



# We exist and resist as woven patches: Collective narrative practices in an activist context challenging and responding to an anti-lesbian hate crime

by Yasna Mancilla Monsalve



*Yasna Mancilla Monsalve is an activist and therapist who works with individuals, groups and communities, drawing inspiration from narrative practices and activism. She is a psychologist with a master's degree in clinical psychology, majoring in constructivist and constructionist psychotherapy, from University of Valparaiso, Chile. ykarina.m@gmail.com*

## Abstract

This article describes a participatory process in which a group of feminist, lesbian feminist and dissident activists came together to respond therapeutically to the impacts of anti-lesbian hatred. The therapeutic context was created gradually with the deployment of a set of metaphors related to textile art, inspired by the re-authoring conversations proposed by Michael White. The process included the creation of a collective document that acknowledges and honours the participants' wisdom, knowledge and particular ways of responding to anti-lesbian hatred. This work was embodied in three different forms: a patchwork quilt, a video and a fanzine. Collectivised through a definitional ceremony, these forms embraced manual-artistic creation and the materiality of fabric as valued means of expression, beyond the limits of the verbal. This work contributed to the visibility, externalisation and politicisation of acts of injustice, acknowledging forms of resistance, care and protest. The process invited us to reflect on the importance of collectivisation, fluidity and flexibility in structuring the therapeutic space, and allowed us to question the roles of therapist and activist as predefined identities.

**Key words:** *lesbian; hate crime; homophobia; collective narrative practice; activism; re-authoring; metaphor; textile art; collective document; definitional ceremony*

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I am an activist, lesbian, feminist and dissident. Belonging to this community, and living in a patriarchal culture in defiance of the dominant order, entails facing violence and marginalisation. Our dissident bodies represent a radical opposition to the political regime of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), which operates as a system of oppression in relationship with other oppressive systems, such as race and class.

The lesbian and dissident movements emerged in the Western world in the late 1960s in response to patriarchal violence, and developed in close relationship with other movements such as the second wave of feminism and the gay liberation movement, the latter gaining momentum after the Stonewall uprising (Falquet, 2006). At the same time, in predominantly white countries and also in Abya Yala<sup>1</sup>, precedents of lesbian feminism were emerging. This movement, based on separatist lesbianism, approaches relationships between women from an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist perspective (Velázquez, 2021). It takes an intersectional view, analysing sex, race, class and sexuality as fundamental political and theoretical categories to understand the subordination of women and lesbians in specific historical contexts.

In the last decade, in Chile and other regions of Abya Yala, lesbian feminist activists have mobilised the concept of anti-lesbian hatred to make visible the structural and systematic violence directed specifically towards lesbian identities.<sup>2</sup> Anti-lesbian hate crimes or lesbicides differ from femicide in that they do not usually involve domestic or family elements. These acts constitute hegemonic attempts at annihilation, motivated by hatred and the rejection of lesbian women. It is important to highlight that lesbicide, being motivated by hatred, is a specific type of femicide. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that not all femicides are lesbicides (Peres, Soares, & Días, 2018).

For this text I decided not to use the term “lesbophobia”, as it suggests personal attitudes rooted in an internal psychological issue, reducing crimes targeted at lesbians by failing to consider the complex political, social and historical framework that has perpetuated the marginalisation and stigmatisation of lesbian identities. This directly threatens our lives and the freedom to experience relationships and sovereignty over our bodies in various ways. Therefore, beyond the term itself, anti-lesbian hatred is an instrument of repression and correction. It manifests through hate speech and corrective practices, and is embodied in harassment, beatings, kidnappings, torture, sexual

assaults and lesbicides. In Chile, the inland part of the Valparaíso region is considered a “red zone” for lesbians and sex-gender dissidents, and several cases of murder motivated by anti-lesbian hatred have been reported here. In these areas, discrimination and anti-lesbian hatred continue to be hidden by the hegemonic criminal “justice” system. This increases the precarity of lesbian existence and is a manifestation of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) towards bodies considered non-productive for capitalism.

## The beginning of our story

### **We are not all here, Nicole is missing**

Our history as a collective is interwoven with a call for justice for the lesbicide of Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes. Nicole was from a town called El Melón.<sup>3</sup> *Machismo* and heteronormativity are prevalent in this small town, and lesbian and dissident visibility is severely condemned by the community. In this context, Nicole faced the challenges of living as a woman, lesbian and *camiona*<sup>4</sup>, refusing to submit her existence to patriarchal domination. She chose to embrace her lesbianism and gender expression, challenging stereotypes of femininity. Nicole confronted society with strength and determination, facing the world exactly as she was. Her very existence was an act of resistance. On 18 of June 2016, Nicole boarded a bus to return home. She was abducted and killed by the driver in an anti-lesbian hate crime. Her family, friends and acquaintances searched relentlessly for her. Her body was found on 25 June 2016.

This story had a profound impact on our lesbian and dissident community. Sara Ahmed (2004) has invited us to consider the damage inflicted on the bodies of oppressed groups as not only affecting a person’s epidermal surface but also the skin of a community. Thus, violence was inflicted not only on Nicole’s body but also on the fabric of a community that was being torn apart.

Faced with the negligence of the judicial system in addressing this crime, Nicole’s family summoned feminist, lesbian feminist and dissident activists who rallied around the Justice for Nicole Movement. The Justice for Nicole Movement was created with the goal of solving Nicole’s murder and establishing it as a reference to raise awareness of anti-lesbian hate crimes, promote the creation of self-defence networks,

mutual aid and construction of community dynamics, and lesbian feminist networks that impact society. The movement held actions throughout Chile and in other parts of the world to demand justice. As an activist, lesbian, feminist and dissident, I joined this large network. The pursuit of legal justice for Nicole dragged on for five years due to continued negligence and inaction by the state and judicial system.

### ***The proposal: Embracing the spirit of collective narrative practice***

I turned to collective narrative practice as an opportunity to continue to enrich the broad fabric of the Justice for Nicole Movement by incorporating a therapeutic/activist perspective that would allow us to create safe spaces where we could talk and reflect on our struggle and the challenges we faced during these five years of activism. My goal was to honour our acts of resistance and to continue to build collective ways to contribute to activism. To achieve this, I needed to find a practice that would really resonate with our collective experience. I came up with the idea of creating a collective narrative practice that incorporated textile art, specifically the technique of joining fabric pieces into a patchwork.

