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Dialogic Literary Gatherings: Opening Up Spaces of Meaning Creation and Social Transformation for Roma People

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Date of publication: July 15th, 2021

Edition period: July 2021 – November 2021

To cite this article: Lopez de Aguilera, G. (2021). Dialogic Literary Gatherings: opening up spaces of meaning creation and social transformation for Roma people. *International Journal of Roma Studies*, 3(2), 131-151. doi: 10.17583/ijrs.2021.8633

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/ijrs.2021.8633>

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Dialogic Literary Gatherings: Opening Up Spaces of Meaning Creation and Social Transformation for Roma People

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Abstract

Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) were created in La Verneda-Sant Martí Adult School, located in one of the poorest working-class neighborhoods in Barcelona at the time, in 1978, by a group of non-academic women known as the “other women”. They were created to tear down elitist walls impeding low SES, migrant, people with no academic studies or from other at-risk groups from reading universal literary classics. Roma people have participated in the DLGs since its very beginning. None of the participants in the first DLGs had university studies, and yet, they were able to read, understand, enjoy and debate works by Kafka, Lorca, or Joyce, among others. As extensive research has shown, DLGs have promoted benefits among these populations, from fostering access to higher education, increasing self-esteem, or becoming transformative agents. DLGs are based on dialogic learning, which is comprised of seven principles: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity, and equality of differences. This paper focuses on two of these principles: creation of meaning and transformation. Through reviewing empirical works about DLGs in Spain with adult participants, including Roma, I argue that the dialogic interactions around universal classic literature promote participants’ creation of meaning and transformations in their own lives and social contexts.

Keywords: dialogic literary gatherings; Roma community; social transformation; creation of meaning; dialogic interactions; classic literature

Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas: Abriendo Espacios de Creación de Sentido y Transformación Social para el Pueblo Gitano

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Resumen

Las Tertulias Literarias Dialógicas (TLD) fueron creadas en la Escuela de Adultos La Verneda-Sant Martí, uno de los barrios obreros más pobres de Barcelona entonces, en 1978, por un grupo de mujeres no académicas llamadas "las otras mujeres". Se crearon para derribar muros elitistas que impedían la lectura de clásicos universales a personas de bajo nivel socioeconómico, inmigrantes, sin estudios académicos o de otros grupos excluidos. Gitanos y gitanas han participado en las TLD desde sus inicios. Ninguno de los participantes en las primeras TLD tenía estudios universitarios y, sin embargo, lograron leer, comprender, disfrutar y debatir a autores como Kafka, Lorca, o Joyce. Además, como demuestran las evidencias, han promovido beneficios entre estas poblaciones, como fomentar el acceso a educación superior, aumentar su autoestima, o convertirse en agentes transformadores. Las TLD se basan en el aprendizaje dialógico, compuesto de siete principios: diálogo igualitario, inteligencia cultural, transformación, dimensión instrumental, creación de sentido, solidaridad, e igualdad de diferencias. Este trabajo se centra en dos principios: creación de sentido y transformación. A través de la revisión de trabajos empíricos sobre TLD en España con personas adultas, incluido personas gitanas, argumento que las interacciones dialógicas en torno a la literatura clásica universal promueven creación de sentido y transformaciones de participantes en sus vidas y contextos sociales.

Palabras clave: tertulias literarias dialógicas; pueblo gitano; transformación social; creación de sentido; interacciones dialógicas; literatura clásica

Writer Carlos Mayoral has declared: “I deny to believe that anyone has enjoyed reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses*”. I only went to school until I was eight, but I have already read it four times and now I’m in the fifth. (...) I belong to a gathering of universal classic literature in which we read many classics (...). We enjoy the Reading of *Ulysses* in the gathering

Ana Lebron, participant in a DLG and feminist activist

In this quote, Ana Lebron vindicates her right to read and enjoy a book she has freely chosen to read. She belongs to a movement, mainly formed by “other women” like her, with no academic studies, which organized at the end of the 1970s to overcome the power relations which had excluded them not only from the possibility of reading classic literature, but from the capacity to read and enjoy it. It was considered by reproductionist authors that they did not have the capacity nor the motivation to take up such readings, that it was only enjoyable and understandable by the elites (Bourdieu, 1979). Seeking for freedom to read whatever they wanted, they gathered and decided to read the best literary works of humankind, often known as universal classic books, and they loved them so much that they decided to read more classics. Ramon Flecha, who was working with adults at the time, provided them with the theoretical and pedagogic base, known as dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), and together they created Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs).

