

Feminist Mentorship, Belonging, and *Testimonios* of Migrant Girlhood in Peru

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Abstract: In this article, I examine how *Chamas en Acción* (*CheA*) a community-driven feminist empowerment program in Peru, supports migrant adolescent girls who navigate gender-based violence, discrimination, and displacement. My analysis explores how its pedagogical components—participatory workshops, psychosocial support, family engagement, and a dedicated mentoring axis—create conditions for safety, belonging, and political emergence. Drawing on *testimonios* produced by girls and adult mentors, I show how care-centered practices, based on decolonial feminist ethics, enable participants to reinterpret their experiences, articulate demands, and engage in public action. I argue that mentorship, as one pillar of a broader empowerment model, functions as relational praxis that strengthens agency, fosters intergenerational solidarities, and sustains feminist continuity across territories.

Keywords: adolescent girls, feminist mentorship, gender-based violence, migration, empowerment, belonging, feminist popular education



I examine feminist mentorship as a political and pedagogical practice grounded in the lived experiences of adolescent migrant girls in Peru. Grounded in insights generated through the multi-year feminist initiative *CheA*, designed and implemented by Quinta Ola, a Peruvian women-led non-profit organization, the name of which translates to Fifth Wave in reference to the feminist movement, across five Peruvian regions (see Quinta Ola 2025), I explore how feminist mentorship supports emotional restoration, political formation, and collective agency in contexts shaped by structural violence and displacement.

CheA was developed in response to overlapping conditions affecting adolescent girls in Peru. Since 2017, the country has become a primary destination for Venezuelan migrants, with more than 1.5 million arrivals, including large numbers of girls and young women (R4V 2024). Many of them face xenophobia, precarious housing, labor exploitation, and limited access to education and health services (Mandujano 2024; Save the Children 2022). These challenges intersect with a national crisis of gender-based violence (GbV). Between 2022 and 2025, more than 70 percent of cases attended by the Women's Emergency Centers involved survivors under 18 years of age, 91 percent of whom were girls

(Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables 2025). According to the National Survey on Social Relations (Encuesta Nacional sobre Relaciones Sociales 2024), 75.7 percent of Peruvians tolerate violence against women, and 56.5 percent of men over the age of 18 justify sexual violence.

The problem intensifies during girls' adolescence, a critical stage in the development of identity, autonomy, and agency. Consequences include physical and psychological harm including forced pregnancies and social stigmatization that lead to school dropout, all of which perpetuate cycles of violence and poverty. Exposure and impacts are more severe in contexts of intersecting vulnerabilities such as poverty, forced migration, racial or ethnic discrimination, disability, and sexual or gender dissidence (Defensoría del Pueblo 2023; United Nations Children's Fund 2020). Although Peru has preventive policies, they have been undermined by a conservative backlash against gender and sexuality education in schools and health systems. Budget reductions and the erosion of protection mechanisms have further deepened institutional neglect in addressing GbV. Peruvian girls in peripheral districts experience similar precarity, particularly in urban areas shaped historically by internal displacement and a weak state presence (Wallace 2024). *CheA* emerged from this shared terrain of dispossession as a sustained feminist response grounded in education, care, and political solidarity.

CheA's methodology grew out of Quinta Ola's broader feminist educational trajectory, particularly the experience of GirlGov Perú, a program created to strengthen adolescent girls' leadership through political education, feminist mentorship, and collective advocacy implemented in different cycles between 2019 and 2021 and relaunched in 2025 (Quinta Ola 2025). In its early design stage in 2021, Quinta Ola's team conducted a participatory diagnostic with Venezuelan teenagers to identify their needs and aspirations. Building on this process, *CheA* adapted the GirlGov Perú curriculum to suit the migration context, and evolved into an autonomous, community-rooted, and explicitly feminist initiative co-constructed through continual feedback loops with program graduates and Quinta Ola's Advisory Board of Adolescents and Youth. Between 2021 and 2025, *CheA* reached more than 420 adolescent girls in five regions—Lima, Piura, Trujillo, Tumbes, and Madre de Dios. The program seeks to redefine empowerment through a feminist, decolonial, and collective ethics of care. In recognition of its originality and impact, *CheA* received the 2022 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Innovation Award for the Americas (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022).

The analysis I present here draws on the intersection of girlhood studies, feminist pedagogy, and migration research. Scholars such as Jessica Taft (2014) show that girls are already shaping political worlds, often through informal or overlooked practices. Insights from the development and evaluation of *CheA* extend this literature by showing how feminist mentorship—when grounded in

care, embodiment, and shared inquiry—enables girls to act as political agents in territories that have often excluded them.