This textile metaphor, rooted in Abya Yala's feminist and lesbian feminist movements, reveals profound connections with our practices of bringing fragments together. Just as scraps of fabric can be sewn together to create a larger, more meaningful piece, we have stitched together our histories, resistances and struggles to form a collective narrative of resistance and emancipation. The practice of piecing scraps together is not only culturally appropriate in Abya Yala, it is also highly resonant with the feminist and lesbian feminist movements in these regions, in which a diversity of experiences and voices intertwine to create a fabric of community and resistance.

I also wanted to include in my proposal a form of collective documentation that would be culturally responsive to this context. The fanzine emerged as a powerful tool that could be adapted to local practices of knowledge production and distribution, allowing our stories to be told authentically and without censorship. Abya Yala's feminist and lesbian feminist movements have embraced the fanzine as a networking or weaving tool that can be subversive and emancipatory. Fanzines are manifestations of cultural resistance that defy the norms imposed by patriarchy and colonialism, as well as being tools for visibility and agency.

This proposal drew on existing collective narrative practices and expanded their horizons, diversifying them and integrating them into the particular cultural, social and political context of the lesbian feminist and dissident movement in this region. The adaption of collective narrative practice to the cultural context of Abya Yala contributed to recognising, integrating and uplifting the local traditions and practices commonly employed in the feminist and lesbian feminist movements, such as textile art, the metaphor of weaving and the fanzine.

### *Honouring stories of resistance in the face of an anti-lesbian hate crime*

Why is it important for our dissident community to honour the stories of our challenges and responses to an anti-lesbian hate crime?

David Denborough (2008) wrote that we choose paths of action based on our knowledge and skills to face the problems in our lives. However, stories of trauma and injustice are often remembered more clearly than other narratives, leaving stories of resistance in the shadows. Using methodologies that aim to make visible and share the skills and knowledge implicit in people's responses and acts of resistance, and linking these to a local cultural context, can strengthen these initiatives and enable future actions, both for ourselves and for others (Denborough, 2008).

In addition, Denborough has argued that it is possible to convene rituals and ceremonies that reinforce collective self-definitions, allowing the skills and knowledge of groups of people affected by social problems to benefit others in similar situations. These practices can therefore contribute to local social movement and to the sustainability of activist work (Denborough, 2008).

The maps of narrative practice (White, 2007) offer us a travel guide, which we can adapt to fit our geographies, conditions and worldviews.

Bearing in mind the idea of "the copying that originates" (White, 1989, p. 38), the process was assisted by metaphors for working with groups and communities, such as the Tree of Life (Ncube, 2006), and the work of the Mt Elgon Self-Help community, as described in *Raising our heads above the clouds: The use of narrative practices to motivate social action and economic development* (Denborough, 2006).

## Calling the meeting: The search for scraps

When planning the call for our first meeting, I remembered Enne, an activist and dissident whom I had met during the Justice for Nicole Movement. I recalled our stories of struggle, calling for justice in activist spaces. We met again one summer afternoon in December 2019. I shared with her the initial ideas for this project and invited her to participate.

The proposal to create a therapeutic space through textile art and fanzines in response to our five years of activism resonated with Enne, and they<sup>5</sup> took on the task of contacting other activists from the Justice for Nicole Movement. A few days later, Enne informed me that three people were interested in joining: Chio, Bego and Aloe. The network further expanded thanks to Chio, who in turn invited Maria and Karen.<sup>6</sup>

At our first meeting, I shared the three initial aspects of the proposal:

1. a therapeutic space to discuss the long and challenging path of seeking justice
2. the creation of a textile work using a “patchwork” technique
3. the creation of a collective document in fanzine format.

The group expressed interest in participating and suggested that we start a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication and organisation. Chio took charge of creating the Patchwork Project group. Aloe offered to take on the task of photographically documenting the therapeutic process.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to postpone the project for a year. However, the WhatsApp group remained active. We exchanged greetings, information and commemorative words on dates that were significant for the group.

In March 2021 we resumed the project. I messaged the WhatsApp group to invite everyone to meet. Maria communicated her need to be fully involved in the judicial process for Nicole, and for this reason decided to withdraw from the project, as did Karen.

Chio proposed that we continue to weave this network and extended the invitation to Lore, Amapola and Hortensia, activists from the Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes Feminist Self-Education School.<sup>7</sup>

We held virtual meetings in which, as well as discussing the project, I proposed a collective analysis of the problem.

In our opinion, the rise of different expressions and mechanisms of anti-lesbian hatred stems from the influence of patriarchal ideas in the contexts in which they occur. In rural areas of Chile, lesbians and gender dissidents coexist with invisibility, discrimination and violence:

There is silencing of these issues where people do not know what an anti-lesbian hate crime is, we have to fight every day to break these barriers. (Hortensia)

Being a woman, a lesbian and *camiona* is like a snowball that gets bigger, like the violence that surrounds it. (Chio)

## Co-research methodology and collective narrative practice

In this process, I adopted a co-research orientation aligned with the methodology of collective narrative practice, embracing a broad and collaborative scope. More than a research topic, this story traverses my dissident existence. Therefore, I position myself from an irrevocable place of vital resistance and shared political love, inevitably involving both my identity as a co-researcher and therapist and my identities as an activist, lesbian, dissident and so many others that have been flung into this therapeutic–activist process.

In my approach to assuming the role of a narrative practitioner, and from my influential position, I made several proposals to the group as the process developed. Throughout our activities, I took on the role of planning questions that were offered to the group as a guide each session. In narrative conversations, it is usually the therapist who asks the questions and takes notes. In this work, I expanded and dispersed the position of therapist, supporting the autonomy of other collective members by collectivising the roles of posing questions, sharing responses and taking notes. In narrative practice there is an important emphasis on the spoken word (Denborough, 2008); however, in this work, the asking of questions during conversations unfolded differently. My decision to join as a participant meant not maintaining an expert position in asking questions. Instead, after offering my questions to the collective, I joined in the conversations and shared reflections in my own evolving roles as a participant and activist.

## Creating our therapeutic space

4 June 2021

A few days before starting our work together, I reached out to the collective through our WhatsApp group and suggested that people bring to the first session a piece of cloth or an item of clothing they no longer used. This would begin to create the framework for the unfolding metaphorical work. I also invited them to bring images or personal objects to begin creating the therapeutic space from the collective's contributions.

