this case would be the State. This policy is relevant because recognition is essential since it allows the creation of a sense of belonging and attachment to a certain community, in this case, since recognition is achieved in an institutional framework, the state begins to create mechanisms and tools for the satisfaction of victims' rights. With the advent of this new regulation, the importance of the act of naming as a starting point in the participation of social and political processes is then understood. That is to say:

To move from considering victims as passive subjects and anchored to a permanent condition, to approach the category starting from its transience, by which it is established that these subjects are in a situation that can change, is to recognize the possibilities of their action and mobilization, and also of the expression of their subjectivity." (Delgado Barón, 2015)

The struggle for the recognition of victims' dates back long before the issuance of the Victims Law. Since the 1970s in Colombia, social organizations, collectives, and associations of victims began to emerge and assume a position of active political subjects and began to mobilize to make their victimization visible. From that moment and through the years, throughout Colombia, people and populations suffering from violence in Colombia began to organize informally to create spaces for dialogue and work where they share their experiences and create support networks due to the lack of state presence (Cardona Londoño et al., 2020). In this context, organizations such as MAFAPO, Movice, Asfaddes etc, are created, and it is this "recognition of victims in a common space of subalternity allows them to build a collective subjectivity that "signifies the damage in political terms", which allows them to recognize themselves as a "community with explicit awareness of being in a situation of dominated" and use this awareness to organize and mobilize" (Delgado Barón, 2015)

When these organizations and collectives begin to be created, in parallel, collective awareness is produced through spaces for dialogue and the reconstruction of stories,

which translates into recognition linked to the conception of memory as a political construction "since it enables the visibility of one or several stories as alternative forms of representation, in which there is a process that endows an experience with sense and meaning to an intersubjective process of dialogue between individuals and society" (Delgado Barón, 2015). In this sense, we no longer speak of state and institutional recognition, but of community recognition, local recognition, recognition granted by others who have experienced similar victimization. This phenomenon predates the current recognition by the Colombian state and continues to occur in parallel after the Victims' Law.

#### **1.3.4 Suffering as a social phenomenon**

Part of this recognition, which occurs in parallel to the State, is because in Colombia violence has interwoven daily life and reconfigured social life, that is, the suffering of a victimization such as forced disappearance cannot be understood as an individual phenomenon, but as a process that permeates society.

The interest in understanding social suffering has developed especially from anthropology and in the Colombian case, special attention has been paid to the suffering caused by violence (Salcedo, 2006), the political nature of emotions and emotional communities (Jimeno, 2010), and the forms of resistance and of transiting the pain of the victimizing event (Gómez Correal, 2022). It is a concept that seeks to understand how experiences of victimization and pain are conditioned by social circumstances, therefore, social suffering is not only framed in the individual experience of a painful event but implies a relational condition that encompasses any relevant suffering that occurs in a social context.

This concept allows an approach to individual experiences; however, the relational emphasis allows a multilevel analysis where social conditions are linked to individual experiences and emotions (Gómez Correal, 2022). For instance, it also allows recognizing the political dimension of the groups that have suffered from some victimizing event, understanding healing processes without pathologizing the experience of the victims, but rather recognizing other visions and practices to heal and to transit the pain (Gómez Correal, 2022).

Now, authors as Le Breton (2019) states that pain exists psychically, that is, it is a personal fact that happens after making sense of a situation of suffering, it does not establish physical and social relations of this phenomenon. This is deeply connected to a

modern/colonial vision of suffering where dichotomies such as body/mind, reason/emotion, individual/society (Escobar, 2018) are analyzed unequally, that is, there is a hierarchization of the concepts of mind, reason and individual being those that correspond to the logics of coloniality. These logics, according to Quijano (2007), are characterized by the exercise of practices of restraint, i.e., they have left consequently a lack of knowledge of some of the components of the duos, they are responsible for eliminating otherness, the different, the subaltern through various types of violence: of knowledge, of power or of gender.

However, to recognize the relationality that also underlies these concepts, it is important to emphasize that social suffering not only implies psychic wear and tear, but that it is transferred to physical, family, cultural and even institutional situations; therefore, separating the experience of suffering from the body, emotions and society ends up being simply an approach to the concept from modern/colonial logics.

The social suffering caused by the long decades of conflict in Colombia has left almost indelible wounds in the country's social fabric. Therefore, transitional justice appears as a mechanism for punishing those most responsible, repairing the victims and building trust in the institutions. The values related to truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition will function as fundamental pillars to help overcome suffering and build a just and lasting peace.

### **1.3.5 Without justice there is no common place.**

Justice is a fundamental requirement for the construction of a peaceful society. However, in a society characterized by structures of erasure and silencing inherited from colonial practices, which are exclusionary from their configuration, the only thing that is achieved is the promotion of inequality. This is why justice must address the structural causes that generate violence, as mentioned by Gómez (2016), justice for life at the center of everything to compensate the suffering of the machinery of death "would include in the legal sanctions the countries of the hegemonic North that have influenced the structural and embodied violence that has accompanied our history".

However, under the proposal to "change the practices and social relations constitutive of our society in such a way that differences are recognized and do not involve denial." It is possible to rethink the idea of the common, to reconfigure social relations, to allow the emergence of new politicized subjects and new spaces of "saber otro".

## **Transitional justice and decoloniality**

The concept of transitional justice is generally applied in contexts where there has been a transition from a previous period of repression or major conflict in a country's history to one of peace. According to Van Zyl (2005) in his text "Promoting transitional justice in post-conflict societies", transitional justice is understood as the effort to build sustainable peace.

after a period of conflict, massive violence or systemic violation of human rights.

The purpose of transitional justice involves bringing perpetrators to trial, revealing the truth about past crimes, providing reparations to victims, reforming abusive institutions and promoting reconciliation. This requires an inclusive set of strategies designed to deal with the past, as well as to look to the future in order to avoid the recurrence of conflict and violations (van Zyl, 2005, p 211).

Criticism of this concept has been widespread. Some argue that reparations focus on administrative, legal, and financial processes and neglect the victims (Orentlicher, 1991) the lack of a focus on the prevention of new violence or human rights abuses (Howard-Hassmann et al, 2008); the lack of inclusion of the communities directly affected, i.e., that the transitional justice has a primarily top-down approach (Hayner, 2011). Based on these criticisms, it is possible to rethink new scenarios or ways of reading and understanding transitional justice.

Since the modern/colonial legacy works through logics of erasure, elimination and destruction of otherness. As Shah and Stauffer (2021) assert when they state that the Western mentality tends to homogenise practices and knowledge according to what they consider to be appropriate, denying the possibility of nuance and diversity.

In this sense, modern/colonial logics are evident not only in peacebuilding, but also in the application of transitional justice. At the end of the 20th century, Latin America experienced a wave of transitions to democracy and liberalization processes in which transitional justice mechanisms were implemented to judge serious human rights violations and victimization that took place during the years of dictatorship in various countries in the region. However, given the context in which these processes took place, the final objective of transitional justice was defined as the establishment of liberal politics, denying the possibility of creating different futures.

Latin America is not the only case where transitional justice has been a space for the maintenance of colonial practices. South Africa, for example, made a democratic transition after apartheid, but this did not contribute to decolonization, in other words, the practices and processes of settler colonialism were maintained (Park, 2022). In other words, transitional justice has functioned as a device to maintain the colonial project in the present day, and has not necessarily offered situated, appropriate, and contextualized justice practices that allow communities to take agency in dealing with diverse victimization.

However, several authors have considered the possibility of decolonizing transitional justice. In this regard, they mention that for this purpose it would be necessary to take measures of recognition, transfer of power to the colonized peoples, and returning what has been taken from the oppressed.

They also offer alternative approaches from a proposal to radicalize transitional justice as transformative justice "radically reforms its politics, locus and priorities" (from legal to social and political, from state to communities, from top-down to the bottom-up) Gready and Robins (2019) define transformative justice as "transformative change that emphasizes local agency and resources, the prioritization of process over preconceived outcomes, and the questioning of unequal and intersecting power relations and structures of exclusion at both local and global levels" (p. 340). This radicalization of transitional justice would entail a fundamental shift in its relationship with the settler state, as it could lead it into a crisis of legitimacy where oppressed societies might begin to raise the need to reform or change existential issues of current colonialism (Park, 2020)

In this paper I do not seek to study coloniality in peacebuilding, but I find a possibility to understand how there is a transition from individual suffering to community spaces and ways to overcome that victimization of the *mujeres buscadoras*. From a decolonial perspective, the creation of these community ties is relevant because it rescues "saberes otros", those related to the emotional, corporeality and popular historically delegitimized and denied. In other words, new ways of relating are proposed that allow us to begin the search for ontological and epistemic emancipation, challenging power structures and promoting multiple understandings and recognizing the violence imposed by a dominant understanding of justice. This RP seeks to recognize the importance of creating counter-

hegemonic practices that seeks pluriversality<sup>3</sup>, and that sees peace-building processes to put an end to exclusion, discrimination, oppression and the establishment of a classist, racist and gendered system.

