

Now and forever: Creating knowledge to honor people

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Abstract

After the restoration of democracy in Spain, the victims of the dictatorship were never recognized, and the murderers were never judged. Silence was the norm in reference to the Civil War, the dictatorship and the people who fought for democracy. Only a few civil society organizations and other similar groups tried to reclaim the memory of the victims by looking for their remains in mass graves and ditches and telling a different history than the official one presented in the textbooks.

One of these groups are adult learners in the adult education school (deleted for anonymity). They try, from the stories of common people, to create new knowledge and to restore the memory of and honor the victims. They are doing this by recovering oral testimonies and biographies and publishing them as a collective history.

In the article, I will present the research conducted by these adult learners. It can be considered participatory research because it enables individuals to restore their memories, to create new knowledge confronting the official narrative and, through publications and public speeches, to disseminate this knowledge and organize community practices honoring the victims.

Keywords: Dictatorship, knowledge, life history, participatory research, repression.

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*Now and forever
You are a part of me
And the memory cuts like a knife
(Carole King. Now and forever)*

A personal statement

My grandfather was one of the non-commissioned officers that participated in the rebellion against the legitimate government of the II Republic. He was injured in Madrid, in the battle for the University Town, fighting against the International Brigades. He transmitted me the admiration for these people coming to Spain to defend democracy. “They were wrong – he told me one day – but they are braves and their come to Spain for fighting for their (wrong) ideals”.

As a lot of people of my age, I never talked with my father about the Civil War. I know that he was born in the working-class district of my city in the 1920s. I know that he lived in Málaga at the beginning of the Civil War, and I suspect that he was in the road from Málaga to Almeria in the time of *La Desbandá*: the bombing by the fascist navy and the German and Italian aviation against civilians while they were fleeing both from the war and the fascist troops.

Introduction

On the 18th of July, 1936, an important part of the army, led by a group of fascist generals, and a conglomerate of fascist civilians, coordinated a rebellion against Spain’s legitimate government. The rebellion started simultaneously in different cities in Spain and in the

African colonies. It failed in its main goal – to take Madrid¹ – and the Spanish Civil War continued until 1939. After the end of the Civil War, the country fell into the darkness of a fascist dictatorship. Only in 1977 did the first democratic elections take place.

From the very beginning, the fascists organized a repressive regime that incarcerated and murdered people suspected of being democratic. In the city of Seville, the general Queipo de Llano, who is still buried in a famous church there, called on his troops – in infamous radio speeches – to rape women and kill men. This organized terror continued during the entire Civil War and later throughout the dictatorship (Beevor, 2005).

The number of people murdered by the fascists during the Civil War – including the poet Federico García Lorca, the Andalusian politician Blas Infante, and the anarchist teacher José Sánchez Rosa – was approximately 200,000 (Beevor, 2005). Other sources (cf. www.memoriahistorica.org) have indicated 140,000, most of them were never found.

After the restoration of democracy², the victims of the repression were never recognized. Nobody asked them for forgiveness. For a long time, people decided to not talk about the repression, and the criminals were never judged for their crimes. Only in 2007 was a ‘Law of Historical Memory’ enacted. The law was an attempt to recognize and support the work that – at least since 2002 – has been done by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) supported by some city halls and regional governments³. When the conservative party ruled

¹ The battle of Madrid took place in November 1936. The International Brigades played an important role in stopping the fascist army at the gates of the city.

² Two different dates could be considered here. One is December 1978, when the Spanish Constitution was enacted. Other sources point out June 1977 as when the first democratic elections took place.

³ Spain is both a politically and administratively decentralized state. There are 17 regional governments with their own budget.

the country, the law did not receive funding from the national state budget. In July 2021, a new law was approved by the cabinet. A new impetus for recognizing and honoring the victims who lost their lives fighting to defend democracy can be expected.

CSOs have been fundamental in the process of honoring and recuperating the memory of the victims through diverse initiatives spreaded across the country (for example, www.todoslosnombres.org). However, in addition to CSOs, other groups and organizations are trying to rescue and honor the memory of these people as well. This is an important issue because the accounts of the victims have been – like themselves – omitted from the history books (Rangel, 2021). This means that to recover the memories of these persons, new and alternative knowledge must be created in a way that enables individuals to tell their history and be listened for. As the novelist Pérez Galdós once wrote, “I am offended by those displays of disbelief from those who listen. [People were] eyewitnesses” ([1874] 2016, p. 65).