The article unfolds in three sections. In the first section, I outline the theoretical foundations of *CheA*, drawing from feminist popular education, decolonial feminist thought, and girl-led activism. In the second section, I detail the program's pedagogical and territorial design, and show how feminist mentorship operates through participatory workshops, psychosocial accompaniment, and family engagement within an infrastructure of care. In the final section, I analyze *testimonios* from adolescent participants and adult mentors to illustrate how mentorship functions as relational praxis that nurtures safety, belonging, and political agency, in transforming experiences of displacement into feminist continuity and collective action.

We Built That Table Together: The Significance of my Positionality

This article is also grounded in my position as a feminist educator, mentor, researcher, and co-founder of Quinta Ola, and as a woman who grew up in a human settlement formed by families displaced during Peru's internal armed conflict. My own adolescence was shaped by many of the same conditions the girls from *CheA* now face—limited access to services, the prevalence of GbV, and being treated by public institutions as invisible. These experiences allow me to relate not only to the participants but also to the adult mentors, many of whom carry their own histories of exclusion, migration, or silence. This shared ground has informed the program's intergenerational model, which centers sorority, horizontality, and political accountability as foundations for learning. I have also served as one of the main educator-mentors of *CheA* for five years, directly engaging with more than 200 adolescents in over 30 full-day workshops. Their wisdom and transparency have transformed my own and the collective ways we imagine, teach, and name knowledge itself. This epistemological labor is, at its core, feminist and shared.

Theoretical Groundings

The mentoring approach developed in *CheA* is informed by three interrelated feminist traditions: feminist popular education; decolonial feminist thought; and girl-led political participation. These frameworks provide the conceptual and methodological foundation of the program. They shape how mentoring is understood and practiced—as a pedagogical, political, and relational process—and help explain how adolescent girls and adult allies co-construct learning and belonging environments grounded in resistance.

The first foundation is feminist popular education, a pedagogical tradition that rejects vertical models of instruction and emphasizes learning rooted in lived experience, dialogue, and collective reflection. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and expanded by feminist educators such as bell hooks (1994) and Antonia Darder (2002), this approach positions education as a practice of freedom and knowledge as something produced, not transmitted. In *CheA*, this framework shapes the structure and facilitation of participatory workshops, in which girls engage in storytelling, visual mapping, embodiment exercises, and collective analysis. These practices reflect a political commitment to recognizing adolescent girls as thinkers and creators of knowledge.

This commitment also resonates with broader feminist scholarship that has conceptualized mentoring as an ethic of care and a feminist practice. Scholars such as Helen Colley (2003), Carol Gilligan (1982), bell hooks (1994), Nel Noddings (1984), and Jean Rhodes (2005) have emphasized the transformative potential of relational learning grounded in empathy, reciprocity, and mutual recognition. However, most of this research has emerged from institutional or Global North contexts, where mentoring is often framed as an interpersonal or developmental tool rather than a political practice. *CheA* expands this field by situating mentorship in community feminist praxis and a decolonial ethics of care in Latin America. Here, care is a radical commitment to sustain life and dignity amid displacement, xenophobia, and GbV. Mentorship becomes a collective responsibility; educators and girls co-create reciprocal relationships of accompaniment that challenge the hierarchies embedded in conventional development and humanitarian programs.

This redefinition of mentorship connects directly with Latin American decolonial feminist thought, particularly the contributions of Lorena Cabnal (2010), Ochy Curiel (2007), and Julieta Paredes (2013). These thinkers criticize the universalism of Eurocentric feminism and center political practices rooted in community memory, relational autonomy, and territorial belonging. They emphasize the colonial entanglements of violence, especially for racialized girls and women whose bodies and lives have been constructed historically as expendable. In *Quinta Ola*, this framework supports a view of mentorship as a long-term relational process that requires mutual accountability, affective coherence, and shared responsibility. Mentors engage in constant reflection about their own histories and positionalities not to claim moral authority, but to allow accompaniment grounded in integrity.

The decolonial framework also supports a particular understanding of belonging. *CheA* affirms belonging as a situated process of emplacement—one that acknowledges histories of displacement, recognizes embodied difference, and constructs new political attachments through care and co-resistance. This perspective is consistent with feminist scholarship that understands belonging as both affective and political, a structure of feeling and a claim to space and

participation (hooks 2009; Yuval-Davis 2006). In the mentoring process, belonging is cultivated through everyday practices of presence, recognition, and relational commitment.