#### **1.4 Justification and relevance of this research**

This RP is relevant insofar as it allows me to start looking for ways to reject two aspects: living the wounds of war in solitude (individualization of a victimization) and academic extractivism which consists in practices of epistemic dispossession and appropriation, making their origin invisible and violating. “saberes otros” (Bonavitta & Bard Wigdor, 2021). In the first place, an approach will be made to a cultural project that has been the result of several encounters and the work as a collective. It should be clarified that, not only the process of this collective, but in general, the victims in Colombia have advanced important work in this area in parallel to the state. They did not need institutional support to begin to develop collectives, coalitions, groups, gatherings, “juntanzas”, etc., as mechanisms of resistance to violence and, eventually, reexistence<sup>4</sup>, which have allowed *mujeres buscadoras* to find in community processes a way to heal and move forward despite the war (STCIV, 2021).

On the other hand, as a researcher I have faced ethical challenges regarding the way I have approached communities. That is, I consider that the lack of reciprocity in researcher-researched relationships has always been very evident in my experience in this field. Then, I seek to establish a more horizontal relationship with the research and with the collective that will accompany me in this process. "By refusing to extract and appropriate from already vulnerable and marginalized peoples and communities we start to create space to question the institutions in our neighborhood and start to organize in anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist ways." (Sheik, 2023. p. 233). For this purpose, I consider that it is necessary to start from a process based on active listening from respect, compassion, and empathy, to understand the herstories and processes that these women have gone through.

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<sup>3</sup> The pluriverse refers to a worldview that echoes the creativity and autopoietic dynamics of the earth and the inescapable fact that no living thing exists independently of the earth.

<sup>4</sup> Re-existence is the manifestation of the “ontological reconstruction of being... of the healing of the multiple wounds produced, for more than five centuries, in bodies, spirits and nature by the tearing action of the coloniality of power (Gomez cited in Ortiz & Gómez, 2023)

# **Methodology and Theoretical considerations**

## **2.1 Methodology and Methods**

How do I do research without replicating the extractivist knowledge production system from which I am trying to detach myself? This is the first question that arises when thinking about this Research Paper. It is for this reason that I made the decision to carry out responsible and careful research, taking into consideration my positionality and the importance of situated knowledge. In this sense, I consider that the decolonial approach is the right one for this purpose.

According to the idea that knowledge is not produced, knowledge is cultivated and therefore knowledge cannot be understood without considering a relational approach and, in this case, from the collective and embodied. This research arises from a curiosity to understand the way in which *mujeres buscadoras* have lived their membership in collectives, groups, 'gatherings' in a context of armed conflict and after being recognized from the individuality of a victimization.

### **2.1.1 Buscando con amor: sampling**

For this research I came across the work of an organization in Cúcuta, Norte de Santander: the "Corporación Construyendo Poder, Democracia y Paz (PODERPAZ)", they were announcing their most recent project, the theater group "Buscando con Amor". Poderpaz was established in 2014 to comply with the popular mandate of political participation. It is a corporation that aims to promote scenarios for the strengthening of grassroots organizations, the development of popular educational projects and the construction of peace with social justice.

In the search to empower, strengthen capacities and contribute to the emotional recovery of victims of enforced disappearance, Poderpaz implemented the second phase of the project "Círculo de Mujeres que Sanan en la Búsqueda de sus Familiares Desaparecidos/as"<sup>5</sup> as a way to give continuity to the project and continue acting on behalf of the victims in Norte de Santander, that is why a pilot proposal of the theatre play was proposed with the circle of women in Cúcuta where 10 people of the same would be part of the process of Forum Theater in the group “Buscando con amor” (Appendix 1), seeking

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<sup>5</sup> Circle of Women that Heal in the Search for their Disappeared Relatives

that this becomes a tool that allows them an emotional recovery through artistic expressions such as the aforementioned.

This forum theater<sup>6</sup> pilot proposal was aimed at the recovery and management of emotions of 10 people who suffered the forced disappearance of one or more loved ones, in the context of the Colombian armed conflict, specifically in the department of Norte de Santander. This project has sought to reconstruct the memory of those experiences that have caused them endless emotions that have been contained for a long time and that do not allow them to move forward in their processes not only in their search but also in their life projects; also, emphasis was placed on the externalization of the pain and the internal struggle that each of these people.

### **2.1.2 Fieldwork and data collection**

The fieldwork for this research began February 2023, given my previous work in peace-building in Colombia, my social networks constantly show me events and the work done by different social organizations in my country. It was in this way that I found Poderpaz and "buscando con amor". Following the lead of the work of this group and this organization, in March their play "En mi casa falta algo" was launched, which I was able to see via streaming, and this only reaffirmed my interest in learning more about them.

In May, I contacted Poderpaz to let them know how interested I was in the work they were doing with the *mujeres buscadoras* in the city of Cúcuta. I had the opportunity to have a virtual meeting with the director of the corporation, Mildreth Hernández. She welcomed me with open arms and introduced me to all the work the corporation does in the region. After months of planning the trip and everything necessary for this research, in August 2023 I traveled to Colombia, and I had the opportunity to get to know the *mujeres buscadoras* of Cúcuta.

The first approach to the corporation and its work with this group were three unstructured interviews with the people who have accompanied the process of the *mujeres buscadoras* from Poderpaz. Mildreth Hernández (director of the corporation) and Evelyn García (social worker) were my gateway to "Buscando con amor" and it was a way for them to get to know me and understand the meaning of this research.

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<sup>6</sup> Forum theater is a participatory theater modality that involves the audience in the representation and analysis of social, political or problematic situations. In this type of theater, spectators are not merely passive observers; instead, they are given the opportunity to intervene in the play, modify the evolution of the plot and explore solutions through theatrical action.

However, during my stay in the city of Cúcuta not only did I hold meetings with the *mujeres buscadoras*, but also, during the dates I was there, the 19th book festival was being held in Cúcuta " Expediciones a la memoria, el territorio y la frontera" (Expeditions to the memory, territory, and the border), where the memory component was being developed with a focus on forced disappearance. From September 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, I was able to accompany forums, seminars, conferences, and cultural exhibits related to forced disappearance in the region, which allowed me to recognize the magnitude of this scourge in Norte de Santander.

At the same time, Evelyn introduced me to the work of the theater group. There I met nine women and one man who make up the group "Buscando con amor" and with whom I organized two focus groups that allowed me to learn about their stories, journeys, feelings, and opinions.

At this point, it is worth asking "why I keep calling them *mujeres buscadoras* if Don Nelson, a man, is also part of the group?" And the answer was given to me by himself; he explained that in this region most of the people who search are women and that he knows that he is a minority, but his companions have made him feel comfortable and he does not feel discriminated against when talking about *mujeres buscadoras* because he recognizes and appreciates the work that these women have done for years in the region since they have facilitated the search for his brother.

In this aspect, the idea was to establish horizontal workspaces where dialogues are established around the narrative of their process as a collective. To have a respectful approach, an informed consent form (Appendix 2) was presented to the participants where the main objective of this research was explained, and they could decide whether they wanted to be part of the project under the conditions that were most comfortable for them.

After having these brief encounters with "Buscando con amor" I was invited to accompany the rehearsals of the play that would be presented on September 8<sup>th</sup> at the book festival. I accepted the proposal and was present in all the rehearsals, being a forum theater, I was able to participate in some of the scenes of the rehearsals and I was a spectator of the dynamics within the group.

Finally, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, I was able to be a spectator of the play "En mi casa falta algo" at the book festival. Although I had been present at the rehearsals and knew how

the play was developed, I decided not to be part of the audience that participated in transforming the play, in the rehearsals I had already reacted, lived and felt the indignation and annoyance generated by these scenes, therefore, I decided to just watch and listen to what those students had to say since I wanted to be a spectator of the different reactions that the people of Cúcuta would have about the play. Since the intention of the *mujeres buscadoras* is to generate an impact on the city of Cúcuta and the region of Norte de Santander, my reactions and impressions took a back seat.

After accompanying this whole process and getting to know it better, I consider it fundamental that this research not only focus on the interviews and focus groups already carried out, but to finish understanding and making visible the work of these *mujeres buscadoras*, a narrative analysis of the play will be carried out, given its meaning and impact for the theater group. The idea is to begin with an initial reading and visualization to understand the plot and context. Identify the key elements, such as the characters and the central theme. Break down the structure into acts and scenes, analyze the characters, their motivations, and relationships. For a more complete understanding, investigate the historical and cultural context in which the play was written. This process of analysis provides a solid foundation for understanding and appreciating the play. Given that the play is not very long and consists of only few short scenes with few elements and characters, it can be a relevant component to understand the dynamics that have been generated around the conformation of the group due to the fibers that it moves in those who participate in it.