DLGs are among the Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) which are improving academic achievements and social cohesion among Roma communities, contributing to reducing the already existing inequalities among such vulnerable community (Flecha & Soler, 2013). In spite of racist and reproductionist stereotypes that portray Roma families as not interested in education, research has shown that when they are included in SEAs which seek all children’s academic and social success, they are key agents of social change for the Roma community and society at large (Aiello et al., 2019; Gírbés-Peco et al., 2019; Khalfaoui et al., 2020; Munté et al., 2020). Envisioning all human beings’ potentialities rather than focusing on reproductionist speeches, DLGs transform their own expectations and self-image by opening up a dialogic space to read, debate and enjoy some of the best literary works of all time (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021).

This paper focuses on how Dialogic Literary Gatherings promote two of the seven principles of dialogic learning, namely creation of meaning and transformation, among adult learners participating in DLGs in Spain and on how dialogic interactions and the use of classic literature, two of the main pillars of DLGs, promote participants' creation of meaning and transformations in the labor, family and/or social spheres.

First, the context in which DLGs were created, what they are, and their theoretical underpinnings will be outlined, as well as the Roma community's role, together with other vulnerable communities, in this context. Next, the methodology and findings will be exposed. Finally, some limitations, remarks for future research and conclusions driven from this paper are explained.

DLGs, Defying Determinism During the Spanish Transition to Democracy

Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) were created in 1978 in Barcelona (Spain) in one of its poorest neighborhoods at the time, only three years after Franco's dictatorship ended in 1975. It was the so-called "transition" to democracy period, in which people saw a glimpse of light and hope after decades of living in fear, despair, and repression during the dictatorship. Nonetheless, it soon became obvious that the democratic transition was not a rupture with the Franco regime, but a reform: most of the leaders of the "Movimiento" (the single political party during the dictatorship) started to occupy positions in the new "democratic" parties, bringing with them their old ideas disguised in new discourses (Climent & Joanpere, 2018). It was also a time in which, in Europe, postmodernist and structuralist theories claimed that not only was transformation often not desired, but it was seen as impossible by many (Flecha, 2000). Reproductionist models "proclaimed that education reproduced social inequalities and that nothing could be done about it" (Flecha, 2000, p. 12).

Bourdieu (1979), for instance, with his concept of habitus – defined by, at the same time that it defines, each class' taste – claimed that people in higher classes have a higher cultural capital than people in lower classes, as the former have a natural preference for that kind of culture because they are socialized in it at a young age. Such claims caused negative consequences for

adults from low SES backgrounds, with no academic studies, or from ethnic minorities, such as the Roma.

Fortunately, at that time there were also academics who believed that not only can education transform lives and society, but that it has the responsibility to do so. In Freire's words, "we are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation" (in [Flecha, 2000](#)). Authors such as Freire and Flecha, among many others, have dedicated their lives and careers to understanding and propelling the transformative power of dialogue. In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", one of the most read books in pedagogy worldwide, Paulo Freire defines dialogue as follows:

Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. (...) It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialogues; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind.

DLGs break the social stereotype that non-academic people cannot read, enjoy and debate classic literature ([Torras-Gómez et al., 2021](#)). With the creation of DLGs, Flecha and adult participants with no academic studies showed that dialogue is a key to social transformation. Roma participants like Antonio, whose story will be shared later, show that engaging in dialogues that connect the best literary works with their own life experiences and sentiments contributes to crafting desired futures for themselves and their families ([Aubert, 2015](#); [Munté, 2015](#)), despite concepts such as habitus which hinder their educational and social success.

Dialogic Learning: When Language Becomes the Center of Human Lives

DLGs are based on the theory and practice of dialogic learning, developed by Ramon Flecha ([2000](#)). The dialogic turn in the Spanish society, in which the dictatorship was replaced by a democracy, had a great influence in science and education. Dialogue opened up new possibilities in which learning and development are no longer based on the mere transmission and reception of knowledge, but learners become the protagonists of their own learning and development processes, and knowledge is constructed between the teacher

and learner (Freire, 2018). Dialogue, both among peers and between students and other adults, enables students to reach the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986), to reach new horizons, to go further and deeper. Dialogue is what distinguishes human beings from other animals and allows us to transform our relationships, contexts and societies into more egalitarian and democratic ones; language is the tool through which not only do human beings interact and learn (Vygotsky, 1978), but through which we become more critical and capable of transforming our environment and our relationships with other human beings (Freire, 2018). Dialogue, therefore, has shifted learning and development from an individualist stand to a social one, being understood as intersubjective, sociocultural processes (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1996; Wells, 1999).