Henceforth, I focus on one of these initiatives: a group of people linked to the adult education school (deleted for anonymity) in the city of (deleted for anonymity). Their work has been, and still is, an attempt to create a different knowledge that confronts the ‘official’ narrative of the recorded history. One of the most important features of this experience is the determination to both create and disseminate new knowledge, one of the foundations of participatory research.

Theoretical framework

Freire (1970) affirmed that the “Culture of Silence” does not mean that people do not have a culture but rather that people have no way of expressing it. The most important thing here is that certain people have difficulties expressing their culture not because of their own

difficulties but because power dynamics in society – the oppressor in Freire’s terminology – impede this expression. People living in the culture of silence do not need somebody to tell their story on their behalf. Rather, they need to be listened to with respect. I will revisit this when discussing Maria’s testimony in the context of the research undertaken by the adult learners.

Freire (1970) also affirmed that the way of life of the oppressor has colonized the mind of the oppressed. In the case of the history of the Civil War and the resulting dictatorship it could be said that textbooks never focus on the suffering of people, or even on the quotidian life during this time. There is a curtain of silence surrounding this period, and the dominant narrative still upholds the privileges of the murderers and denies those of the victims.

In some ways, the culture of silence is the starting point of the work by Belenky et al. (1986). They differentiated between silence, procedural knowledge and, overall, constructed knowledge in a sequence of steps. The last step enables people to integrate diverse voices into shared knowledge. They considered knowledge as a process of construction and reconstruction based on the capacity to listen and, by sharing it, to cooperate with others.

In the end, their most important contribution is indicating how to connect the knowledge that is being created to community practices of emancipation. Thus, one of the key elements is not only how people create knowledge but also how this knowledge becomes a strategic element in creating bonds, networks and actions that strengthen the social fabric and the community (Belenky, Bond & Weinstock, 1999).

In his research about the children of the Third Reich, Bar-On (1989) stressed the loneliness and, overall the silence – the ‘walls’ – created in relation to the events, the difficulties to penetrate in the parents’ silence - or simply to ask, as my self – and the fact that they looked for stories that can explain, without pain, the things happened. In the specific case of Spain, psychologists are now paying attention about the trauma of repression in the victims and their relatives. This can be only overcome by recognizing their suffering by sharing their stories.

The creation of knowledge is a collaborative effort through which people share concepts and ideas (Toulmin, 1977). It also reveals paths of action. As Reason and Bradbury pointed out, it “is on those dimensions of social organization that decide the *capacity* for initiating, developing and putting ideas into effect” (2001, p. 23, italics in the original).

Examining several works, Reeger and Bunders (2008) differentiated between Mode 0, Mode 1 and Mode 2 ways of creating knowledge. These authors establish a link between each mode, the relation between science and society, and the type of knowledge produced. Mode 0 produces monodisciplinary knowledge with an emphasis on science and a clear differentiation between knowledge and people. Mode 1 results from cooperation between sciences and society and produces multi-interdisciplinary knowledge. Finally, Mode 2 is based on experiential knowledge and practice “and science both actively seek the best way to structure and manage complex change processes” (Reeger & Bunders, 2008, p. 12). Regarding Mode 2, these authors also stated:

Co-production corresponds with the idea that not only is scientific knowledge relevant for the resolution of persistent societal problems, but that social knowledge or experimental knowledge is also important (Reeger & Bunders, 2008, p. 14).

Hall (2011) discussed knowledge democracy and the emergence of new discourses and practices related to social engagement that establish links between scholars and people in communities. He argues that “the strong tendency in both [knowledge democracy and knowledge access movement] is to see, as a central value, the dissemination and impact of knowledge” (p. 14).

In this context, the new knowledge created must be an attempt to organize paths of emancipation by making the history of ordinary people visible. It is also a liberating process through which to enable community actions. As Fals Borda (1986) affirmed, “history takes new aspects of both truth and power. Not only can it be remembered but transformed into a catapult for action to achieve a better collective life” (p. 89). To him, the recovery of memories seems to enable citizens to better organize their community issues by situating them in a macro-level scenario that places local histories in a broader framework. He thought that “not every tradition is positive, [only] practices that are liberated from the alienating introjection of the exploitative system should be selected” (Fals Borda, 1986, p. 102). This is in connection to the notion of folklore - as Gramsci (1974) portrayed it - as an alienating form of popular culture that must be criticized and dismantled.