We met in hybrid mode, both online and in person. Aloe, Enne and Amapola attended in person, bringing offerings. We began to create the therapeutic space with meaningful objects, images, incense, candles and crystals, along with a woodcut print titled "Come back to you".<sup>8</sup> Lore, Hortensia, Chio and Bego joined virtually, and shared their favourite images to include them in the space.

I had prepared some questions inspired by Michael White's (2007) re-authoring conversations map:

- Do you remember the history of that piece of cloth or garment? What meaning and/or importance does this fabric have in your life?
- What does the reuse and recycling of clothes or other things mean to you? Who was the first person you saw reusing or recycling? Do you remember that moment? What is the importance of reuse and recycling in your life?
- What do you know about sewing? How did you learn about sewing? What sewing stories do you remember? How important is sewing in your life? Who was the first person you saw sewing or engaging in a similar activity?
- What images does the practice of joining scraps or creating a patchwork bring up for you? What do you know about the practice of making patchwork? Does it have any meaning in your life? Do you remember any stories about this practice?
- Are you familiar with fanzines? What meaning do they have in your life? How did you find out about them? What was the first fanzine you read? Do you remember any topics you read about that were important to you? Do you have stories about fanzines?



Figure 1. Creating our therapeutic space. Photographs by Aloe, 2021.

To start the conversation, and in order to facilitate communication between virtual and face-to-face participants, I proposed that we split into three small rotating groups to address each topic.

At the end of each topic, I invited the group to come together and collectively share our reflections. We recorded our findings on a flip chart.



Figure 2. Personal and collective meanings. Photograph by Yas, 2021.

## Textiles

In the conversation, we honoured the stories of the fabrics and old garments, and their meanings and importance in our lives:

This piece of cloth for me has a connection to life and death. (Enne)

I have had this jumper for more than 10 years, it is my teacher jumper ... I like the idea that it can transform, it has so much history ... (Chio)

Other histories related to clothes emerged, including clothes that had been inherited and passed down between generations:

I would always inherit my siblings' clothes ... we were always inadvertently recycling in our family. (Lore)

I wore my cousins', sisters' clothes ... things of my mum's. They still hold value, even if they are faded. (Hortensia)

We remembered that reusing clothes was an ingrained practice in our families. This was ancestral knowledge for survival. We honoured the trades of sewing, weaving and repair, which have deep roots in our history and identities, passed down between generations as ancestral traditions. These trades are not only forms of economic sustenance but also expressions of cultural identity and resistance to the capitalist system. Through these practices we preserve ancestral knowledge, and promote self-reliance, community and the valuing of local resources over industrial exploitation:

Reusing clothes was standard practice in families, as survival, because there was no money to buy clothes. Before it was common for the women of the family who knitted to pull apart a knitted sweater or items that were now too small, make a ball of yarn and then knit something new ... a sweater, scarves. (Hortensia)

My grandmother is a seamstress, and the sewing machine was a gift from her, it was an exciting moment ... now sewing is my main source of income. Sewing allows me to reinvent myself, to keep the fire of creativity alive. It is a family knowledge. I like to transform clothes, it is part of my life, of my ancestors ... sewing allows me to create, repair things, fix things that are important to people, help people in their existences and diversities ... it is a way of surviving in community. (Enne)

To continue with the necessary contextualisation for the development of metaphorical work, we explored our knowledge associated with the patchwork technique:

When I lived in Peñalolén, I met the *arpilleristas* of Lo Hermida ... pieces of recycled fabric with a message ... I associate patchwork with *arpillera*<sup>9</sup>; it is a closer concept ... patchwork is more foreign, more gringo, but I know it has to do with joining pieces together with sewing and recycled fabric. I like the idea of doing it and through that remembering everything that these years of fighting for Nicole have involved. (Hortensia)

In the context of this conversation, the collective proposed replacing the term patchwork to describe our practice. We saw this as part of a broader linguistic decolonisation effort, which acquires special relevance in a historically colonised context such as ours. For this reason, we decided to call this practice *unión de retazos*, meaning "joining pieces together" or "a union of scraps".

## Fanzines

As we explored the meanings around fanzines, we defined them as "books of resistance" in constant motion:

The first fanzine I ever held was lent to me, and when I finished reading it, it said "pass it on". For me, a fanzine, is a history book. They are a form of resistance that unites us in our lives and allows us to share knowledge, to resist intellectual property in which knowledge is only for some. (Enne)

I discovered fanzines at the same time as discovering lesbian feminism, because 10 years ago, they were the only way to read alternative things ... counterculture, animal liberation, recipes ... I like that the transfer is between people, it is more accessible ... The first ones I read were about lesbian feminism, medicinal plants ... I remember that a friend made a fanzine that reclaimed madness. (Chio)

## Getting ready to sew!

### 18 June 2021

To continue generating context for the unfolding of our textile metaphors, and at the same time continue creating the therapeutic space, I proposed starting our conversation with the following questions:

- How do we prepare when we're getting ready to sew?
- What might I need for this sewing experience?

These questions led us to recall favourite stories from times when we had undertaken sewing practices. They invited us to bring this knowledge into the present and make it available for this experience.

Next, I suggested that we each create a personal sewing kit. This metaphor contributed to continuing to build the space collaboratively and in a way that was

resonant with the group, expanding the possibilities of contributing to the creation of the metaphorical work and the transformation of the therapeutic space.

In the personal sewing kit, we can include:

- sewing implements
- special insights and stories about how they were learnt
- significant rituals or symbols
- anything you might need for this sewing experience.



Figure 3. Preparing to sew. Photographs by Aloe, 2021.

After inviting the group to share our personal sewing kits collectively, we outlined a route towards the construction of a great collective sewing basket.

**Amapola's sewing kit:** thread, wool, thread cutter, stories of women who sewed for me, my grandmother, my mother. Overview of sewing in the women of my family, Nicole's altar, connection with nature, the sea, needles to lead the way, patience, calmness, tranquility.

**Enne's sewing kit:** may we always have the initiating fire, the "Vuelve a ti" woodcut print, courage, empathy, tolerance. Creating collectively, the desire to be open to experimenting, belief in oneself, being open to frustration, changing the structures, always renewing oneself, transformation. Redefining death as part of our lives, memories of my ancestors.