Dialogic learning was developed based on these authors' contributions about the social nature of learning, and the recognition that the learning environment must acknowledge the socio-cultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). It is grounded on seven principles: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity, and equality of differences (Flecha, 2000).

Although all principles of dialogic learning are equally important and essential for learning to be truly dialogic, in this paper I will focus on the principles of meaning creation and transformation, as they are the ones I am most interested in. To define both principles, I will draw on Flecha's (2000) definitions. Meaning creation is contextualized in what Weber (1978) defines as the loss of meaning in our societies due to the replacement of communities by bureaucratic systems and the colonization of the social, political, spiritual, and work worlds (Flecha, 2000). As a response to this, meaning creation refers to every human being's capacity to give meaning to our lives through constantly generating new dreams, feelings and actions in our relationships which "help direct new social changes in a positive way", and this is achieved through dialogue, as "meaning is recreated when interpersonal interaction is actually directed by ourselves" by confronting the "antihumanist reductionism supporting the systemic colonization of everyday life that we now face" (Flecha, 2000, p. 18). DLGs promote people's meaning creation by conversing in a dialogic way about some of humanity's most profound issues, which are often criticized, such as the slaves Aquiles is offered in The Iliad in

exchange of going to war, or projected in participants' past, present and future lives.

Transformation, on the other hand, refers to transforming "people's relationship to their environment" (Flecha, 2000, p. 12), going back to Freire's definition of human beings as transformative, not accommodative. Desired transformations are achieved through dialogue, co-created among different people, and not imposed by only a few (Flecha, 2000). In this paper, transformation is analyzed in terms of improvements in people's lives in the labor, family and/or social spheres. By participating in the DLGs, adults from vulnerable communities such as the Roma, who have often been denied access to classic books, transform those difficulties to freely read what they want into possibilities for reading books which have often been considered apt only for a few. Transforming these impositions changes their self-perceptions, and this encourages them to overcome more barriers (Munté, 2015).

Based on these understandings of creation of meaning and transformation, in this paper I will argue that the dialogic interactions and the use of classic texts, the two main pillars of DLGs which will be explained more in depth in the following section, promote creation of meaning and transformations in participants' lives and contexts.

Two Fundamental Pillars of DLGs: Dialogic Interactions and Classic Literature

DLGs were identified by the INCLUD-ED research project (European Commission, FP6, 2006–2011) as one of the Successful Educational Actions (SEA) (R. Flecha, 2015) which were contributing to improving both the instrumental and social dimensions of learning in those European schools in which they were implemented.ⁱ

DLGs are a dialogic space based on the dialogic reading of the best literary works of humankind. Participants freely and democratically decide the classic book they want to read and discuss in the gathering. When somebody questions their choice of reading universal classics of literature, they tell them they want to read the same books that authors such as Virginia Woolf used to read. Once the book to be read is chosen, every week the group decides the number of pages or chapters they want to discuss in the following gathering. At home, participants read the pages agreed upon and choose a paragraph or

sentence they would like to share with the rest of the participants and think of an argument to explain why they have chosen it. During the gathering, each person who wants to share the paragraph or sentence they have chosen, they provide their argument for why they have chosen it, and then the floor is open for the discussion among all participants. There is always a moderator – who is usually either a teacher or one of the participants, in which case participants rotate this role every week to make it more egalitarian – who ensures that the dialogues are egalitarian, that is, that everybody has the same right to voice their opinion without imposing it to the group.

The aim of the DLG is not to reach consensus on the text's or author's meaning; rather, it is to have a dialogue among people's different interpretations, feelings and ideas, and consensus is that all ideas are respected, regardless of who says them as long as they respect Human Rights. For instance, following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no one in the DLG can say that Roma people are dumb or sexist, or that a woman does not have the right to read the books she wants. The premise, therefore, is that participants' contributions to the dialogue are based on arguments, what is understood by Habermas' (1981) concept of validity claims, rather than on impositions, referring to the authors' power claims (Habermas, 1981). This is a core criterium of the DLG as it entails that all participants and all ideas are equally valid and respected as long as arguments are provided and respect towards Human Rights is granted (Soler Gallart, 2017).