### **2.1.3 Traveling with company**

Since Cúcuta is currently one of the most dangerous cities in Colombia, my dad decided to accompany me in my fieldwork. Despite being Colombian and having lived there all his life, he is a person who has not been affected by the armed conflict in any way and sees it as a phenomenon completely unrelated to his reality, therefore, taking him with me not only meant having company, but also exposing him to difficult situations that would confront him with unknown and painful realities. He was a great research assistant, very attentive and respectful throughout our visit; I also believe that the theater group found in him a tender and supportive father figure. As part of this research, I decided to ask him about his experience which will be problematized and discussed in the forthcoming chapters:

"In Cúcuta, I was impressed to see the large number of *mujeres buscadoras*, people who have suffered the cruelty of the forced disappearance of their relatives. Likewise, I witnessed the performance of students from different schools in the city to know and understand the difficulties and sufferings of the *mujeres buscadoras*. It is very sad to hear the raw stories where these women express their feelings and cry out to know what happened to their relatives. It is very interesting to see how they show solidarity among themselves. They presented a play, where all the feelings and sufferings they had were palpable, this play moved all the attendees. For me, this trip made me see the real situation of the *mujeres buscadoras* and their families, I understood that the governmental entities do nothing to support these people".

#### **2.1.4 Positionality**

I was born and raised in the capital of Colombia; I am from Bogota. I studied in a school located in one of the most segregated localities of Bogota and the third with the highest number of victims of the conflict who were displaced from their regions (38,420 approximately), however, that reality was just beyond the gates of my school, that is, I never saw it. When I was in ninth grade, the social sciences teacher gave us an assignment: to find out about political violence in Colombia through the stories of my grandparents. After much questioning I concluded that my family, in no way, had been victims of the time of violence and conflict in my country, "how fortunate!" Well, I think about it now, at that time I thought that was normal, "to be a victim? That doesn't happen here".

I studied at one of the most prestigious institutions in Colombia, the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; I surrounded myself with people with many opportunities and a thousand open doors, but I remained blind to many realities that plagued my country. I have been a person with many privileges, considering that according to the National System of Higher Information for 2021 only 53.94% of young people between 17 and 21 years old will be able to enter higher education institutions (Universidad del Rosario, 2023) and me, I come from a private institution, very expensive by Colombian standards and with high international recognition.

In 2020, I started working in the Technical Secretariat of the International Verification Component of the Final Peace Agreement in Colombia - CINEP/PPP, although

I always knew that peace was the right path, it was not until that moment that I understood why peace is fundamental in a country like Colombia. I was part of point 5, verifying the progress of the entities in charge of truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition; and it was in this contact with the entities and victims' organizations that I found what moves my heart.

For this research I am standing in a timid corner, beginning a process of decolonizing the self, my ways of relating to the world, academia, and peace. The process of recognizing how the colonial wound has conditioned the way I understand the world and relate to it. My place of enunciation as a mestizo woman, heterosexual, cisgender, urban, bilingual (both colonial languages), with two university degrees and studying a master's degree in the Netherlands, who has worked hand in hand with the institutionality that supports peacebuilding in Colombia, puts me in a situation of privilege that for me is tense, but allows me to unlearn and relearn from and towards "saberes otros". This research allows me to approach peacebuilding in my country in a different way, it allows me to recognize the grassroots efforts of communities and different collectives throughout the country. It allows me to be critical and reflective about the forms, methods, preconceptions, and arrogance I have about my position in the world and my work as a social scientist.

Coming from working with state institutions, my perceptions of *Mujeres buscadoras* were very arrogant because I framed them within the preconception of the suffering and helpless victim. Through dialogue and listening, especially a lot of listening, I began to reflect on the agency of victims of the conflict in different scenarios and it was there that my learning process really began.

### **2.1.5 Limitations and ethical considerations**

First, I find it important to mention that the search processes for missing persons in Colombia date back decades, therefore, the notions that I discuss here are probably not possible to generalize from them. Likewise, an important limitation is the security conditions of the territory that did not allow me to embark for a long time in the city, given the confluence of important dynamics around migration, organized crime, and drug trafficking. Likewise, given my limited knowledge of artistic representations, the work is analyzed superficially for its potential social impact and not from a subjectivity knowledgeable of theatrical aesthetics.

In terms of ethical considerations, given my background in peacebuilding, I understand how important it is to protect and respect the ideas, opinions, feelings and identities of the *Mujeres buscadoras*. This research was carried out from a place of empathy where I was attentive to maintain conversations that did not revictimize, but rather created spaces where they felt comfortable and accompanied. Despite this position, I find in decolonial approaches a tool to ask myself from where I want to do what I am doing, and to advance research that corresponds to the principles of reciprocity, sharing, listening, offering, and receiving (Sheik, 2020).

## ***2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual considerations***

### **2.2.1 Social Collectives**

Florez (2010) asserts that in Latin America social movements do not imply a challenge to modernity, nor do they offer alternatives to it. In other words, social movements in the global north are the critical actors of modernity, but in those regions where the "expected" standard of modernity has not been reached -such as Latin America- it is not possible for social movements to emerge to question it. In this sense, Flórez (2010) assures that there is no correct way to make the 'decolonial turn', some authors affirm that this implies generating channels of communication and interrelation between perspectives outside modernity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2002) including genealogies of thought that were suppressed by the modern/colonial matrix (Mignolo, 2008), recognizing the epistemic potential of local histories (Castro Gómez, 2003), even so, it is possible to identify that the decolonial turn supposes the affirmation of otherness, that which has constituted a source of resistance. This resistance for Lugones (1992) is always in collective reaction to oppression and can play at different levels, that is, resistance is understood as a collective process that can occur in various forms and from various fronts simultaneously to create new meanings.

Then, taking up the argument that social movements are producers of knowledge (Florez, 2010), it is important to consider the meaning of everyday practices for social movements in the global south since they help to consolidate values, meanings, and iden-

tities and for Lugones (1992) these everyday practices also serve as mechanisms of resistance. Considering the "saber otro"<sup>7</sup> not only allows for critical subjectivity that nourishes the movement with meaning and identity, but also helps to re-signify hegemonic conceptions of it. This condition of social movements as spaces for the creation of knowledge breaks with the modern/colonial conception of the separation between the place of knowledge and the place of doing (Zibechi, 2003; Korol, 2007).

Given that it is the collectives, the communities, the victims organized from their localities, from their daily experiences, their knowledge and cultural practices, who have begun to move from suffering to hope, from death to life, even in the midst of situations of tension and persistent violence, such as those currently being experienced in the country, citing Das, (2002)"the social movements that create their social texts of collective pain from the individual experiences of their members" (p. 13). It is also important to mention that within these processes of overcoming pain, spaces are created for externalization of the suffering experienced, which can be extended to other communities and create new political links, according to Jimeno (2010), these are the emotional communities. These enhance the emotional nature of people and the opportunity of this for the politicization of ties, "they are communities of meaning and affection, which link people and different and even distant sectors, in which the pain caused transcends indignation and feeds organization and mobilization" (Jimeno, 2010, 34).

Thus, in this research I will understand the collective action as a space where theory and praxis are indissoluble and an irremediable consequence of each other and can create a space in common due to certain feelings and situations in common. Where it is possible to find a multiplicity of ways to give meaning to social action, among those, the involvement of languages that from a dominant western point of view do not respond to the logics of modern reason, as for example the body and emotions "The body that fights has to learn to engage with all the senses and, therefore, political training cannot be reduced to a fencing of words but requires thinking from the feet that hurt, from the hands that work, from the heart that does not tire of pumping blood so that the struggle continues" (Korol, 2007, p239).

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<sup>7</sup> Understanding this "saber otro" (other knowledge) as situated knowledge and knowledges, contextualized and from places of collective enunciation.

## 2.2.2 Transitions

The discourse of transitions emerges given the attack and destruction of the nondualist worlds, that is, they emerge as the possibility of thinking in more appropriate conditions for the pluriverse. According to Escobar (2020; 2015) it is imperative to cross traditional institutional and epistemic boundaries, to begin to consider other visions and ways of understanding the world, giving way to transformations that are necessary in current times. Thus, transitions are described by Thomas Berry (1999) as:

the historical mission of our time is to reinvent the human - at the species level, with critical reflection, with the whole community of living systems, in a historical temporal context, through storytelling and a shared experience of dreaming (Berry 1999, pp 159).