Finally, it is important to consider that each individual life history is collective. As Merrill affirms:

Biographical research may at first sight appear to be much of an individualistic approach for engaging with class and adult learning as biographies are largely analysed as an individualistic way of understanding the social world. Yet in constructing a biography a person relates to significant others and social contexts: a biography is, therefore, never fully individual (Merrill, 2007, p. 71).

Now, we will see it in the delicate work done by the adult learners taking part in the workshop.

The case: The life of the others (that is our life).

I am going to describe the context of where the workshop is held. Then, I will describe the work being done.

Context

The context can be defined by several aspects. First, there is the district in which the adult education school is located. Then, I will introduce some notes on the adult education system in Europe and its direction at present. Finally, I will refer to the adult education school where the workshop is placed.

The neighborhood

The diverse neighborhoods that compose the district are in the southeast of the city. Some of them were built around an important textile factory that has now disappeared. Others were populated in the 1960s by people who migrated from the countryside to the city looking for a better life.

In the 1960s, the dictatorship initiated a process of industrialization. Factories were concentrated in the cities – mainly in the industrial belts of both Madrid and Barcelona but also in other cities. This initiated the important process of migration from the countryside to cities or to other countries in Europe. As an example, Andalusia – one of the poorer regions in Spain – lost 25% of its population during these years. This population mainly lived in the countryside and worked on huge agricultural properties, usually without contracts and with low salaries in a regime approximating slavery. By migrating, they were fleeing from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, and exploitation.

The process of migration inside the country was the origin of the neighborhoods. Before this process, the territory was occupied by farms and stockyards. These places were suddenly supplanted by apartment buildings. Since the 1970s, some neighborhood associations⁴ have been created to demand claims for public transportation, street lighting, and sewage systems. It is important to stress here that some of these neighborhoods were only integrated in the city early in the present century.

Picture 1. Apartment buildings in the district (Author)

Some people started to live in existing dwellings, but later, they took action to build their own houses in collaboration with other inhabitants. This shared task created an important feeling of solidarity that still exists.

⁴Associations of neighbors were very important in the final years of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy. They led the participation of residents demanding improvements for their neighborhoods. At the time of the first democratic elections to City Hall, some of the leaders of these associations were co-opted by political parties and became city councilors. When this happened, the associations lost their power to file complaints.

Picture 2. Self-edified houses in the district (Author)

People living in the district worked in urban construction, textile factories or – for the women – as servants in private homes. The closing of textile factories and urban construction crashes are the reasons for the high level of unemployment. Working as a domestic servant is very precarious and usually without social security benefits and contracts.

In short, poverty, a low educational level, employment uncertainty and unemployment are some of the features of the daily lives of the people living in the community. However, their difficult but rich life experience is also a core feature of their character.

Adult education in Europe

In Spain – and in all of Europe – adult education has profoundly changed. The tradition of popular adult education being closely linked to the community (Crowther, 1999) has been lost. The new regulations regarding adult education are based on the policies and practices of Lifelong Learning that focus only on the labor market and view people as workers or consumers, not as citizens. Lifelong Learning has forgotten personal and community life (Author, 2014). These new policies, not only in Spain but also internationally, have reduced the role of education to a simple process of manpower training. Even though this is a general tendency in secondary and higher education, it is even more apparent in adult education.

Counter to this tendency, the foundations of adult education are in the social, relational and community lives of persons in my view. In fact, after the restoration of

democracy, it could be affirmed that, for a time, adult education schools were a kind of cultural places whether in villages or working-class neighborhoods. This space still exists in the gaps of the educational system (Guimarães, Lucio-Villegas & Mayo, 2018). It provides a place of resistance where teachers and learners have learned the means of transgressing the rules and organizing educational processes focused on people's needs and desires to learn and to act, as in this school.

The adult education school (deleted for anonymity)

Adult education schools in Spain are mainly situated in working-class neighborhoods. In a common feature from the beginning of the restoration of democracy until they became 'institutionalized' (Engesbank, et al., 2010), teachers worked voluntarily with neighbors until - years later - they were hired by city halls or other public administrations. This means that community work was always a decisive element in working with adult learners. This willingness to serve people is currently maintained in this adult education school.