**Chio's sewing kit:** the "vuelve a ti" woodcut print, non-human (animal) companions (Sam and Neo), a sincere look, words with meaning, courage, respect, heartbeats, a safety pin, water, wind, forest, stars, thread to stitch up wounds, thread that sutures, this story is a wound that we have been healing, murals, songs, documentaries are born from this wound.

**Aloe's sewing kit:** white candles, the "Vuelve a ti" woodcut print, tea – in my family we always had tea at our gatherings. Scissors to cut through injustice. Sunset. A needle that carries the thread to heal.

**Lore's sewing kit:** pieces of resistance, pieces of hope, love and rebellion, tenderness, joy, humour. Sewn with the thread of affection and care. Fire, Nicole's altar, creativity, scissors to cut down the patriarchy, a special button that demands justice and revenge for Nicole and for everyone, desire to make music, a piece of my garden.

**Yas's sewing kit:** solving things with what you have on hand. Being open, first and foremost. Sunset, the sea, the forest. Patience. Threads that support and resist.

We collectively defined the tools and metaphors that we wanted to include in the collective sewing basket, leaving open the possibility of adding new elements at any time. We used a flip chart to record group notes.

## The great sewing basket and an encounter with the dragon

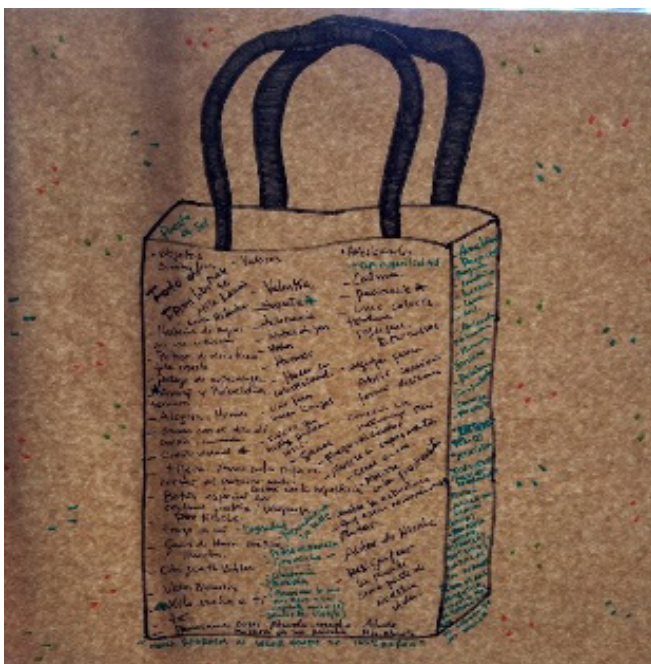


Figure 4. Collective sewing basket creation process. Photograph by Yas, 2021.



Figure 5. The dragon. Photograph by Yas, 2021.

### 2 July 2021

For this session, the collective decided to relocate to an activist space that was highly symbolic for the group: the Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes Feminist Self-Education School. We all met face-to-face. We decided to set up outdoors so we could enjoy the sun, the sea view, and the breeze. We were greeted by a host who kept the fire – the dragon<sup>10</sup> – burning throughout the day.



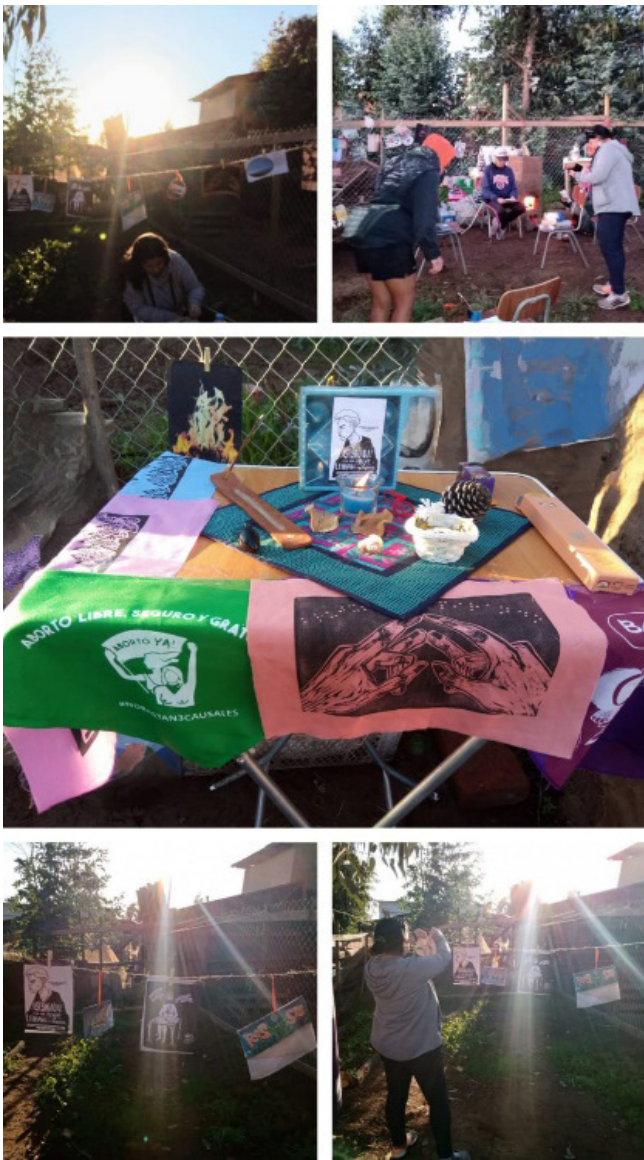


Figure 6. *The great sewing basket and an encounter with the dragon.* Photographs by Aloe and Yas, 2021.

We continued to compile an inventory of the set of metaphors in our collective sewing basket. I planned some questions that guided the beginning of the conversation:

### Scrap metaphor

- What skills, values, and pieces of knowledge would you like to bring to the table? How did you learn them?

### Wool and weaving metaphors

- What skills, values or knowledge were once woven that I now want to unweave because they no longer make sense to me?
- What skills, values or knowledges do I want to unweave, weave or reweave?