In this sense, transitions are characterised by 1. Impossibility of any general theory; 2. Complex epistemological processes: require in turn a type of cognitive justice that has yet to be recognised; 3. Entails multiple ontologies: transition involves moving from the one-world Euro-American metaphysic to the world as pluriverse, that is, without pre-existing universals. This concept of transitions proposed by Arturo Escobar points to the fact that the ecological and social conditions of life have been degraded by the forms and practices inherited from modern/colonial logics that have triggered the current civilizational crisis (Escobar, 2018). Therefore, what is sought is a political activation of relationality in which it is proposed that the world must be constructed from a network of relations that involve the participation of humans and non-humans that allows the emergence of new ways of existing of knowledge and practices that have been historically subordinated.

However, there is variation in the discourses of transition according to geo-epistemological variation. That is, in the Global North, discussions include themes of degrowth, the Transition Town initiative, the Great Transition Initiative, the Anthropocene, among others. On the other hand, in the Global South, more emphasis is placed on transitions to post-extractivism, alternatives to development and Buen Vivir, the crisis of the civilizational model, relationality and communalization, and the pluriverse. These transitions point to the relevance of postgrowth and post development, visualizing the possibility of an era where capitalism, liberalism, development, and the homogenizing discourses of the dominant West are not the central organizers of social life, i.e., where there is space for new alternatives for existing in society.

One of the emerging trends related to development debates in relation to transition are around communal logics and relationality. In this respect, this point speaks of a reinvention of the communal for co-existence beyond the modern state and capital. The field of politics has been very limited in that it has proposed a single reality without considering the irremediable interdependence between all that exists, the human and the non-human, without contemplating that nothing pre-exists, but that reality is purely relational (Escobar, 2015). Understanding these subaltern forms of existence allows us to understand the importance of the opposition to non-dualist perspectives that resist heteropatriarchal and racist capitalism derived from settler colonialism.

A first approach to a relational understanding of life proposes the construction of community(ies) with an inclusive principle of care for life, collaboration, dignity, trust and reciprocity breaking with the bonds imposed under logics of modernity (Escobar, 2018). To reweave these relational processes is to rebel against a historical project of liberalism and capital that has deprived subaltern subjects of ties, rootedness and enjoyment.

### **2.2.3 The common, communality and the *compartencia*.**

The construction of the self as an individual subject has been based on the precepts of modernity. However, from a decolonial perspective and taking into consideration “saber los otros” opens the possibility of understanding that the human being must recognize himself as part of the world, within it and therefore, capable of establishing relationships not only with humans, but with non-human, affirming that we are not the center of the world, but that we owe ourselves to it.

Given the above, it is possible to understand the communal not as things, but as relationships that are created. This means that the common is not something that is given but that through social relations, it is produced (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2020) Now, Gutiérrez (2020) understands the support of the communal as a practice and the possibility of the regeneration of self-regulated interdependence links that are cultivated from daily activities. The common is then understood as a social relationship that through daily care as a form of systematic subversion of the existing understood as the order corresponding to a logic of modernity/coloniality. It is then that through this concept of the common I seek to understand how the transition from individual victims to a collective process occurred and, in this process try to explore, the role of (historical) communal infrastructures or the foundations for this to happen, but also contemporary obstacles.

According to Martínez Luna, (2017) communality is integrated by four moments: nature (where); social organization (who); production and reproduction (how) and enjoyment and exchange (what for). Nature is understood as a unit in which man participates as one more element; considering nature from this perspective makes it possible to visualize the interdependence mentioned by Gutierrez (2020). From this reasoning, social organization is then understood as the disappearance of the tendencies to individualize, this means that “the communal being is explained through its relationships, and not the opposite, that the individual explains its relationships.” (Martínez Luna, 2017. P 13). These two conceptions then bring us much closer to concepts and practices of harmony, buen vivir, Ubuntu, where relationships are what guarantee existence itself. The author relates production to movement: “The beings that inhabit the world interact in a constant movement. Every movement offers a result. Every relationship produces a new situation, which, in turn, guarantees the reproduction of life” (Martínez Luna, 2017. P 14) and reproduction is associated with “the cultivation, revitalization, regeneration and reconstruction of what is necessary to guarantee collective life, against and beyond the separations and negations imposed by the logic of dispossession and patriarchal exploitation of capital, reinforced by the liberal state and its political forms” (Gutierrez Aguilar, 2020). To overcome the economics character of these concepts, resignification allows understanding the capacity to guarantee life among living beings, the symbolic and material permanence of collective action and the durability of bonds and relationships. Finally, with enjoyment and exchanges, reference is made to the fact that it is not possible to understand the world, its organization and its movement without the relationships that cross it, that is, sharing is a fundamental part of resisting individualization.

#### **2.2.4 Making Linkages**

These three concepts will help me to understand the role of "Buscando con amor" in the lives of the women seekers, since I will understand the creation of the script as the result of shared knowledge spaces (social collectives); that is, the group as a producer of knowledge. However, this knowledge is possible thanks to the recognition of knowledge and practices that have been historically subordinated but only exist in multiple relationships (Transitions). And all this allows the formation of common spaces to transit suffering. However, those spaces are not something that is given but that through social relations (The common).

## Behind the scenes

This chapter provides an overview of the process of creating the script for the play “En mi casa falta alguien”. First, an approach is made to knowledge as something that is not given but created and, in this case, it is constructed, situated, inter-active, critical and even counter-hegemonic and non-representational. Further on, the possibilities of other spaces of knowledge creation are explored, everyday spaces that allude to the possibility of turning to “Saber es otros”.

### **3.1 Knowledge is created and shared**

*Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals:  
the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression.*

*Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power.*

*And a woman with power is feared. – Anzaldúa*

The pilot proposal of the forum theater group “Buscando con amor” starts in February 2023, when there were 8 meetings with the 10 participants where a process of exposition of objectives, identification of emotions and artistic sensitization led by the corporation “Movimiento Visibles” (workshop leader in charge of staging the play) took place. As the meetings progressed, a staging was jointly constructed through the externalization of emotions and finally, on March 22, 2023, the play “En mi casa falta alguien” was premiered, a staging that relates the realities and difficulties experienced by the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia.

First, Mildreth, the director of poderpaz, mentions that the result of the circle was a network of *mujeres buscadoras* in the region, however, the formation of the group “Buscando con amor” meant a much more intimate process that created a special relationship between all its members. The script creation sessions implied the creation of spaces for sharing pain and anguish emotional communities were created that allowed the externalization of the suffering experienced, given that the other *mujeres buscadoras* also identified with that pain. The pain, however, should not only be understood in relation to the disappearance but also to the damage suffered after the disappearance, which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. In accordance with what has already been mentioned, it is possible to speak then that a process of transition begins in which the relational principle of life is sought to be recovered, that is to say, "Buscando con amor" has been a space of care, trust and collaboration where the pain of victimization

has been re-signified through collective work, as mentioned by Doña Yolima “*we thought we were forgotten, here we have learned to talk, to tell our pain among ourselves, to feel safe and accompanied*”.

The process of constructing the script for the theater-forum play “En mi casa falta algo” was carried out jointly by the *mujeres buscadoras* and the workshop leader “Movimiento Visibles”. This proposal has allowed them to recognize new forms of knowledge production based on the analysis and reflection of experiences suffered by themselves, the members of the group “Buscando con amor”. In this sense, it is possible to evidence the creation of dynamic spaces for dialogue and collective negotiation where knowledge is produced not only about victimization, but also about the paths taken after victimization.

This space for co-creation took place between poderpaz, Movimiento visible and the *mujeres buscadoras*. To consolidate the script, all the participants in this process had to take part in a series of activities and meetings in which they: 1. Externalized emotions; 2. Referred to memories of different moments in their lives; 3. Recognized the different ways in which they were victimized; 4. Established strong bonds of trust with the other members of the group.

In the first place, it must be said that the knowledge created in these spaces is situated, (Haraway, 1988) that is, it is a knowledge that has its origin in the personal experience of those who live the victimizing event, it is not a representation of the situation, but rather it is spoken with the power of cognition. On the other hand, it is a collaborative and constructed knowledge, to the extent that the creation of this script has allowed the women of the group “buscando con amor” to problematize their position in the world as victims and break with preconceptions of reality, allowing a break with the imposed roles that perpetuate a narrative of passivity and suffering. It is also an interactive knowledge, given that the construction of the script has only been possible through dialogue and the creation of joint spaces, but also the script may vary slightly according to the disposition and emotions that the actors are experiencing the day of the presentation “*I for example in the scene of the state entity I say the script depending.... the day we performed for the JEP then what I did was to speak as if I worked there and be all indifferent but mentioning the JEP, so that the people of the institution feel that it is for them*” mentioned Doña Carmen; but it is also interactive to the extent that the format (forum theater) allows the alteration of the script by the spectators.