Picture 3. The adult education school (author)

Adult learners attending the school come from the different neighborhoods in the district and represent the diversity of the people living in them: unemployed young adults usually lacking basic education – due to the high rate of school leavers – women, migrant people looking to learn Spanish, senior citizens attending illiteracy and basic education classes, and those seeking social relationships.

The Recovery of Social and Historical Memory Workshop. Process and methodology

The workshop's central purpose is to collect the life histories of people living in the district or attending the adult education school. These life histories are a source of knowledge about repression, incomplete education, employment uncertainty, poverty, or migration.

The workshop started in 2004 with 9 people (5 women and 4 men) – including an adult educator who is the coordinator. All attendees at the adult education school have no previous educational qualifications or specific research experience. All of them have been living in the district for years and have strong social and political commitments.

I have had close context to the workshop since, at least, 2006 when encouraged the members to publish the book and the DVD with the support of the Participatory Budget experiment – I was leading a project devoted to adult education. I was also invited to write one of the prefaces of the book published in 2016. But, I became member of the workshop by 2018.

In 2011, when the workshop undertook its second research project, there were 11 participants (7 men and 4 women). When ongoing research started in 2019, there were 7 participants (4 men and 3 women). As the workshop is voluntary, people attended it only to the degree possible with respect to time and other commitments. It is important to stress that at least 6 people (4 men and 2 women) have participated in the workshop from the very beginning.

López (2011) considered that the defining moment to initiate the work in 2004 was an interview with a woman – María – who had lost her father at the beginning of the Civil War when she was only 5 years old. In María's words:

It was August 10 [1936], my father was at the farmhouse with the goats, and he came to bring the milk. My mother went to take it to the shopkeeper, and my father remained at the door [of the house] with one of my sisters who had not still walking and my three-year-old brother playing with. Three men, two policemen and a Falangist got out and told him to go with them for asking some questions. My father gave me the girl and he sit me on the chair. When my mother arrived and asked about him, people told her that some men had taken him away. My mother ran to see what went on, and she met a neighbor [who told her]: “Your husband was taken by *Santiago, el Tejero, the cross-eyed*” [...] My father never returned [...]. 38 were shouted in the gate of the cemetery [...]. It was August 12, 1936 [...]. My mother had 5 children, and she was also 6 months pregnant. The baby was born, and he never met his father and died after 6 months. (María A. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 144. Italics in the original)⁵

The workshop has developed three different research. The first – started in 2004 – was focused on collecting histories from people living during the time of the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship. Ten interviews – 7 women and 3 men – were conducted to adult learners attending the school. People’s testimonies were focused on the consequences of repression – either their own or those of their relatives – poor and incomplete education for common people (mainly women), and unstable jobs with low salaries. All also related to the process of migration, a theme that the workshop took up in the second research. The results of this first research were presented in a book (Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica,

⁵ The transcripts cannot be translated literally because of the speech of people interviewed. I am trying to be as accurate as possible with regard to the content of people’s testimonies.

2007) and a DVD, both financed by the Participatory Budget⁶ experiment of the city of (deleted for anonymity). The book was divided into two sections. The first presents short testimonies organized around generative themes – repression, education and work in the Civil War and the post-war period – along with other sources such as books, newspapers, etc. The second includes the complete 10 life histories. Dissemination was done through public speeches – in some cases, it was the first time that the participants had spoken in public. These presentations were addressed to adult learners in adult education schools across the city, in university classrooms, at conferences, in books (Caro et al., 2009) and to neighbors in the district.

As a workshop member stated, the end of this research was a kind of catalyst for developing new ones.

Our project does not end with this book; this is only the beginning. We want to keep working with the rest of the interviews to help the voices of the people who have always been silenced to be heard. Our aim is to bring them to light using the time and work that we can devote to the research (Caro et al., 2009, p. 28).

The second study started in 2011 by collecting 14 life histories – 10 women and 4 men. They are related to the last years of the dictatorship and the period known as *La transición*⁷: the

⁶The participatory budget experiment took place from 2003 to 2007. The experiment followed the model of Porto Alegre in Brazil. After the municipal elections in 2007 the experiment was dismantled.