The metaphors of patches of rebellion, scraps of resistance and fragments of hope led us to identify and honour some of our underutilised, hidden or undervalued values: ancient, old-fashioned and faded knowledge. These metaphors provided a basis for identifying subjugated knowledges. They invited us to identify aspects of our lives that go beyond single-storied accounts, and that resist the norms and expectations of dominant discourses (White & Epston, 1990). This knowledge included:

That linking of the intimate and the political, of the personal and the collective, feeling pierced by this fight ... the ability to be attentive to deeply personal processes ... because this fight is so strong, with marches and creating awareness, but also this subtle way of accompanying life and pain ... humanising the fight, listening, feeling that behind this fight there is profound human suffering. (Lore)

Knowing how to take care of oneself. Knowing when it is time to stop, to channel the energy. It is okay to take a break – that is not within the political ideal, and that also makes me feel that I am failing in the fight ... trusting the pack ... I hold back to give it my all later, pacing myself. Deconstructing the idea that to fight, one must be a martyr. There can be a handoff to someone else. (Enne)

To further explore the textile metaphor, we drew on the knowledge of our ancestors, who wove, unwove and reweave. We explored skills and knowledge that were once woven and that we want to unweave today, and reweave again. This conversation led us to a process of deconstruction of dominant discourses and exploration of preferred stories.

Something that was tightly woven and that I want to undo and weave again is language. I want to weave an inclusive language ... to unweave the binary language imposed by the RAE<sup>11</sup> and incorporate all experiences. There are many experiences that have been ignored. (Aloe)

We closed this meeting with an enjoyable conversation by the fire. The dragon's flames danced with the cadence of the sea breeze. The heat embraced us, sheltered us.

## Completing the great sewing basket and threading our needles

16 July 2021

A collective sewing basket was created using recycled materials – an unused cardboard box, scraps of paper and plastic bags, among other things – to continue honouring recycling practices. We put sewing implements in it together with small notes, thus maintaining a written reminder of the metaphors we had been developing.



Figure 7. The great collective sewing basket completed. Photograph by Aloe, 2021.

Implements and metaphors that initially made up the collective sewing basket:

- scraps of rebellion
- scraps of resistance
- scraps of hope
- wool for weaving, unweaving and reweaving
- the needle that leads the way
- the threads that unite with love and attention
- threads to stitch up wounds
- threads that resist
- buttons that demand revenge and justice for Nicole and for all
- scissors to cut through injustice, the patriarchy
- the activating fire
- Nicole's altar.

To contribute to the unfolding of the metaphors, I prepared some questions to begin the conversation:

Metaphor of the needle that leads the way

- What pathways do we want to open?
- What paths do we want to travel?
- Who do we want to join us on those paths?
- What gives the needle the strength to move forward?

Metaphor of the threads that heal, resist and bind with care and affection

- What acts of resistance hold us together?
- What has sustained this collective?
- What has allowed us to heal our wounds?

Metaphor of buttons demanding revenge and justice for Nicole and for all

- How have we demanded justice?

Metaphor of scissors for cutting through injustice and the patriarchy

- What do we want to cut or transform?
- What are the hopes, dreams or desires that I harbour for myself, for the community, region or for forms of social or political change?

We began by exploring the metaphor of the needle that leads the way, and at the same time, as decided by the group, we threaded our needles and began to create our personal textile piece as we spoke, generating resonance between verbal narration and materiality as means of expression:

I want to travel pathways of breaking down prejudices and limitations ... I want to be accompanied by people who resonate with the same vibe, to seek out those connections ... With Nicole's struggle, I have been transforming, meeting people, chances that have taught me many things ... resistance, collectivity, where my paths lead. (Enne)



Figure 8. Completing the great sewing basket and threading our needles. Photographs by Aloe, 2021.

The metaphor of threads allowed us to honour our personal and collective acts of resistance:

I feel that the most important act of resistance that unites us is to exist, to be who I decide to be. It is also a political act to decide to continue living ... to stand firm, to discover other wounds, other existences, to keep each other company, shelter each other. (Enne)

Existing is already an act of resistance, and sometimes we resist and exist in different ways, as we see through Nicole, but not being visible is also a value and a struggle. (Lore)

The metaphor of buttons led us to elevate the ways in which we demand justice, recognising our diverse responses to anti-lesbian hatred:

For me, our justice has been the perseverance over time. Attach those buttons that demand justice, that resist, because the stitching that was done was so well, there were many stitches: heart, time, life, empathy, conscience ... because there are lives different from ours, but there is one point that unites us, and that point is to belong to a dissident group. (Chio)

The scissors symbolise a tool that cuts and transforms, providing openings to talk about our dreams, desires and hopes:

Transforming society ... I have hope that we can be at peace being and living as we are ... I trust

that things can change little by little. We are in times of transition, and we are also the transition of breaking the status quo. (Enne)

## The expansion of the great sewing basket and Margarita's visit

7 August 2021

For this meeting, Enne brought in their sewing machine, named Margarita. To integrate Margarita into the therapeutic context, I invited Enne to tell us about Margarita's history and talk about its importance in her life:

Its name, Margarita, is in honour of my grandmother, because she gave it to me ... and because it means a lot to me to continue to keep this ancestral knowledge alive ... Margarita has really supported me because I sustain myself through sewing. (Enne)



Figure 9. Margarita the sewing machine next to the great collective sewing basket. Photograph by Aloe, 2021.

We continued to explore the metaphors we had been working with. I suggested expanding the great sewing basket to include other sewing implements that might be associated with everyday knowledge:

What do we know about: pins, thimbles, velcro, pincushions, measuring tapes?

This time I asked the following questions to help us collectively define the metaphor of the pincushion,

a place for pins and needles to rest. This led us to explore alternative stories, knowledge and skills.

#### Metaphor of the pincushion

- Faced with challenges, what helps you return to moments of calm?
- What spaces do you enjoy?
- What spaces give you comfort or rest?

Learning to trust the pack around me, to trusting others. I rest and enjoy the community. It relaxes me, helps me to let go of control. (Enne)

Being by the sea, on a rock listening to the ocean, stopping for a while to see where everything is, clearing doubts, more paths open up and certain actions become engaging again. (Amapola)

Gradually, the expansion of the great collective sewing basket slowed down, and we agreed that we now had everything we needed to continue. We threaded our needles and resumed our personal textile projects. Some people completed their individual piece, and so, stitch by stitch, Margarita put the pieces together, and the united scrap quilt began to take shape.

## Stitching stories and Facilita's visit

**30 August 2021**

For this meeting, Amapola brought her sewing machine, Facilita. This time, the collective members took the lead in asking Amapola about Facilita's story and its importance in her life.

Facilita was a gift from my mother. When she moved to the south a few years ago, she left it to me. It is like an inheritance because it has been in the family for a long time and it's super supportive ... Its name honours that: it means easy to use. (Amapola)



Figure 11. Facilita the sewing machine. Photograph by Aloe, 2021.