Now, the construction of this theater play, in effect, is possible thanks to the narration of individual experiences, however it is from the negotiation and consensus on collective images that the script begins to take shape, As Doña Yolima assures us, “*among the companions we talked about where we had gone to look, with whom, how the disappearance had been, and then you realize that you have a lot in common with everyone, so we talked about things like that to make the script*”, as already mentioned, it is a constructed knowledge that not only allows the strengthening of bonds of trust, but also the recognition of other spaces of knowledge such as the living body, the validation of their emotions as vehicles that, initially, mobilized them only to pain but also as reflections of other bodies and stories of anguish, oppression, suffering, resistance and resilience, Doña Analides assures that “*those recreational spaces with the teachers were very pleasant, let's say that in the first classes one was embarrassed to participate and everything because one had to imitate animals and do things that one is not used to, but it's like one is gaining confidence. Then they teach you how to express your feelings, that it's good to feel them, and since we all felt similar things there, it was like a place to share that*”.

It is also possible to speak of critical knowledge, as it portrays common situations in the lives of these *mujeres buscadoras* but the way in which the approach to these experiences is made is from a contesting and indignant tone. It should be noted that the situations described in the script represent spaces of everyday life that may be unknown, controversial, and painful, not only for those who interpret them but also for the spectators, therefore, at the time the script was written, the aim was to generate those sensations that would encourage those who saw the play to try to change what they were seeing. This script can also be characterized as a counter-hegemonic knowledge process, first, since it is built from a base of subaltern knowledge and, moreover, because it is developed in the fissures of a model that reproduces structural differences where *mujeres buscadoras* suffer various types of violence, allowing the destabilization of dominant knowledge of modernity, however, this point will be addressed in greater depth in the next chapter.

### **3.2 The (Other) ways to create and share knowledge**

Starting from the possibility of building collectively allows us to understand that we are all producers of knowledge. This multiplicity of knowledge is also given from “non-traditional” forms that seek to overcome the hierarchical and dichotomizing categories imposed by modernity, giving space to subaltern knowledge. According to the *mujeres bus-*

*cadoras*, the recognition of multiple places of enunciation allows not only to make themselves visible, but also to find themselves in the reflection of their companions, to inhabit other worlds, strengthening their capacity to understand the gravity of the victimizing events that affected millions of people throughout the national territory, their companions and themselves. The logic of erasure is broken, as mentioned by Doña. Mery ‘*I thought that there was no worse suffering than mine, I thought that my pain was the greatest of all and that nothing would ever help me to heal it. Then I met my companions and I realized that...it is not that my pain is less important, it is that there are many of us who feel similar pains and that we must support each other instead of fighting over which pain is more important*’.

But how can bodies and the everyday be spaces of enunciation and creation of knowledge? Who gave them permission to write the script of the suffering of their lives? According to Anzaldúa (1983) “the danger of writing is not to merge our personal experience and our perspective of the world with the social reality in which we live”, there is no trivial subject. However, the creation of these spaces to build together has allowed them to understand that despite the “*insurmountable condition of this event*” (according to themselves), opening spaces to meet with other *mujeres buscadoras* has been a possibility to learn to recognize their emotions, their bodies, and their struggles.

Referring to Florez, Lugones, Zibechi and Korol, these spaces of knowledge allow the enhancement of subaltern subjectivities through the significance of everyday practices and “simple” experiences such as the search for a loved one. Additionally, the fact that this alternative knowledge is collectively constructed gives a strong meaning to these practices and consolidates the value of resistance that characterizes them. It is possible to evidence a reintegration between knowing and doing, that is, the object of study becomes the subject of knowledge: women, their feelings, their pain, their experiences and their struggles are no longer written, represented and acted by others, they themselves are the ones who were in charge of creating a script with which they felt comfortable and told their stories in the ways they decided were more relevant and meaningful. The epistemic value of their victimizations is highlighted there, as they mentioned during the sessions for the elaboration of the play “*there is no better representation of the armed conflict than the life story of each one of us*” as Doña Berenice mentioned.

In this sense, according to the arguments of Florez (2010) "Buscando con amor" represents the capacity of social collectives to produce knowledge from everyday practices, in this case the everyday practices are the search situations they are confronted with throughout the play that will be addressed later. However, it is in these spaces of daily struggles in the search for their loved ones that opens the possibility of involving the relationship between the body and the mind, this means, overcoming the hierarchization proposed from the coloniality of knowledge where reason overcomes the bodily and emotional limits. On the contrary, in these daily practices of knowledge production, the use of the senses and corporeality is exalted. For example, during the sessions for the creation of the theater play, it was necessary for the *mujeres buscadoras* to first find activities that allowed them to express their feelings and recognize the importance of these "*at the end of the day they were tired, even though the exercises had not involved great physical effort, the emotional discharge that it implied exhausted them*" Evelyn assures.

## **Break a leg!**

In this chapter a brief analysis is made of the scenes of the play "En mi casa falta alguien". It especially addresses theater and aesthetic forms as producers of meaning that allow *Mujeres buscadoras* to find themselves in other spaces beyond their victimization, that is, to be liminal subjects, but also as a complete being.

*Changing the world does not come from above, nor from outside...*

Now, the play "En mi casa falta alguien" is developed in 5 scenes, each of these contains a particular meaning for each of the *mujeres buscadoras* and were carefully thought out so that they could convey the message that the group wanted, but also generate feelings of empathy and discomfort in the audience. The play is characterized by a very simple scenography that varies depending on the situation (generally one or two chairs and a table) and the costumes, for ease of use, they decided that it would be a sweater and black pants.

### **4.1 Te Busco (scene 1)**

The play begins with an audio of the CEV: "Desaparición en Colombia", the stage is arranged with 9 candles in a row. This is a narration of also other *mujeres buscadoras* in other regions of Colombia talking about what the search means to them and how it has been the pain of going through these search paths. The actresses and the actor enter the stage, pick up the candles placed on the floor as if it were a very precious object, walk around

the stage and arrange themselves in a line facing the audience; there they lay their heads on their partner's shoulder. One of the women comes on stage and lovingly and nostalgically picks up the candle and holds it to her chest. She begins to waltz, as if she were with her missing relative. The candles are lit and each of the members of the group shouts a line with a phrase that was thought up by themselves as a sign of hope. The phrases heard on stage are: "Let there be an end to forced disappearances in Colombia", "My struggle will be tireless", "This is the light that guides us", "Someone is missing in my house", "The silence of the innocent", "We will never give up", "We need to find them", "Our struggle, our faith" and "We are women fighters". After saying these phrases, each one gives her candle to a member of the audience.

This scene is very touching as one of the women who has been searching the longest for her loved one is the one who lights the candle for the others, as if to say that she is searching, but she is not searching alone. They lean their heads on the others (Appendix 2), this being a very clear symbol that they need to lean on the others "*of course...because it is very difficult to search alone. You know that maybe you won't find your missing child with your companions, but at least we search together and fight and shout; and if one of our companions' children turns up, that companion will continue to help us search for our missing children*". From the beginning of the play, the intention is to show that the search is easier when it is done together.

#### **4.2 Rejections: family, community, and institutions (Scenes 2, 3 & 4)**

The following three scenes are ultimately a clear demonstration of the victimization that accompanies the disappearance of a loved one. In these scenes, the *mujeres buscadoras* decided to show how indifference and lack of empathy occur in various spheres of society: at the family level, at the neighbourhood or community level, and at the institutional level. In each of the scenes there is a pause each time these ends where the audience is invited to transform the situation, they have just experienced.

##### *Family:*

The first of these three scenes represent two situations of family rejection. In one of these scenes, Doña Mery begins to get ready to go out to the street to spread flyers of her missing son. She applies powder, puts on lipstick, fixes her hair and prepares the flyers. With a lot of hope and courage. However, Don Nelson (her husband in the scene) questions Doña Mery's decision with phrases such as: "I am tired of you spending time on something that we have already lost", "You have to dedicate yourself to those of us who

are here at home, to your other children, to me who am your husband”, “This bullshit of going out to hand out flyers so that they only make fun of you”, “Understand that you are not the only one who suffers, stop being so selfish”. Due to these comments, Doña Mery’s character is sad and begins to shrink her body; however, she decides to go out and give information about her son.

The Second situation presented in this scene has Doña Berenice as the main character, who is also getting ready at home to go out and give out information about her missing son. When she is about to leave, her daughter arrives questioning her decision with phrases such as: “Mom, don’t you get tired of looking for him?”, “You also have us as your children”, “It makes us angry that you spend so much time on this and look how worn out you are, looking tired”, “I don’t think it’s fair, my brother was the most important one?”, “You definitely have no choice with this crying all the time, we can’t stand it anymore”.

Then the scene and all the actors stop, a facilitator (Evelyn Garcia) enters the stage who raises awareness and allows the performer or performer to interact by resolving the conflict. The audience is then asked to explain the scene and to change what they think went wrong there.