Based on Habermas' concepts of power claims and validity claims, scholars such as Soler and Flecha (2013) use the distinction between power interactions and dialogic interactions (Searle & Soler, 2004). Whereas in power interactions opinions are imposed according to the power position the speaker holds, there is lack of honesty and often of consensus, in dialogic interactions arguments are required to justify a person's claims, they are based on honesty and consensus without coercion (Soler & Flecha, 2010; Soler Gallart, 2017). Of course, even in dialogic societies and spaces, such as DLGs, power interactions can still be found: "in each relation diverse interactions intervene which can be, at the same time, power or dialogic interactions" (Soler & Flecha, 2010, p. 369-370). Indeed, even when dialogic interactions prevail over power interactions, there are no linguistic interactions which do not involve linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1979). Nevertheless, dialogic spaces such as DLGs, in which self-reflection and self-criticism are constant and

imperative to overcome power relations and power interactions, are what Erik O. Wright (2010) defined as a real utopia: although utopias do not exist, there are real utopias which are getting closer to them.

The other premise in DLGs is that only the best literary works of all time, often considered classic literature, is read. Although DLGs are not free from power relations, the main power relations participants in the first DLG faced came from the people who tried to impose other criteria for the book selection, limiting participants' freedom to choose which books to read. Still today, it is frequent for many people who approach the gatherings, for instance academic people, to criticize what they are reading and try to impose other books. But in the more than 40 years that they have been participating in the DLGs, they have not given up their freedom, they have not subdued to such pressures and impositions, and they keep deciding what they want to read. Their response to these scholars who try to impose other readings in DLGs has always been: "don't you read whatever you want to read? Then let us read what we want to read".

Therefore, by not subduing to those who questioned their desire to read classic books, they achieved the first transformation of DLGs: to overcome the power relations which impose other readings that are not classics. The overcoming of these impositions encouraged them to overcome and transform other power relations in the labor, family and/or social spheres, as will be shown later in the paper. Among other things, this transformation led them to create La Verneda-Sant Martí Adult School in 1978. Being one of the poorest working-class neighborhoods at that time, neighbors from La Verneda-Sant Martí dreamed of having a center that provided educational opportunities for all and, hence, they created the first School as a Learning Community (Aubert et al., 2016; Sánchez-Aroca, 1999). Since its creation, the school has helped adults from migrant, working-class or Roma communities, many of them illiterate, read and write, contributing to their labor insertion or pursue of higher studies, among others (Aubert et al., 2016). Its truly democratic organization and functioning, a characteristic of Learning Communities, has made La Verneda a success example that has since its creation improved the lives of the neighborhood residents (Aubert et al., 2016).

Classic books hold issues which have historically concerned and moved human beings, such as Sapho's poems about love, Ulysses' journey back home, Romeo and Juliet's constant fight for love, Kafka's criticism of

alienation due to a lack of communication among individuals, or Lorca's dignifying depictions of Roma people. Hence, participants in DLGs from all over the world and different ages do not find it hard to make connections of the texts with their own lives, experiences and dreams. By making access to these works a reality for them, by giving them voice to speak and discuss the feelings and ideas that reading them arouses in them, DLGs are a democratic space based on the transformative power of dialogue and classic literature.

Methods

The purpose of this paper is to shed a light on how DLGs promote adults participating in them to create meaning in their lives and become transformative agents of social change in the labor, family and/or social spheres. I am particularly interested in reviewing whether and how the dialogic interactions and the use of classic literature promote these impacts.

To that end, three databases have been used for this literature review: Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. The words search in each database were "dialogic literary gatherings" and "dialogic gatherings". From the search in these databases, 15 empirical articles, 11 of which appear in more than one database searched, form the corpus reviewed in this paper.

In an initial search, by typing those two keywords, 66 papers were found (30 in Scopus, 31 in WoS, and 5 in ERIC). From these, 51 were discarded by looking at the abstracts or, when necessary, at the methods sections, either because they were not empirical research articles, they were not about DLGs, or they were not focused on adults participating in DLGs in Spain.