⁷The transition was the period of the restoration of democracy. The name derives from the idea that it was a peaceful passage from dictatorship to democracy. This ‘peaceful’ and gradual change is the main reason for the oblivion of the victims of the dictatorship.

process of recuperating democracy between 1975 – the death of the dictator – and 1978, when the democratic constitution was enacted.

The generative themes that arose were: a) the processes of migration – a consequence of the previous research, b) the first massive workers' strikes, c) the birth of democratic trade unions (even in the age of the dictatorship), d) the social and political militancy either in clandestine political parties or in the first neighborhood associations, and e) the condition of women.

Informants were people living in the district who had witnessed the evolution of the diverse neighborhoods over these years. A book was published (*Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica y social*, 2016), which was divided into two sections as the first one already mentioned. The book was self-funded by workshop members and financed by book sales.

Dissemination of this research started with a public event in a community theatre in the district. Then, it was presented in diverse locations: adult education schools, secondary schools, community centers and the university. Audio-visual material was organized to systematize these presentations.

Since 2019, the workshop has been involved in new research related to one of the most important textile factories in the city. This factory is also significant to the history of the district – the theatre where the second research was presented is part of a community center built inside the former factory – and to the history of the workers' movement in the city.

To date, 8 interviews – 7 men and 1 woman – have been conducted with people connected to the factory: workers, managers, and trade unionists. The interviews were focused on the history of the factory, its influence on the life of the district and the workers' movement, either in the district or in the city. As the interviews have now been organized and analyzed, generative themes are under discussion.

Below, I will explain the methodology.

The first step was to define the idea – derived from María's testimony – and to search for key informants, who were selected by the members of the workshop among those attending the school (in the first research) or neighbors with a relevant experience of living in the district, or worked in the textile factory already mentioned. Sometimes, informants accepted the invitation but decided to withdraw their testimony after the interview. This was observed in the first research and was related to the silence and fear that still exists in relation to the Civil War and the dictatorship. In parallel with the selection of informants, a comfortable place in which to conduct the interviews was prepared.

The second step was the interview itself. There were no defined guidelines. Instead, it was a conversation between the members of the workshop – not all of them took part in each interview – and the person who was telling their history. Interviews were recorded in both audio and video.

The next step was the transcription of the interview by one or two workshop members. After completing this text, the process of reconstructing and analyzing each of the interviews was initiated. This was done – including the ongoing research – in weekly two-hour meetings

including all members of the workshop in which delicate and collaborative work is done, in which diverse voices are integrated and choral knowledge is produced. If in the first research the organization of the life histories took a more chronological presentation, the second and the ongoing research organize the testimonies according to other categories already defined as generative themes. Four or five weeks can be spent organizing each life history. In this process, some elements of triangulation also appeared among the different narratives that are useful for clarifying emerging doubts about the narrated events.

When this process concluded, the interview was returned to the informant to correct and to validate the content. They were always the final authority on the content of their own testimony.

The next step was to contextualize the life histories into historical events. To do so, each member of the workshop contributed books, documents, pictures, journals, etc. This process allowed the knowledge to be contextualized by complementing personal testimonies with other sources of knowledge.

The last step is to produce the book, which is divided into two different sections, as previously explained. The book presents the contrast between selected documents and the histories told by the people. In doing so, each book tries to contextualize each personal experience within the broader history to confront both. When the book is published, a set of public speeches is organized to disseminate the findings of the research.

Another relevant element is the cooperation among scholars and the workshop. This was/is mainly focused on methodology: how to conduct research and interviews, analyze the

results, and organize categories of analysis. It is important to emphasize that this cooperation is not institutional, but personal. The university does not provide support for the practice of cooperating with communities to democratize knowledge.

Discussion: The creation of knowledge in the workshop

One of the most important achievements of the workshop is to demonstrate that people can play an important role in creating knowledge “for those telling and those listening” (Trofanenko, 2017, p. 150), allowing them to escape from the culture of silence.

The building of knowledge in the workshop is based on the contrast between the ‘official’ history, which is presented in the textbooks and derived from the processes of legitimation of the dictatorship that serve political, cultural, and educational powers, and the collective history that people share about their own lives leaving the silence.