*Society:*

The following scene refers to the rejection by the community and society. The scene begins with all the actors on stage, there they pretend to have a mirror in their hands and only one of them, Doña Yolima, has a real mirror in her hands. This mirror has the phrase “what if the missing person was your loved one?”. The group moves around the stage with the invisible mirrors and finally Doña Yolima shows the real mirror to the audience. In this scene it is possible to evidence the clamour of the *mujeres buscadoras* to generate empathy and gestures of solidarity from the Colombian society.

Next, Doña Berenice comes on stage with flyers and the bag where she carries all the elements, she needs to distribute information about the search for her son. She turns to the audience, hands out the information about her relative to three people. She returns to the center of the stage and says: “Today I know that I will do very well, today I have a great hunch that I will get some information about my son. I feel very encouraged. One by one, several people come out to surround her, who represent society and begin to make disparaging comments about her search, discouraging her with hurtful words. The actress reduces her body little by little with each person who makes comments to her, and

with her hands she covers her ears, trying not to listen to them, but each time the people are crueler without thinking about her pain. They approach her with phrases like: "I don't know why she wastes time looking for him; to know where that boy is", "She should resign herself to the fact that she won't find him, with so much time, who will remember his face? Who knows what that boy was involved in for them to do something like that to him", "Children reflect what they are taught at home, you must have done something wrong with the example you gave him for him to be involved in bad meetings", "You have to give up. So many people have disappeared in Colombia and even more yours, which was on the border, with this situation, what are they going to find him".

As in the previous scene, everything stops when the moderator (Evelyn García) intervenes for the audience to give their opinion and interact about the situation they have just seen represented.

*Institutions:*

The next scene is a representation of the indifference that exists on the part of institutions and public officials. In this scene, Don Nelson enters an office of a state institution. There, the official who attends him is doing her nails and shows great disinterest, referring to him with phrases such as: "how many times do I have to repeat that nothing has come out of your case yet", "Look, don't exaggerate, what you should have is much more patience". Faced with these answers, Don Nelson feels very desperate and urges the official to help him because he has been going through more than ten years of bureaucratic procedures where not only has, he not been given an answer to his missing person, but he is also treated with disdain and no empathy is shown at least by offering a seat or a glass of water. However, the official decides to be indifferent and listens to Nelson's pleas.

Finally, everything stops again when the moderator (Evelyn García) intervenes for the audience to give their opinion and interact about the situation they have just seen represented.

Doña Mery mentions that what they were looking for with the content of these scenes was not to find their loved one and that's it, but to make society aware that there are other ways to hurt the victims "*for example in the scene of the public entity. That is, one knows that one's son is not going to show up if one goes every day to bother the official, that is obvious. But they are sometimes very rude, so sometimes not even a chair or a glass of water is offered. What we wanted to show was that, that sometimes it is the small gestures that really help us, because if you are suffering and they come to treat you badly at the victims' unit or at the ombudsman's office...well, that's no good!*"

In this aspect, the forum-theater work functions as a vehicle for political action, where the actresses and actors generate an appropriation of this method to raise their voice and claim an unjust situation. However, this process was something that *mujeres buscadoras* had been developing since the writing of the script, so during the presentation of the play it is relevant to observe the role of the spectators as possible agents of change who, considering local needs and specificities, decide whether to give a twist to the story. In other words, all those involved in the forum-theater end up politicizing their language and creating common meanings as they seek the transformation of the social phenomenon they are representing.

At the book fair in Cúcuta I was able to witness how the women searchers presented the play to an audience of approximately 150 people, these people were tenth grade students of the Calasanz school in the city of Cúcuta, a school highly recognized for being from prominent families in the region. Proposing this artistic experience to think about the complexities of forced disappearance in Colombia not only allows us to understand the aesthetic forms as a mechanism that produces meaning for the actors, but also represents a space to stimulate processes of politicization of the spectators where they begin to recognize and understand the places from where the victims speak. The reactions of all of us who were present in that room were very similar.

After listening to the interventions of several students, María Lugones' (1987) idea of arrogant perception began to make sense. Lugones proposes this concept as a gap of non-recognition of the other. All those students who participated in the scenes or commented on it assured that they did not know the seriousness of this situation, they mentioned that they did know what forced disappearance was but "that only appears in the news".

After some tears and beautiful words of encouragement that they gave to the searching women, the play, a simple artistic show becomes the greatest tool to advance in a proposal of loving perception where others and their differences, their subjectivities and the undeniable interdependence that exists between us as relational beings are recognized. This recognition is given from non-hierarchical places of enunciation where the spectators, in this case students, begin not only to look, but to actually observe the realities of those who have historically been erased "Perhaps the ultimate goal of performance [...] is to decolonize our bodies, and to make these decolonizing mechanisms evident to the public, in the hope that they will be inspired and do the same on their own" (Gómez-

Peña, 2011, p. 304). From there it is possible to begin to consolidate “decolonial aesthetics” (Mignolo & Gomez, 2014) that correspond to insurrectionary symbolic inventions that seek to disarticulate stereotypes, cross the limits of the culture imposed from modern/colonial aesthetics that homogenize, erase, eliminate and censor otherness.

However, artistic forms not only open the possibility of generating this critical and reflective thinking in those who act or watch the play. According to the actresses and the actor of “en mi casa falta algo”, the theatre gave them the opportunity to understand the place of victimization in which they were, however, it created in them the need to break with that place, that is, to create spaces of resistance through the recognition of pain and to leave that space to build new ways of being and being.

With the above, it is possible to observe that social organization (Martínez Luna, 2017) changes. If the law of victims constructs them as individual victims, the searching women of “Buscando con amor” find in the theatre a way to break with that place and transit to a collective. Now, to make this transition more complex, Mignolo proposes “to think from dichotomous concepts instead of organizing the world in dichotomies”, this means that instead of organizing the world in dichotomies imposed by modern/colonial logics that hierarchize and pigeonhole the world in such a way that complex relations of inequality and oppression are generated, as well as deepening simplistic views instead of capturing the complexity of relationships, it is necessary to adopt an approach that recognizes the multiple realities that make up the world and the beings that inhabit it.

What does this mean for the *mujeres buscadoras* of Norte de Santander? Well, recognizing their complexity places them in a liminal space where they “are and are not”. This means that since the world is complex and diverse, it is not possible to approach the integrity of a group or a person through binarisms. Often the understanding of the victim is given only through suffering and passivity, however, the theatre and the group “Buscando con amor” has allowed them to create another vision of themselves, they are no longer “simply victims”, now they are actresses, but they are political subjects that resist, they are still mothers, but also daughters, sisters and wives, now they are also comrades in struggle, as Doña Braulia mentioned “*I didn't act when I was in school and I came to act now when I was old, but it is even good because one discovers that one can do other things, that one is not only a 'complaining old lady' as sometimes they call one there*”, after the proposal of creating a script for a forum theater and multiple meeting spaces, they have learned to recognize new spaces of enunciation from where it is possible for them to resist the logic of erasure

to which they have been subjugated, as stated by Gómez Correal “Recognizing the existing structural interrelation between family members and loved ones and family members as holistic beings, allows us to understand the complexity that trigger the facts of violence in everyday life and in the structuring of life projects”.

#### **4.3 Healing (Scene 5)**

The scene begins when the song “río pa’ sanar” by the group 5ta con 5ta plays in the background. The entire cast comes out in a line, lifting a blue cloth over their shoulders and dancing from side to side, they form a spiral around the stage. The first person in line carries the cloth and leads the group to spread out across the stage and into the center of the audience. They lay the cloth on the floor as if trying to simulate a river and the last actor in line finds a container of paint and takes it to several actresses to paint their palms. Each of the actresses with the painted hand looks for a person in the audience and in a very assertive way, without speaking, they ask them to join hands to leave an imprint of paint on the other’s hand and tells the person in the audience to place his or her imprint on the cloth as part of a symbolic act of involving the audience in their healing process. Finally, the cast faces the audience in a linear fashion without stepping into the river.

In this last scene the whole execution is kept very simple, however, its interpretation is not necessarily so. On the one hand, several *mujeres buscadoras* mention how comfortable they feel in this scene because it is a kind of “closure” for the previous ones, which have been *painful* “yes, of course, I like the one with the river very much because we get out of it walking and we are happier. Besides, we include the public,” says Doña Carmen. Likewise, this interaction with the public opens the possibility of breaking with separations and denials, that is, when they touch the hand of a member of the public and then the spectator puts his or her handprint in the river, it can be understood as a symbolic sign of recognition of their struggle. However, some other members of the group mention that this scene is problematic because, on the one hand, water for them symbolizes an element where things flow and go away, but they also relate it to the disappearance of their loved one, since it has been through bodies of water that stories of disappearance are told.