Results and discussion

The articles reviewed for this study depict the lives of people living at the margins of society, such as the Roma who, despite the multiple barriers imposed by social structures to improve their situations of exclusion (Khalfaoui, 2019; Valero et al., 2020), have participated in DLGs and, thanks to their participation, they have felt more empowered to find meaning in their lives and transform them. Although a number of impacts have been found in the articles reviewed, I have found four prominent impacts in which creation of meaning and transformations are materialized due to the dialogic

interactions and the reading of classic literature. These four impacts are: embracing new educational projects, promoting the participation and leadership in social and democratic movements, impacting participants' families and friendships, and increasing their self-esteem.

It is noteworthy to explain further that all the articles reviewed utilize the Communicative Methodology (CM) of Research (Gómez et al., 2019; Redondo-Sama et al., 2020; Soler & Gómez, 2020). The CM was first used at the European level in WORKALÓ research project, funded under the 5th Research Framework Program, which aimed at overcoming the Roma community's barriers to access the labour market. The CM is grounded on an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants involved in the research in order to create scientific knowledge that contributes to transforming situations of exclusion. Its aim is not only to describe reality, but to transform it, by identifying, in this intersubjective conversation with the participants, the exclusion and transformation dimensions regarding the object of study (Aiello, Flecha, & Serradell, 2018; Gómez et al., 2019; Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011). It is based on researchers' critical standpoint by acknowledging the power relations that have traditionally been established from researchers to research participants in order to overcome those power relations. Of course, like in DLGs, there are still power relations in the CM, but there is also a constant dialogue among researchers and with the research participants to try to overcome them. The use of the CM in DLGs is optimal given that both the gatherings and the methodology have the main aim of transforming realities, of overcoming power relations often found between researchers and research participants or between people with academic studies and people with no academic studies. They both aim at transforming societies and relationships into more egalitarian ones by having continuous dialogues, self-reflection and self-criticism on how to transform oppression into freedom. In what follows, examples drawn from some of the articles reviewed will be provided for each impact identified in this literature review.

Embrace New Educational and Scholarly Projects

As has been stated in the literature review, most participants in the DLGs have no university studies or even high school degree, and some are illiterate or reading learners at the time they begin participating in the gatherings (Alvarez

et al., 2016; A. Flecha, 2015; Garcia Yeste et al., 2017b; Munté, 2015). Some of them, prior to participating in the gatherings, were made to believe by social structures that they would not be able to pursue studies. However, they found new meanings in their lives and were empowered to create new dreams, such as going back to school, after participating in the DLGs. As they show in the article “Beyond the Walls: The Social Reintegration of Prisoners Through the Dialogic Reading of Classic Universal Literature in Prison”, Alvarez and colleagues (2018) studied the transfer of DLGs into a penitentiary institution for women in Catalonia. Through communicative life stories and focus groups with some of the participants in the DLGs and in-depth interviews to the volunteers in the DLGs, the authors reported on some of the participants’ eagerness to pursue university studies (Alvarez et al., 2018). As the authors illustrate, the shared reflections of participants’ lives and personal trajectories and gaining awareness of their opportunities to improve them encourage them to dream beyond the walls (Alvarez et al., 2018). Sofia, an old Roma woman participating in the DLGs in the prison who had no academic studies, explained her aim to go to university.

“Everything in classic literature educates you when learning . . . This is learning, and as you move up in the ranking, you set short-term goals with specific goals, and at the end, you make a career. A person from the lowest rank can make it and reach university studies. I will have this as a goal, and I know that I will make it.”

Sofia was not the only one in desiring a future they had never imagined until they started interacting in this context of high expectations. Nonetheless, as the authors themselves note, the data collection was conducted only during the time in which participants were in prison, but did not do a follow-up of whether these women pursued their dreams and reached social reintegration after leaving prison (Alvarez et al., 2018).

In a similar vein, in the article “The Naked Wind Turns/the Corner in Surprise: A Transformative Narrative About Roma Inclusion”, Munté (2015) depicts the life of Antonio, a Roma man who, in some of his hardest moments in life, most of them driven from prejudices against Roma, found meaning in the DLGs to keep his dreams alive. Through the CM, which is particularly important when conducting research with communities historically

marginalized from science such as the Roma, the author describes in Antonio's words a moment in which an acquaintance betrayed him and embroiled him in legal problems and, even after that acquaintance admitted to Antonio's innocence, he was sent to prison (Munté, 2015). There, one of the ways to cope with the situation was to remember the different dialogues which occurred in the DLGs he had previously participated, in which participants built "the shared utopia of advancing toward more egalitarian societies in which minimum rights are guaranteed for all citizens, regardless of class, culture, or identity" (Munté, 2015, p. 898). Tearing down all those barriers, after he started participating in the DLGs, Antonio was able to pursue a BA in Sociology, and has therefore committed his life and work to helping other members of the Roma community who, like him, are trying to overcome barriers imposed by society (2015).