Program Design

Reflecting both the geographic spread of Venezuelan migration and Quinta Ola's commitment to decentralizing feminist education, each program cohort carried out a five-month cycle with an average of 40 to 45 participants, about 70 percent of whom were migrants between 13 and 19 years of age. The model was co-designed with Quinta Ola's Advisory Board of Adolescents and Youth, which reviewed activities for relevance, accessibility, and cultural coherence, while positioning adolescents as active co-designers.

CheA's current model is built on five interdependent pillars: Participatory Feminist Workshops; Psychosocial Accompaniment; Intergenerational Feminist Mentorship and Dialogues; Community Advocacy; and Family Engagement.

Participatory Feminist Workshops

Held weekly, these workshops address interconnected themes such as human rights, gender and sexual diversity, xenophobia and aporophobia, autonomy, sexual and reproductive rights, GbV, the history of women's rights, and collective action. Drawing from feminist popular education and creative pedagogy, activities with girl and young women participants include body and community mapping, storytelling, working with theater of the oppressed, holding reflection circles, and organizing collaborative artmaking (Quinta Ola 2021, 2023). Each cycle consists of five full-day sessions, culminating in a collective graduation held with families and allied organizations.

Psychosocial Accompaniment

Each regional team includes a licensed psychologist responsible for risk assessments, mapping local protection services, and ensuring referral pathways to public institutions for participants. During workshops, the psychologist remains a visible and supportive presence, co-facilitating emotional check-ins and offering individualized support. Many participants have described her as a steady figure capable of holding emotions with care and without judgment.

Intergenerational Feminist Mentorship and Dialogues

Mentorship operates through three interconnected modalities. First, in workshops, feminist educators also act as mentors. Each session invites reflection, questioning, and genuine curiosity about one another's experiences. Emotional

check-ins and open dialogue cultivate trust; it is common for mentors and girls to cry, laugh, or exchange stories of migration, violence, or hope. Demonstrating vulnerability becomes a political gesture that dismantles hierarchies and affirms learning as a shared process.

Second, structured mentoring sessions focus on adolescent voice and public participation. Across regions, around 150 sessions have supported girls in articulating demands and strengthening their public voice. These meetings have prepared participants for advocacy opportunities and community events—over fifty in total—on education, GbV, and xenophobia. Mentoring has also nurtured creative and intellectual production: girls have co-authored more than twenty opinion pieces in national and migrant-led media on themes such as mental health, hypersexualization, and the right to education.

Third, intergenerational dialogues with women activists create intimate opportunities for cross-generational learning. Girls are encouraged to ask questions freely and engage in conversations on GbV, racism, feminist organizing, and queer resistance. For many, these have been the first encounters they had had with women who embodied the struggles they were beginning to name. Several girls have joined activist collectives they met through these dialogues, thus extending *CheA*'s political continuity beyond the program.

Mentorship often continues after program completion. Months or even years later, many girls consult these mentors when making decisions about education, work, or personal challenges. These enduring relationships illustrate *CheA*'s capacity to build sustained networks of trust, accountability, and feminist solidarity.

Community Advocacy

The fifth workshop of each cycle focuses on designing collective or individual initiatives for social change. Participants identify pressing issues, such as GbV, xenophobia, or school exclusion, and work in small groups to propose concrete actions. Guided by educator-mentors, they use empathy mapping, design thinking, and learning-by-doing methodologies. Many initiatives have materialized later as awareness campaigns, public murals, itinerant art, or digital actions aligned with feminist mobilization dates. In several regions, groups have also marched for the first time, carrying messages they created together. These collective actions provide experiential learning and opportunities for girls to practice leadership and teamwork.

Family Engagement

Recognizing the importance of families in sustaining girls' empowerment, *CheA* engages mothers, fathers, and caregivers through dedicated workshops. These sessions address positive parenting, GbV prevention, reporting mechanisms,

protection routes, community integration, and children's rights. They build intergenerational bridges and support caregivers in identifying concrete ways to ensure girls' participation and safety. More than 80 families have taken part in these workshops across the five regions.

Feminist Infrastructures of Care and Belonging

The pedagogical approach of *CheA* is anchored in a feminist ethic of care that sustains both the emotional and logistical dimensions of the program. Each territory presents distinct social challenges: high rates of adolescent pregnancy and GbV in Piura; human trafficking in Madre de Dios; poverty and school exclusion in Trujillo; xenophobia and urban precarity in Lima; and border-related risks of exploitation and functional illiteracy in Tumbes. Since all these regions host large Venezuelan migrant populations, their diverse structural inequities require the constant adaptation of the methodology.