What this scene seeks to show to the public is evident in that it invites them to be part of these search processes or at least to empathize with those who are searching for the disappeared. However, for the *mujeres buscadoras*, if one of the factors that make up the community is nature (where), it is worth considering that for these women searchers the

relationship with the representation of the territory and, in this case, with the river where many of their loved ones disappeared is conflictive in that it does not necessarily reflect a process of healing and curing, but also awakens vivid memories related to the territory '*I think the river scene is cool because we enter dancing, the song is very nice and with all the companions we enter as if we were happier. But sometimes it hurts because one washes one's sorrows away in the river, but it is also because many people disappeared there, so it seems that the river also carries death*', says Doña Gloria.

## **Bravo!**

This chapter analyzes the aftermath of the work and all the work it entailed. On the one hand, at the end of the assembly and presentation process, the *mujeres buscadoras* considered the work they were doing with "Buscando con amor" to be of great importance and decided to replicate it in other spheres of their lives. At the same time, this work allowed them to be visible in three different ways: to themselves, to the group and to the world outside.

### ***5.1 Expansion of emotional communities***

The process of creating and writing the script, the staging and the audience's reactions have ultimately consolidated "Buscando con amor" as an important phenomenon in the region. However, what happens in rehearsals and on stage is not necessarily the only thing that has allowed the group to position itself.

In dialogue with the *mujeres buscadoras*, I noticed that a recurrent practice among them is the reproduction of activities, exercises and learning in other contexts. In other words, Doña Carmen, Doña Gloria and Doña María agree that what they have learned in the co-creation of the script workshops (improvisation exercises, externalization of emotions, acting, reflection) have been practices that they have replicated in community, neighborhood and family environments. In this regard, poderpaz mentions that this has undoubtedly had positive repercussions in these environments because it has made it possible to generate new bridges and emotional ties, so we can speak of an expansion of emotional communities, which means that the communities of meaning and affection that

link people do not remain only while the women seeking “Buscando con amor” are together acting and interacting, but also in the contexts of their daily lives, helping to overcome isolation and stigmatization.

These new ways of relating through artistic learning that refer to moments of victimization trigger political links that in one way or another help to vindicate the harm suffered. For example, two scenes in the work make a clear reference to the lack of family and institutional empathy, when the *mujeres buscadoras* recreate activities, exercises and reflections in those environments or the families and institutions see those scenes, in effect new people are linked to those sentiments because in one way or another they feel identification or feel the indignation of the women. This leads us to think that there is a transition from individual to collective pain, but the collective is not only “Buscando con amor”, in fact, it does not have to be a single collective, in this case we can be talking that even family members, neighbors, friends, can become collectives to help deal with the social suffering that a disappearance implies. This means that the *mujeres buscadoras* are making an important effort to create many emotional communities because in the women’s circles and in “Buscando con amor” they have learned the importance and the possibilities of going through the pain in company.

On the other hand, with the expansion of these emotional communities there is also a transition from private pain to public suffering. Starting from the fact that the victimization of forced disappearance is a scourge that has affected many people throughout the country, and as shown above, Norte de Santander being one of the most affected regions in the entire national territory, it is paradoxical that the *mujeres buscadoras* keep silent, as stated by Doña Mery “*it was something I had in the trunk, hidden under the bed*”. Often in the public sphere, experiences related to emotions are discarded, mobilizers such as pain, fear and love are not considered and the emotional experience ends up erased and relegated to private spheres, one could then speak of a coloniality of emotions. However, through the politicization of these new family, neighborhood, or friendship ties, it has been possible to bring pain into the public sphere.

Likewise, these new emotional communities tend to destabilize the hegemonic emotional habitus that labels the victim as a victim of pity and begin to privilege other mobilizing emotions such as love, focusing on the care of social ties, exalting relationality instead of undoing it, as violence has historically done. In terms of Martínez Luna, we can speak of spaces of production and reproduction of collective life as new situations based

on dignity, solidarity and understanding are produced and these are reproduced in other spaces of the everyday.

## **5.2 Visibility**

*...to put yourself in the other person's skin and not in their shoes.*

*Because skin feels, shoes don't. – Mildreth Hernández (Poderpaz)*

On the other hand, one of the outcomes of the play, according to the group of *mujeres buscadoras* is to be seen and recognized. But what does this visibility imply? In this case, I will understand it on three levels: self-recognition, horizontal recognition, and external recognition. It is worth noting that all these forms of knowledge can be understood as mechanisms for reaffirming their place in the world that help to produce new situations capable of guaranteeing the preservation of life and relationships (Martinez Luna, 2017).

First, self-recognition has allowed them to understand their position in the world in a different way. This also refers to a point made earlier related to their liminal position in the world, and that is that theater has been a way of recognizing themselves as beings that inhabit the world from the multiplicity of facets and emotions. In other words, they do not inhabit the world, the city, their home, and their body only from the sadness of disappearance, but for the *Mujeres buscadoras* it is also possible to recognize the struggles, triumphs, and resistances. However, I consider it necessary to emphasize that negative emotions should not be left aside because they are also part of the healing process and the creation of memory. Doña Analides mentions that thanks to these spaces she found her voice “*uy no no no, before I could not even speak or tell my story, didn't you see how easy it was for me to tell you my story now? Before I couldn't do that, it didn't come out of my mouth, I just started crying or even fainted and that was it. My psychotherapeutic process continues because I have to take medicine and all that, but thanks to the theater teachers I now know other ways of expressing my pain, and let's say that now I know where that pain is felt...because sometimes you feel it in your chest, sometimes in your stomach, sometimes you feel an ugly lump in your throat and now I know how to get rid of it or at least I try*”. This means that the discomfort of the disappearance had congested the bodies and physical strength of many but through the Theater they have found alternative ways to manage these emotions.

Secondly, horizontal recognition refers to the possibility of recognizing their companions in the group as political subjects who have also been affected by the social suffering of forced disappearance, but also as subjects with the capacity to struggle and resist.

These forms of relationship and recognition have occurred from horizontal and non-hegemonic spaces, that is, they have not sought to be seen from pity and compassion but from an ethic of care and the reproduction of dignified living conditions. “*This play has been built on the basis of our own stories, of our loved ones. This play is “en mi casa falta algo” we want it to be socialized and made visible, that makes us stronger every day and that the struggle is tireless. Because just as we are there are many families, mothers, siblings, who are waiting for their loved one or at least waiting for an answer. This play is part of healing our souls, of remembering...of not forgetting. To remember and for it to hurt, but not as it did before*”. In this regard, the *mujeres buscadoras* mention that rehearsals are not their only meeting places as a group, but over time they began to meet in other more everyday spaces that they call “tertulias” (gatherings). These “tertulias” are not only meeting spaces, but also spaces of care and identity as a group; reciprocity can then be understood as one of the most important values of these spaces.

For example, during the time I was accompanying the group’s activities, Doña María had an ankle injury: in a protest in front of Medicina Legal – which they all attended together – she fell and hurt her ankle. During all the rehearsal sessions, the meetings, and the presentation of the play, all the members of the group were completely attentive to Doña María’s needs, took her home and constantly asked about her state of health. On the other hand, Doña Carmen also mentions that one of the rituals she usually has is that she has lunch in front of a small altar she built for her son, which has been like that for years, but lately she has decided to go to lunch with her friends of the group “*not that I have forgotten about my son, of course not because one never gets over that. But the fact is that my friends are always looking out for me, and we laugh and understand that life goes on*”.

This, however, has also represented an important challenge in their formation as a group. In terms of social action, it has been challenging because there are tensions, i.e., the affirmation of the otherness of their peers has meant that they have had to give in to statements that are presented as disruptive. However, they have managed to find common ground by finding similar feelings and emotions together, the rehearsals and meeting spaces represent for them, many times, spaces of stress and pain but also of sharing and laughter, “*it is like moments in which one distracts the pain*”, says Doña Yolima.

Finally, the external recognition alludes to the fact that most of the participants find in art an opportunity not only to recognize their emotions and other victims, but also to do a job that, for them, no one has ever done, and that is to make visible and sensitize other sectors of society that do not understand the magnitude of this damage. On the one

hand, the value of non-violent mechanisms such as theater (they mention that many times society sees protests as something violent and a negative connotation is given to the struggle) has allowed them to take the message they want to convey to many spaces that they usually had not had access to as individual victims. *'Is to tell their story but also the stories of others and tell them through theater. There is no more individual attrition or having to wait to be invited to a meeting of an institution or something. I am ready to tell the whole society that this happened to me and that this happened to thousands of victims. Making this visible is very powerful for them. They feel they are the protagonists of their own story. But this protagonism is not individual, but a protagonism of "I matter to someone, I matter to society, and I am not alone"*. As a group they have presented themselves in public recreational spaces, before state entities, academic events where they have been very well received.