On the other hand, in the articles "Isabel, From Adult Learner to Community Activist" (Flecha, 2015), "The Other Women in Dialogic Literary Gatherings" (Garcia Yeste et al., 2017b), "Aisha, From Being Invisible to Becoming a Promoter of Social Change" (Serradell, 2015) and "Reconstructing Autobiographical Memories and Crafting a New Self Through Dialogic Literary Gatherings" (Racionero-Plaza, 2015), the authors narrate, through interviews and DLG observations following the CM, the way in which women with no university studies came to participate in scholarly forums about feminism. For instance, Isabel was a non-academic participant in Ainhoa Flecha's autobiographic narrative who created, together with other women (as she describes herself) and Ramon Flecha, the first DLG. Years after participating in DLGs, she has shared a round table with feminist scholars Judith Butler and Lidia Puigvert at an international conference called "Women and Social Transformation" held at the University of Barcelona in 2001. Giving a voice to women traditionally excluded from academic and/or intellectual debates, such as women with no academic studies, Roma women, migrants and from other minorities, opens up pathways to pursue dreams that were unimagined prior to participating in DLGs.

Participation in Social and Democratic Movements

The non-academic women who participated in these studies became active participants in feminist movements, as seen in the previous example. Defying

studies which state that for elderly women with no studies participation in social movements is more limited than in other groups (Reed, Clarke, & Macfarlane, 2012, in Garcia Yeste et al., 2017b), participants in this study, who had been participating in DLGs for over 20 years, became more socially engaged. They state that the debates in the gatherings around some of the inequalities portrayed in the classics, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, and which are also present in our societies, encourage them to remain active in the face of social injustice and be involved in social movements to help people who live in marginalized social groups (Garcia Yeste et al., 2017b):

It reminded us so much about the current situation of the refugees...
(...) We have organised a meeting in the school, and invited a specialised person to explain us the situation. And we are talking about what to do so that we can welcome refugees at the school and help them in every possible way”

Through conversations with the participants, Garcia Yeste and colleagues (2017) reported that these women participate in demonstrations against gender violence monthly, showing an active engagement against gender violence.

Similarly, Isabel (A. Flecha, 2015), a non-academic woman who prior to participating in the DLGs was learning to read, became engaged in feminist movements, as shown by the example in which she shared a round table with Judith Butler. She has been participating in DLGs for over 30 years, where she learned that popular knowledge was as valuable as academic knowledge. Being heard, respected and valued, thanks to the dialogic interactions, and contributing to rich conversations about books which are often considered “more suitable” to academics than to people like her, made herself become aware of her own power and agency for social transformation (A. Flecha, 2015):

One of the things we defend in the school, in the gatherings, is that people with a level like mine or lower can accede and have a voice in the forums ... Judith Butler, we had lunch, and she was very interested in what we were doing . . . and after that, she said that what we said had an impact on her.

Women like Isabel and Consuelo, Teresa or Angelina, some of the participants in García Yeste and colleagues' (2017b) study, also engage in debates in favor of women's rights during the gatherings. This shows that women like them, with no academic studies and in many cases houseworkers, referred in feminist theories as "other women" because they have often been excluded from feminist dialogues, (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2001), not only benefit from speaking up and showing their own perspectives, but also contribute to the dialogue with their own knowledge and experiences and, thus, can promote social transformations. Similarly, in these dialogues Roma women break with stereotypes that portray the Roma community as reproducing gender inequalities, showing instead their agentic capacity to overcome inequalities and gender violence (Amador López, 2019; Khalfaoui, 2019; Munté et al., 2020). An example non-academic women's speaking up in DLGs can be found in the account of one of the DLGs in García Yeste and colleagues (2017a):

A man states that not only during the period of time covered in the book, but also in the 50s in Spain, women were easier to manipulate than men. A participating woman quickly raised her hand up to speak aloud. In her turn, she responded that her experience was not like that.