In this session, we talked about our experience of our time together and its effects on our lives. To prepare the questions, I drew on the questions developed by Adler et al. (2008), adapting them for this session:

#### Sewing stories

- Which session(s) do you remember as particularly significant or important?
- What effects has gathering together had on you?
- Which areas of our lives have been touched by these encounters?
- What values that you hold have been honoured in these conversations?
- What has been made possible through this project of sewing together in this space?
- Where might this experience take us?

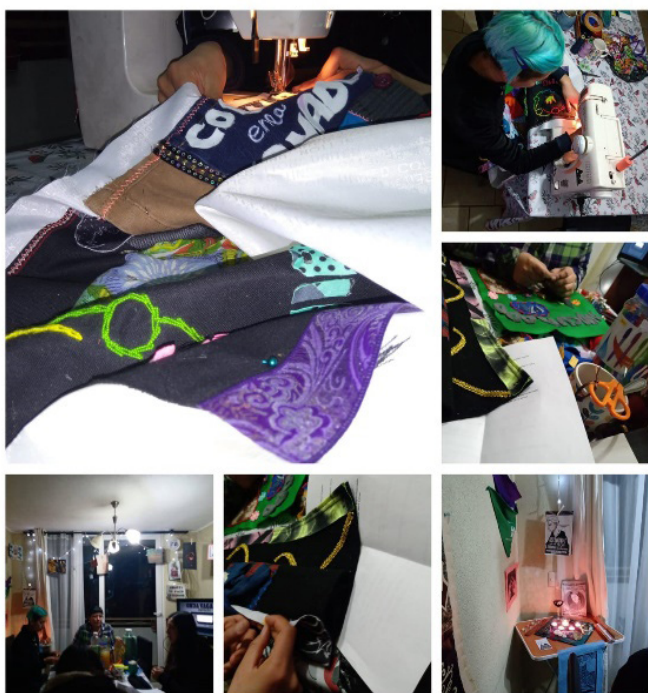


Figure 10. The expansion of the great sewing basket and Margarita's visit. Photographs by Aloe, 2021.

The collective highlighted several important meetings, especially “the encounter with the dragon”.

It’s one of the most significant moments because that day we were all there, watching the sunset, feeling the warmth of the dragon. (Aloe)

This process fostered our desire to continue contributing to activism. It offered a safe and therapeutic space, allowing us to connect with the present and with what we value:

This has been a different way of healing in relation to what happened to Nicole: knowing the strength that weaves us together fighting the fight, retelling our stories, exploring our values and taking a stand. I think we are people with a lot of courage, and I am grateful for that. (Chio)

In addition, our work together contributed to mobilising concrete actions. During and after this process, we convened and joined different spaces of activism that connected us to the broader fabric of this region.

The collective valued several aspects of this process: a safe space, active listening, respect, comfort,

fluid interaction, and the participation of the entire collective in creating the space.

After this conversation, we returned to our sewing to finish joining our personal textile pieces together, with Facilita’s assistance.

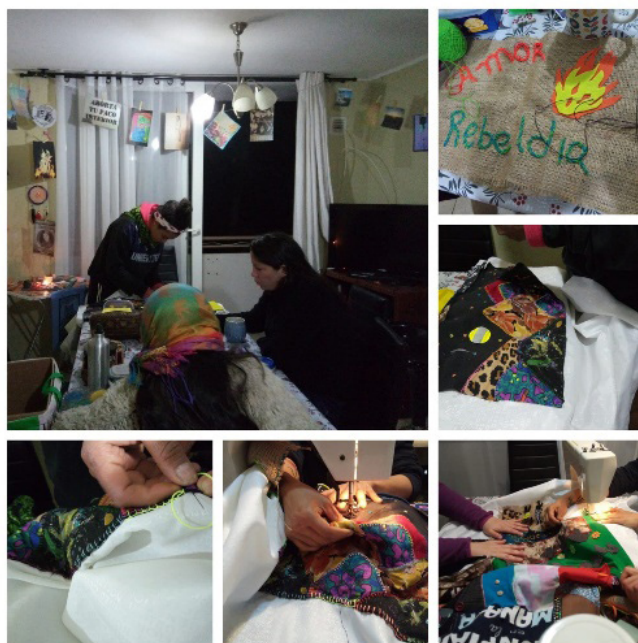


Figure 12. Stories of seams & Facilita’s visit. Photographs by Yas, 2021.



Figure 13. The completed quilt. Photograph by Aloe, 2021.

This quilt, the union of scraps we constructed, expresses the things we value. We transformed our pain into a bright expression of life, weaving our dreams and hopes through this collective expression of art and love.

## *The creation of a fanzine: The book of resistance*

**25 September 2021**

Earlier, I had collected the material we had generated across our five sessions together and drafted collective document. When we met again, each participant read a paragraph of the document aloud. This was a crucial step in the process of creating the collective document (Denborough, 2008) as it allowed the participants to ensure that the document reflected their unique skills and knowledges accurately and in detail. Following Denborough (2008), we implemented a process for members of the group to make changes and additions, thus collectively creating a document that would represent us in our unity and diversity. Once the revisions and adjustments of the document were completed, we transformed it into a fanzine.

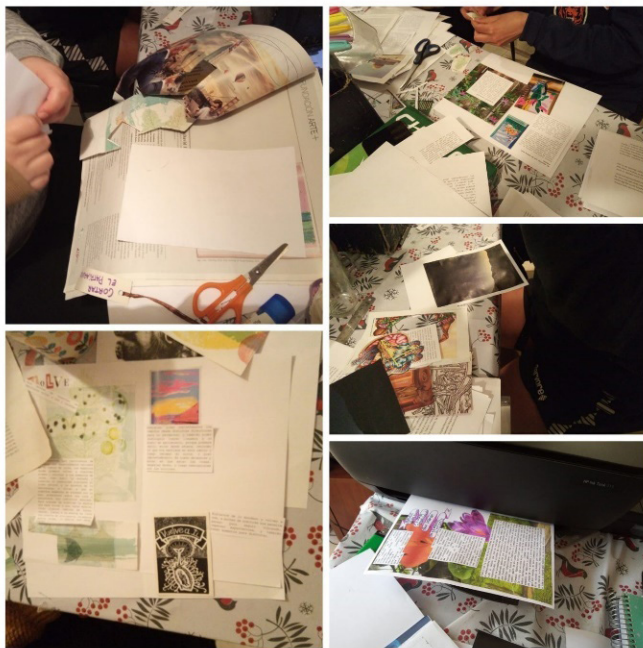


Figure 14. The creation of the fanzine: The book of resistance. Photographs by Yas, 2021.