To respond to these contextual specificities, each territorial team includes two feminist educator-mentors, one psychologist, and a local coordinator, all supported by Quinta Ola's national coordination team. The educator-mentors are feminist professionals with experience in GbV prevention, migration, and youth political participation—an interdisciplinary profile that ensures that emotional and political dimensions of learning are consistently integrated.

Facilitation tools are repeatedly adapted to reflect the realities and creative preferences of each group. In Tumbes, girls gravitated toward purposeful dance and collective art as forms of expression; in Piura, toward storytelling and painting; and in Lima, toward dialogue circles and theater of the oppressed. These preferences are embraced as integral to the pedagogy of *CheA*, affirming the importance of situating learning within each territory's cultural and emotional landscape.

Every session follows a predictable and nurturing rhythm—opening circles, emotional check-ins using colors or metaphors, grounding exercises, and closing reflections. These rituals build the program's infrastructure of care by cultivating consistency and safety. After each workshop, educator-mentors, the psychologist, and the field coordinator conduct structured debriefs to reflect on group dynamics, share emotional impressions, and adjust the next session's approach. This collective reflexivity ensures coherence across cycles and territories while also preventing burnout among facilitators.

Material care is another key dimension of the program. Transportation and meal subsidies are provided to ensure regular attendance and reduce economic barriers to participation. Each participant also receives a Belonging Kit—a T-shirt, fabric tote bag, notebook, and pen—symbolic items that reinforce collective identity and the sense of being part of a larger movement.

Figure 1: Intergenerational emotional safety exercise during an outdoor circle in *CheA*, Lima, 2021. Photograph by Gianina Márquez Olivera



The physical spaces of *CheA* are intentionally designed as territories of care and symbolic belonging. Each site includes an anonymous suggestion box, a circular seating arrangement, a mural of learnings and emotions, and a collective healing activity during which participants can express gratitude, grief, or shared intention. The spiritual knowledge embedded in each territory—manifested through music, movement, or local rituals—is honored as part of the pedagogical process. Together, these elements affirm that learning, healing, and resistance are inseparable dimensions of feminist education.

Girls and adults at *CheA* have co-defined what safety and belonging mean in practice, what forms of respect and consent are needed, and what actions could reinforce collective identity. They create program materials, curate playlists, commemorate women's history, and share stories from their cultural and neighborhood contexts. Belonging is anchored in shared experience, care for detail, and deliberate co-creation.

These practices align with what youth development literature identifies as essential to safe learning environments—predictability, emotional coherence, and supportive peer–adult relationships (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2002). In *CheA*, such conditions constitute mentoring as relational praxis, enabling girls and mentors to co-define safety, belonging, and the boundaries of care in ways responsive to their lived contexts.

Relational Transformations

In *CheA*, *testimonios* are cultivated as a feminist practice of voice and political subjectivity. Rooted in Latin American traditions of decolonial resistance, *testimonio* is a situated form of narration in which speaking becomes an act of collective memory, accountability, and refusal (Cabnal 2010; Rodríguez 2022). For racialized girls and displaced adolescents, whose voices are often absent or instrumentalized in migration and development discourses, *testimonios* enable them to claim space, construct meaning, and generate theory grounded in lived experience. The voices of girls and adults in *CheA* reveal emotional transformation and political insight; whether oral, written, or artistic, they name the effects of violence, the conditions of belonging, and the labor of care and accompaniment, forming a repertoire of relational knowledge that unsettles adultist hierarchies and reframes what counts as expertise.

Unlearning Helplessness

Mentorship in *CheA* is intentionally reciprocal. While adolescent girls engage in political reflection, collective healing, and rights-based learning, adults are also transformed. Many educator-mentors have themselves come of age amid poverty, migration, GbV, discrimination, or institutional abandonment. Rather than a unidirectional transfer of guidance, learning and mentoring become a shared political practice of accompaniment in which participants and adults learn with, and because of, one another.

CheA works as a counter-space to internalized narratives of disposability and silence. Girls and adults examine their stories together, situating individual vulnerabilities in broader social and structural landscapes. What initially feels like private loneliness or hopelessness becomes legible as patterned and political. Discussions of learned helplessness are used to reimagine power, worth, and voice, echoing Julieta Paredes's (2013) communitarian feminist ethos in which struggle and healing are collective rather than individual.