Impact in Participants' Families and Friendships

As presented in the article "Empowerment and Social Inclusion of Migrant Women through Dialogic Literary Gatherings", García Yeste and Gairal (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews and a focus group with houseworker women born in Morocco who are now living in Catalonia, and whose children go to a school in which they do DLGs. In addition to children's DLGs, the school also organizes DLGs with the school's family members and other members of the school community (García-Yeste & Gairal, 2017). The interviews show that some of the mothers who participated in them saw their friendship and family ties strengthened due to their participation in the DLGs. Thanks to participating in DLGs, these mothers have gotten to know more mothers in the school, and their relationship goes beyond the gatherings:

With Farida [another participant in the gathering] we talk many times, we go to the park together with our kids ... We did not know each other before, but when I joined the DLG now I know many women.

Similarly, participating in the DLG, in which other people share some of their deepest dreams, hopes, worries, or feelings, might change one's perception of other participants. Iona, one of the women in the prison, explained how her viewpoint toward another prisoner she had known outside shifted after debating classic literature with her in the gatherings (Alvarez et al., 2018):

I got to know her in 2011 . . . and we only spoke a few times . . . And when I saw her here in [therapeutic unit], and I saw her one year later in [therapeutic unit], she instilled respect in me; I didn't approach her because I saw her a bit . . . but here in the [therapeutic unit], when I saw her, and with Mother Courage, I remember that once, reading, we had done it in groups, we had been reading, and I, to a certain point, was a beginner; when I still didn't follow the . . .

Researcher: . . . the gathering . . .

I saw her marking and reading aloud and I, I said, "Come on, let's go," but no, no . . . and she said, "No, no, because I like it" . . . I was very motivated by the change in Sherezade because she instilled even more respect in me . . . if she could do it, I also had to make it.

Increase Self-esteem

Last, but not less important, the articles reviewed evince the increase that participants have experienced in their self-esteem and confidence due to participating in DLGs. Iona clearly stated that through reading classics and listening to other participants discussing them increased her self-confidence and the hopes that she could one day go to the university and work for helping people like her (Alvarez et al., 2018):

Before participating in the literary gathering, I did not believe in myself. Since the gathering, I am more self-confident, I believe more in my

possibilities because, from the outside, everybody has prejudices about us, and then you think that you are not able to do anything. Through reading these classics, listening to my fellow inmates and seeing what we are able to do, that they have respect for you, believe in you . . .

Isabel also noted that being used to speaking her voice in a space in which it is valued, regardless of her socioeconomic or educational background, has made her feel more confident when speaking in public, as seen in a previous example, or in other spheres in society (A. Flecha, 2015):

You gain confidence in yourself, if you have knowledge about more things, you have more self-confidence, you relate more to people, not only with the people in the school but also with other people, you can participate in more conversations.

Similarly, the women in Garcia Yeste and colleagues' study (2017) reflect that the gatherings have made them feel more confident and not afraid to speak with people or thinking what they might think about them:

Of course, you feel more confident to speak aloud. You get to know more things; you understand what the rest of the people are talking about, and you know what to say. There is not any more to fear about...“What will they say... what they will think about me”.

Conclusion

In all, this paper has shed a light in the way in which adult participants in DLGs in Spain create meaning and transform their lives in the labor, family and/or social spheres. Although it cannot be stated – and nor is it the paper's aim – that only the dialogic interactions and the classic books contribute to such transformations and creation of meaning, there are insights in the reviewed studies' results which reflect that these two essential aspects of DLGs contribute to such impacts.

These transformations appear especially crucial among the Roma community, who have historically been denied the right to quality education. Often being denied the access to “high” culture and to high-quality education

(García-Espinel, et al, 2019; Macías-Aranda, et al, 2019), DLGs show that Roma men and women benefit by this scientific evidence-based dialogic space. Importantly, they also show that that with their participation, the Roma also contribute to other DLG participants by connecting the works read and debated with their unique perspectives, lived experiences and sentiments. Moreover, having a voice to contribute to and learn from other participants also impacts their families, the Roma community and society by and large. Bringing the best literature and opening up a dialogic space to discuss it further advances the potential of transformation of the Roma community to overcome inequalities and craft their own desired futures.

Notes

ⁱ INCLUD-ED, funded by the European Commission's Scientific Research Programme, was selected by the European Commission as one of the ten success stories among the European Framework Programmes for Research due to its scientific, political and, most importantly, social impact, being the only SSH project selected, as reported in the "Added Value of Research, Innovation and Science Portfolio" (European Commission, 2011).

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