For many victimized families, it means [the knowledge produced] restoring their dignity, achieving personal catharsis, ending public oblivion and the stigma of guilty. This moves them to recuperate their relatives by giving them the dignity that the fascism had denied. They can bury their relatives in graves with names and surnames. They can also find them in common graves, perform a simple civil ceremony, and recognize the place of the executions or the graves with a monolith or a tombstone (Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 160).

Picture 4. Archaeologist working in a common grave. (Wancha, 2020)

It can be said that, in the workshop, there is - as in mode 2 - a mixture between social and experiential knowledge. History is about people, about - in this case - the suffering of people who have even lost their own name.

My father sent a letter saying that there were rumors that maybe some people could be released. Others had said that the same thing could happen to themselves too. [For released my father] our names must be changed, and also being baptized and [my mother and my father] marry in the church. Then, my mother told my teacher, and she answered: “yes, I knew all that, but I had not wanted to tell you. So, you must get married in the church and change the name of your children”. So, they [my parents] changed my name. (María P., former name Libertad Mariana de Pineda. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 40).

It is also important to contrast the local results with the knowledge provided by textbooks and the manner with which they present the Civil War and the dictatorship⁸. The Civil War is only presented in relation to battles, troop movements, etc. The dictatorship is merely presented by naming politicians, governments, etc. The textbooks make no reference to repression, the struggle for democracy, the poverty of the people, migration from the countryside to cities or to other countries in Europe, etc. By challenging textbooks, knowledge is created from silence.

About the Republic and the war, what I remember, what was heard from my family.

They [the fascist] killed my two uncles. Ramón was killed on July 22, 1936. He was

⁸ For instance. University students don't know about the International Brigades and other facts concerning the Civil War.

shot in Maria Luisa Park⁹, and Antonio was shot on the cemetery walls on April 14, 1937. My father must join the Legion because he feared that they would kill him. just like his brothers. He said that he always shot to the ground, and he shot himself in the leg and put chickpeas in the wound to avoid returning to the front. (Dolores. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica y social, 2016, p. 219

By constructing this new knowledge, adult learners are challenging the ‘official’ history and are telling their own based on their lives. The most important thing here is to consider that this knowledge comes from the experience of people living in the community. The major attempt of the people is to unmask the ‘official’ knowledge about the Civil War, the dictatorship, and the restoration of democracy and confront it with their own views. In doing so, they challenge the hegemonic power and build democratic knowledge based on their lives and memories to create the capacity to reflect upon the narrated events.

My father-in-law was a teacher in Torres¹⁰ when the republic was proclaimed. Teachers had the right to a house, and it was in one of a rich man. When the fascists arrived at the village, they performed a search in his house and found his UGT¹¹ credential. He was imprisoned for several years, and here begins the torture of this family (Rosario. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 29).

The knowledge produced attempts to create new paths of emancipation by making the history of ordinary people visible against the discourse of the conservative forces that are trying to

⁹ A park in the city of Seville.

¹⁰ A village in Andalusia.

¹¹ A socialist trade union: Unión General de Trabajadores

impede the search for and exhumation of the victims of the war and repression. As mentioned, it is an experiential knowledge that derives from their own biography.

And that woman was called to the Plaza de España to receive some money if signing that her son had died for natural causes. She did not sign because he [her son] fled and was killed [by the fascist] in the Tamarguillo¹². She did not receive any money and went to work to the cemetery cleaning graves to have something to eat and live. She usually came to my grandmother's house to eat because she was midwife for her. (María L. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 33)

Conclusions

The main aim of the workshop is to reconstruct a specific time in the history of the country using the experiences of people whose voices are usually not heard. Life histories and biographies have a collective meaning because they refer to a historical moment and make sense when they are collected and organized. They describe a specific situation and how history was made from the micro (neighborhood and people living in) to the macro (the place of these personal stories in the whole history of the country) levels. Therefore, the workshop integrates each individual life into the collective history of people struggling for democracy and a better life.

According to López (2011), there are a variety of achievements that emerge from this research experience. First, participants learn how to conduct research. Additionally, they acquire the tools to express their voice and be listened. For instance, their public presentations

¹² A former stream in Seville.

show them how to express their own thoughts and ideas. In addition, they employ creativity when preparing these public speeches by including music and poetry.