Video has also been used as a form for collective narrative documents (Denborough, 2008), and we decided to take up this tool, producing a collective audiovisual document.

## **Preparing a definitional ceremony**

We reviewed the idea of holding a definitional ceremony: what this would consist of, its stages, and how we wanted it to unfold. Any questions or concerns were addressed.

We decided that an intimate venue would be appropriate, and that we would invite no more than four people to attend as witnesses. The following questions guided our discussion about how to invite.

### Questions to select the audience

- With which person, group or community would we like to share our work with?
- What kind of audience might resonate with this experience?

We agreed to invite an audience of four activists, carefully chosen for this moment. One of the people invited was Bego, who had participated in the first sessions of our group before withdrawing for personal reasons. The other three invitees were Dani, Sol and Nicole, activists involved in the Justice for Nicole Movement.

## *Definitional ceremony: We exist and resist as connected pieces*

**17 October 2021**

To complete our process, we met at the Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes Feminist Self-Education School. The dragon's flames began their dance, and everything was set. The audience was present.

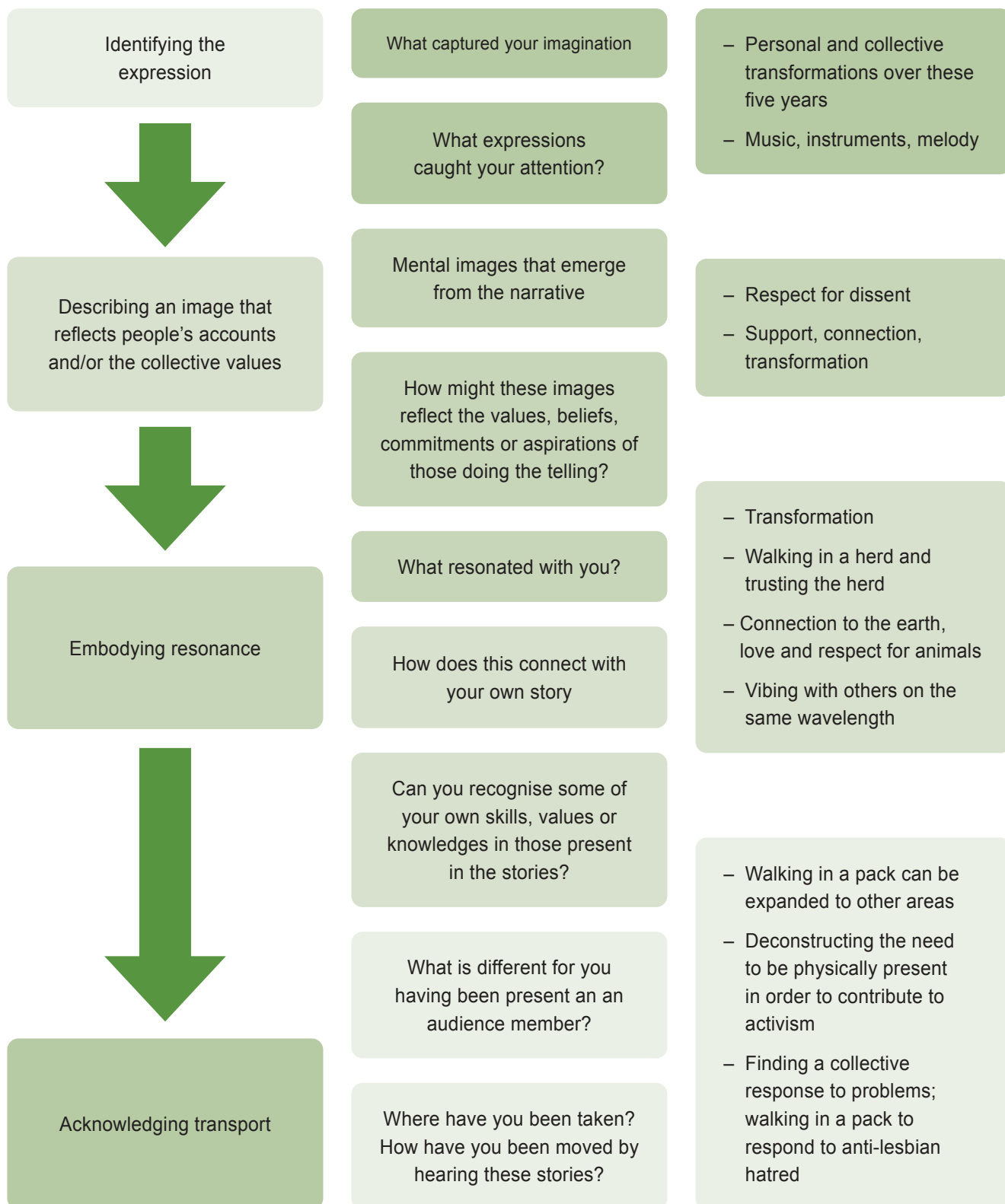
Before conducting the definitional ceremony, I followed White's (2007) suggestion to prepare the outsider witnesses. I met with our invited audience to explain that they would be participating in a particular tradition of recognition that can enrich our collective stories. I invited the witnesses to engage in a retelling based on attentive listening and focusing on particular aspects of the story that captured their attention. There were asked to express these retellings in non-evaluating ways, responding from their personal perspective about what stood out to them and how it affected them. They were asked to refrain from many of the common ways in which people respond to others' life stories, such

as such as offering opinions, giving advice, making judgements or expressing praise (White, 2007, p. 165). In addition, I took ethical responsibility for the consequences of the retellings. Later, I described the four categories of inquiry reflected in my questions, and provided the outsider witnesses with a copy of these.

To carry out our ritual, we followed the definitional ceremony structure described by White (2007), which

consists of three distinct stages: the telling of the meaningful story by the group at the centre of the ceremony – in this case the telling was done through a video; the outsider witnesses’ retelling of the story; and the retelling of the outsider witnesses’ retelling by those at the centre of the ceremony.