On the other hand, a spill-over effect has been generated in the circles of *Mujeres buscadoras* in other municipalities of Norte de Santander. The identification that other *mujeres buscadoras* have felt has been so important that “Buscando con amor” is a project that has encouraged people from all over the department to want to be part of similar collectives. Here again it is worth asking the question ‘can one *mujer buscadora* be the reflection of another?’, in the end it can be, and in fact, the *Mujeres buscadoras* of “Buscando con amor” have demonstrated that they are, since the whole process of creation, presentation and feedback of the work has taken place together, sharing experiences and reflecting on the experiences of others. You find something common in the victimization but also in the search and it is in that similarity that they see in other women that they begin to heal.

At this point I would like to bring back the presence of my father in this research. My dad is a 56-year-old man, from Bogotá, with a technical career and with many privileges. His presence in Cúcuta was very valuable, as a bodyguard and research assistant, he fulfilled an admirable role. During the whole trip I was asking him about his impressions of all the activities we did, all the conferences we attended, the rehearsals we collaborated in and finally, the play we were spectators of. My dad, despite being a person who is not afraid to show his feelings, Cúcuta was the epitome of tears. For him, meeting the *mujeres buscadoras* was a completely new and enriching experience, and every day we were there his curiosity to learn more about my work and the initiatives like “buscando con amor” grew. Even so, without romanticizing what this experience meant for my father, I consider it relevant to mention that, if my father, who is a studied man, with access to tech-

nology and information, was almost completely unaware of the scourge of forced disappearance in Colombia, it is alarming to think that the same thing happens in the rest of Colombian society. In this aspect, it is also fundamental to continue replicating artistic forms that, on the one hand, help the healing of the victims, but also to make the search paths more visible; In this regard, this group is making a very valuable effort in that they have already performed 4 times in their region and are recognized in the city of Cúcuta and other small municipalities “*we really did not think we would get this far, it is that one feels like we are famous because they already call us and know us*”, says doña Analides.

However, this whole experience around victimization brings me back to international cases: Marisela Escobedo, for example. Marisela Escobedo was a Mexican mother to whom society and institutions failed her, she is spoken of as the woman who died three times in the search for justice for the murder of her daughter: once with the femicide of her daughter Rubí; the second with the acquittal of the femicide in the penal system; and the third with the murder of Marisela after several days of sit-in as a demand to the Mexican government. And one can only wonder “will it take the third death of any of these *mujeres buscadoras* for “buscando con amor” for them to be seen throughout the national territory?”

## Conclusion

Violence and forced disappearance bring with them serious consequences to the social fabric, making it highly challenging for an institutional framework such as the Colombian one to travel the narrow paths of the local and the community.

In the first place, spaces for the creation of knowledge emerge as a first mechanism for *Mujeres buscadoras* to find common ground. That is, when they perceive themselves and their reality as subjects and spaces of cognition, they begin to create connections that fill with meaning and significance meeting spaces such as “searching with love”. These places of knowledge are seen not only in daily practices, but this should also be understood as the emotions and corporality, breaking then the colonial vision where there is a hierarchy between the binationalisms imposed by the West, where reason comes before emotion, in this case, it is simply indissoluble, it is then transited from “I think therefore I am” to “I am where I think”.

Likewise, the relevance of understanding *Mujeres buscadoras* as liminal and complete subjects is understood, breaking with the binaristic and victimizing impositions of coloniality. Thus, through artistic processes that allow them to recognize other facets of their lives, *Mujeres buscadoras* create spaces where they not only understand their facet as victims and the emotions and feelings that this entails, but also begin to express the need to break with that place. This means that they find multiple places of enunciation, not only as victims, but also as actresses.

In this research I was able to observe the power of emotions in the construction of joint spaces and with this, the capacity of the *Mujeres buscadoras*, not only to externalize their emotions, but to use them as mobilizers and in this way to unite and create emotional communities in various spaces of their lives, moving from individual suffering to collective suffering and where pain should not be lived privately but can become public and politicized for the formation of affective networks. In the same way, the possibility of making a victimizing event and the emotions it triggers visible is highlighted to generate spaces for empathy, recognition and solidarity.

Finally, it can be said that the role played by "Buscando con amor" in the lives of the *mujeres buscadoras* in Norte de Santander is that of a vehicle to overcome social suffering through the creation of common senses and meanings. That is, through the sharing of experiences and knowledge in everyday spaces and through very simple exercises, they break with the figure of an individualized victim created by the law that is framed into modern/colonial logics and, although this does not turn them into SRC before the Colombian State, among themselves they do create communities and spaces that, although they are not reparable before Law 1448, are spaces that are thought outside the traditional margins of individualization and it is possible to think of the transition processes towards the relationality and the community as small steps to heal the wounds of war.

### ***Areas for further research***

During my stay in the territory, I remember with deep nostalgia the reactions of the spectators to the book fair, however, I consider that the engagement they had with the work should be a factor to consider for future research. Since the *Mujeres buscadoras* have performed several times and will continue to do so, it is time to go further into the reactions and possible politicization of the spectators from a deeper analysis where different intersectionalities are considered.

## Appendices

Appendix 1. List of members of “Buscando con amor”

Doña Mery
Doña Yolima
Doña Analides
Doña Braulia
Doña Carmen
Doña Berenice
Doña María
Doña Gloria
Don Nelson

Appendix 2. Original consent form in Spanish

**Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sociales (ISS)**

**Universidad Erasmus de Rotterdam**

**Título tentativo:** La comunidad como espacio de paz decolonial. Mujeres Buscadoras en Norte de Santander, Colombia: su construcción como sujeto colectivo y sus formas de resistencia.

**Estudiante:** Andrea Catalina Medina Garzón

**Formulario de consentimiento previo e informado para participación en la investigación**

Estimada/o/e participante:

Usted está invitada/o/e a participar en un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo en el Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sociales (ISS) con sede en La Haya, Países Bajos. Este proyecto es parte de mi tesis para obtener el grado académico de Maestría en Estudios del Desarrollo con especialización en Derechos Humanos, Estudios de Género y Conflicto, con Perspectiva de Justicia Social. En esta investigación busco honrar las historias de mujeres y familias que han sufrido el flagelo de la desaparición forzada, que han vivido su vida buscando a sus seres queridos y que, en los caminos que han recorrido, encontraron pasos similares y comenzaron a caminar de la mano de otras mujeres buscadoras. Busco entender cómo tomaron la decisión de hacer un tránsito de víctimas individuales a colectivas y cómo esto les ha ayudado en el sufrimiento social. Toda la información que se obtenga durante las entrevistas/conversaciones, será utilizada únicamente con fines académicos para esta investigación y serán publicados de manera escrita o pueden ser presentados oralmente en conferencias o seminarios. Para proteger su privacidad, la información recolectada será tratada con estricta confidencialidad. Además, usted puede decidir cómo quiere ser identificada/o en la investigación y ese será el nombre que se utilizará durante todo el proceso. Las entrevistas/conversaciones/actividades serán grabadas si usted lo autoriza y posteriormente transcritas usando el nombre con el que usted quiera ser identificada/o. Los fragmentos de entrevistas pueden aparecer o ser directamente citados en forma anónima. Posteriormente, la grabación original será destruida. Su participación en esta investigación es voluntaria y puede interrumpirla en cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia. Esto significa que en cualquier momento puede tomar la decisión de no continuar o contestar alguna pregunta. Además, usted podrá solicitar el acceso al material escrito (por ejemplo, publicaciones) en el que usted figura. Además, me gustaría que me comunicara cualquier sugerencia que pueda tener, en adición a lo aquí descrito, relacionada con la recolección, uso y almacenamiento de datos personales, particularmente en términos de anonimidad y confidencialidad, así como otras medidas que pueden minimizar o eliminar cualquier riesgo potencial derivado de su participación en la investigación. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, puede hacerla durante o después de la investigación para que le pueda explicar en detalle a través del número de WhatsApp +31647313030 o mi supervisora de tesis Rosalba Icaza [icaza@iss.nl](mailto:icaza@iss.nl). Por último, si usted decide participar en esta investigación bajo las condiciones arriba expuestas, pero prefiere otorgar su consentimiento verbalmente o no desea ser grabado,

también lo puede hacer. Tomaré nota de la información sobre su entrevista (utilizando seudónimo).

Acepto hacer parte de esta investigación y manifiesto que entiendo que mis datos serán procesados y almacenados bajo las condiciones arriba descritas SI  NO .

Autorizo la grabación de audio de mis respuestas SI  NO .

Quiero ser identificado junto a mis respuestas SI  NO

En caso de querer ser identificado, que se use el nombre \_\_\_\_\_.

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre del participante, fecha/hora:

Firma de investigadora:  
Nombre: Andrea Catalina Medina Garzón

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