A last achievement has been to raise awareness that a different view of history exists and that it is vital to bring it to light by creating and expressing alternative historical knowledge. They “wanted to show how history can be built through individual memories” (Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 16). As in the case of Rosario’s memories, she noted “how my mother read [to a woman who lived in the street] the last letter of her son before he was shot”. (Rosario. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 29).

The knowledge created by the workshop could be considered relational knowledge that “makes it possible to create and sustain a community” (Park, 2001, p. 86). It stresses a collective approach, and that the production of knowledge is a collective process. Relational knowledge is built through a process of listening to the life histories of individuals. This process of listening creates solidarity and allows individuals to share their painful memories with others breaking the silence. Additionally, this is a process of healing - as some of the interviewees by Bar-On (1989) - which creates empathy with other people who are now able to understand events that, because of their age, they did not experience directly.

We are convinced that our workshop has contributed and collaborated to reconstruct part of the historical past - rescuing the memory from oblivion - of our country through each of the biographies [...] Thus, the memory of each of them becomes a reference, an oral and written source of hitherto unknown facts and a people’s

document that shows the social, economic and policy history of a society (Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica y social, 2016, p. 301).

In Mode 2 of producing knowledge, “actors are not regarded as people who speak on behalf of others or in support of a particular interest, but as individuals who speak from their knowledge and experience” (Reeger & Bunders, 2008, p. 96).

We started trying to find some people who had worked in the channel¹³ and could tell us their story. For us, it was a surprise when we began to talk about these matters because we realized that there was an immense social demand from the protagonists to be heard. We quickly began to listen to them and convey their social importance. When we started tallying numbers, we calculated that about 10,000 families were involved [corresponding to approximately 10,000 political prisoners working in]. The places where they lived had a name: "concentration camps" (Cecilio. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica y social, 2016, p. 211).

Picture 5. Political prisoners working in the ‘Channel of Prisoners’ (García Longas, 2016)

In the introduction of this article, I indicated how the research performed by adult learners was focused on a silenced period of history. The research connected to the long tradition of democratic education inspires us in a moment when totalitarian movements are threatening democracy. Democratic education, as Dewey (1916) stated, is more concerned with practicing democracy than with focusing on methods for the process of teaching and learning

¹³ The channel of prisoners was a public work undertaken to irrigate extensive properties. The owners of these properties were usually landlords who supported the coup d'état and the dictatorship. The work started in 1940 and continued until 1962. The major labor was provided by political prisoners (García Longas, 2016).

it. Participatory research is one of the methodologies that can help in this effort to preserve democracy because it is both a methodology and a research process based on participation to create real democratic knowledge about our past, present and future lives. This democratic practices - such as the research presented in this article - created and strengthened community practices in the district, such as advocating for a doctor's office, opposing power cuts, or honoring the victims of repression by placing a plaque in remembrance of one of them.

Picture 6. Plaque in honor of Francisco Ledesma, murdered during a strike in 1977 by an unknown killer.

Finally, the research, and the process involved therein, can also be considered liberating because – through listening – it generates a healing process for the individuals involved. People share memories, and by participating in this project, a process of solidarity, empathy, and consolation comes about. When relatives can remember and honor the victims – by telling their histories to a receptive audience, or by finding their remains – it is liberating. In addition, when the lost victims can be placed in settings where they can be honored and remembered, the result can be a healing process for people such as María A. or Francisco who suffered through profound trauma full of pain and fear.

I was born in Villanueva de San Juan¹⁴, after the Civil War, when my mother returned from prison. She was a political prisoner of the Movimiento Nacional. His crime was to compete with the head of the Falange [in the town]. Both had a bakery, but my mother, because of her sympathy and her good work, took most of the customers, so that was her crime. My father was also imprisoned, but it was in the concentration

¹⁴ A little village in Seville

camps, after surrendering when the war ended (Francisco. Taller para la recuperación de la memoria histórica, 2007, p. 129)

Francisco, Libertad Mariana – in her real name – María A., María L., Dolores, Rosario, Cecilio and others had searched for the respect and memory of their relatives. Paraphrasing the last verse of Carole King’s song¹⁵, they can say, “Now and forever, we will always be with them”.

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¹⁵‘Now and forever’ is a song by Carole King. It was included in the soundtrack of the film ‘A League of their own’ performed for the first time in 1992.

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