At the end of the definitional ceremony, the collective distributed copies of the fanzine to the audience. We



enjoyed an afternoon of celebration, contemplating the sea and the sunset, and being embraced by the warmth of the dragon. There was laughter and love – a lot of love, the kind of love that gives us strength.



Figure 15. Definitional ceremony: We exist and resist as united pieces. Photographs by Aloe, 2021.

forms of activism, from direct and visible actions to those that might commonly be seen as small or trivial. We also confronted and honoured our contradictions as activists, giving voice to our discomforts. Jules Falquet (2022) offered a critical perspective on the complexities and contradictions within social movements, in which certain actions can perpetuate existing power relations or exclude certain groups, highlighting the importance of addressing intersectionality and the different dimensions of oppression.

### Artmaking as central to this process

Usually in therapeutic practice, emphasis is placed on conversational processes, with non-verbal processes often given little attention. In this work, the artmaking neither replaced nor supplemented the conversational process. It is not my intention to suggest that one is more valuable than the other. Rather, for us there was an interaction between both practices, resulting in a multiplicity. Our collective documents are concrete examples, unfolding in three forms: a fanzine, the united scrap quilt and the video. Our quilt can be understood as a non-verbal collective narrative document. In its creation, our stories of resistance, and our values, dreams and hopes were translated into images, shapes, colours and textures. When contemplating this visual collective document, multiple images may emerge, and along with them infinite meanings, metaphors, suggesting “a multi-textured story” (Denborough, 2008, p. 41).

Textile art enabled us to tell our stories, make meaning and generate strategies of collective resistance (Sánchez-Aldana et al., 2019). The united scrap quilt and the fanzine have become texts that story the identities of those of us who are not part of the dominant discourses or the hegemonic stories (Espinoza et al., 2019). They allowed us to raise our voices, resist injustices and preserve our memories.

### Final comments

Providing a metaphorical framework in a context that allows individuals to draw from their own knowledge can empower a community to adopt, replicate and transform the metaphor. This reflects the spirit of collective narrative practice: it is by the community and for community.

### The collective that has become therapeutic

The role of the direct-action activist and the role of therapist are based on predefined identities, structures that must be adhered to and followed. Deleuze might describe such normative positions as “majoritarian” (in Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In this process, we collectively threw ourselves into an unknown and unexplored territory in which dominant identities were destabilised and deconstructed, challenging the roles of therapist and activist to the point of rendering them unrecognisable from the most common perspectives.

By throwing these predefined identities into the dragon’s fire, the collective that becomes therapeutic releases its political and therapeutic energy, mobilising us to weave and interweave in a new, shared fabric.

In activist contexts, certain actions are valued while others are dismissed and undervalued. These sharply defined structures perpetuate oppressive and classificatory dominant discourses. During our work together, we questioned and challenged dominant structures and discourses that perpetuate oppression. One of the ways we did this was by recognising all



We hope that our experience of working with collective narrative practices can contribute to others, and we invite the continued expansion and transformation of the sewing metaphors we developed. In this work, the collective sewing basket continued to grow until we decided that we had talked about all we needed to talk about. Even so, we remain hopeful that its expansion will continue in multiple ways, accompanying other communities. The great sewing basket is timeless, knows no borders, and is available to all.

## Acknowledgments

This work would have been impossible without the participants, who allowed its dissemination as a testimony to our resistance and strength, and to contribute to other communities facing similar challenges. My thanks to this collective.

This article is an original work. It is enriched by the research project titled *Collective narrative practices in an activist context, challenges and responses to an anti-lesbian hate crime*, which I completed as part of a master's degree at the University of Valparaíso, Chile. The thesis is available at [https://repositoriobibliotecas.uv.cl/handle/uvscil/10383?locale-attribute=es\\_ES](https://repositoriobibliotecas.uv.cl/handle/uvscil/10383?locale-attribute=es_ES)

## Editors' acknowledgments

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is a term adopted by Indigenous communities to refer to South America.
- <sup>2</sup> The concept of "lesbo-odio" was coined by lesbian feminists and dissidents in Chile to talk about the murder of Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes. It was then adopted by the broader lesbian feminist movement in Abya Yala. The direct translation of the concept is "lesbo-hate"; however, in this article it has been decided to translate this as "anti-lesbian hate".
- <sup>3</sup> A town located in Nogales, in the province of Quillota, Valparaíso Region, Chile. It is a small town with a population of around 20,000.
- <sup>4</sup> In Latin America, *camiona* refers to lesbian women who adopt certain characteristics associated with masculinity, both in their appearance and their behaviour. Like the English expressions "butch", "dyke" and "tomboy", it has been reclaimed by lesbians.
- <sup>5</sup> Throughout the process, we sought to respect, honour and make visible the diverse gender identities that were part of this collective, and among those who might wish to join us through this document. I have tried to use language that includes all identities, adopting the use of preferred pronouns throughout this article.
- <sup>6</sup> Maria, Nicole's cousin, has been one of the leading voices demanding justice in relation to Nicole's murder. Together with other activists, Maria and Karen worked tirelessly to bring attention to this crime, denounce the irregularities in the investigation, and demand that those responsible be brought to legal justice. In 2019 they staged a building occupation in prosecutor's office with three other activists to demand progress in the investigation. This resulted in the criminalisation of the five activists.
- <sup>7</sup> The Escuela de Autoformación Feminista Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes collective was founded in 2017 with the aim of fostering feminisms in the Central Coast region. Its purpose is to build a self-education school in areas where feminism is not so visible, and to make known cases of anti-lesbian hatred, including the murder of Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes.
- <sup>8</sup> "Vuelve a ti". This image was highly symbolic and significant for this collective. It is a woodcut print that was created by participants of this collective and that was present as an offering at the two-year commemoration of the murder, placed on an altar in the place where Nicole was found.
- <sup>9</sup> Arpillera can be translated as burlap, but it describes a three-dimensional textile picture constructed from patchwork, applique and embroidery. This Chilean artform has often been used to depict political themes and local struggles.
- <sup>10</sup> The dragon is a wood-fired oven, built with brick, mud and straw. It was built and offered to the Nicole Saavedra Bahamondes Feminist Self-Education School by a dissident activist from the Central Coast who decided to share her skills by making these ovens in community spaces, using the natural resources available on site.
- <sup>11</sup> Real Academia Española or Royal Spanish Academy. This Spain's official institution for regulating the Spanish language. It is a symbol and mechanism of ongoing colonisation.

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