This reciprocal process does not romanticize resilience; it foregrounds the labor of care and the ethics of presence required to sustain it. In practice, reciprocity means that mentors listen and disclose judiciously, allowing vulnerability to dismantle hierarchies without shifting emotional burdens onto girls. It also means reading adolescents' experiences as knowledge capable of reshaping the pedagogical agenda. In this sense, mentorship functions as relational praxis, a way of doing and knowing in which girls' testimonies orient the work, and mentors' reflexivity ensures that accompaniment remains responsive to place, power, and precarity. The counter-space cultivated here lays the groundwork for voice and agency.

Voice and Visibility

Once helplessness is named and unsettled, girls move from guarded silence to collective articulation. Across locations and years, participants emphasize that they have rarely been asked what they think, feel, or dream. As one Venezuelan girl (2023) recalled, “At first, I felt nervous. . . but during the sessions, with the mentors’ support, I gained trust and overcame that fear.”¹ These moments of vocal affirmation contest the silencing routinely imposed on girls in institutional and public arenas.

Following bell hooks’s (1989) insight that speaking from the margins is both pedagogical and political, *CheA* makes speech thinkable by reframing silence as a product of social structure rather than individual failure, and doable by embedding voice in relationships of recognition. In a context marked by xenophobia, over-policing, and educational exclusion (Mandujano 2024), speaking becomes an act of reclaiming narrative control: girls reinterpret past experiences and re-define what their stories can do in the present.

Vanesa, a sixteen-year-old participant in *CheA* (2021), offered one of the clearest articulations of this complexity in saying,

Being a migrant, a woman, and an adolescent is a triple tragedy—not only do we face all the challenges of migration and the existential crises of adolescence, but we also have to confront the inequalities, prejudices, and stereotypes that have formed around Venezuelan women in Peru.

Published *testimonios* illustrate how voice consolidates through belonging. In 2023, Anyi, a Venezuelan participant, reflected on feeling alienated at school and finding a lifeline in *CheA* through a friendship with a peer from her hometown, a learning environment that celebrated a plurality of voices, and connections to protective services. Her reflections echo participants from the 2023 cohort: “I no longer feel alone”; “It feels really good to talk to someone who understands you.” Similarly, in 2022 María argued that while having a public voice felt impossible in her country of origin, in Peru she feels able and compelled to speak about barriers to educational access for migrants and refugees. And in their joint op-ed, Neylimar and Ashlye insisted, in 2014 that,

It is true that prejudices and insecurities may persist, but our [political] participation shows that we have as much right as any citizen to influence this country’s direction, because social problems also affect us—as adolescents, as women, and as migrants.

Taken together, these accounts show voice emerging not as an individual trait but as a relational practice: confidence grows through recognition, analysis deepens through accompaniment, and speech becomes action when anchored in collective belonging.

Recognition and Shared Responsibility

Voice consolidates into recognition—of shared experiences and of differences without dismissal. Lucia, a Peruvian participant (2021) captured this shift in saying,

It helped me become more empathetic toward the Venezuelan migrant community ... to see the reality of the hardships many young Venezuelan girls face in a country that is not their own.

This movement from sympathy to situated empathy reframes migration from an abstract issue into relational accountability among peers. Yadira, a Peruvian youth activist (2023), extended this accountability:

Every time a refugee or migrant person speaks about their home, their country, and the life left behind, it is impossible not to pay attention. . . . Displaced and refugee communities exist, and it is time for institutions and organizations to contribute to their struggle and well-being in the country where they are.

Her *testimonio* translates listening into civic demand, marking recognition as a public ethic rather than a private sentiment.

These relational ties echo Ochy Curiel's (2007) emphasis on community-based political practices grounded in dignity, mutual care, and collective responsibility. Crucially, recognition does not dissolve differences; it makes them speakable and actionable. Girls learn to name positionality (migrant/local, girl/adolescent/woman), to listen across these fault lines, and to translate recognition into everyday practices of alliance in schools, neighborhoods, and also online.

This collectivizing turn was voiced by Kamila, a Venezuelan adolescent in her op-ed in 2023. "We want to live safely, not harassed, discriminated against, or assaulted. We demand respect. We are united for a society without violence." Here, recognition becomes a platform for collective will, linking belonging to action. As participants connect their stories to broader patterns, belonging becomes a political project. The result is a repertoire of gestures and practices (co-authoring op-eds, designing murals, organizing awareness campaigns) that converts empathy into responsibility and responsibility into action, setting up the analytical move to how bearing witness and sustaining safety operate for both girls and adults.

Bearing Witness, Emotional Labor, and Safety

As girls' political awareness deepens, many speak about violence and exclusion they already recognize as wrong—sexual harassment and xenophobic aggression in schools and public spaces. What persists is the environmental normalization of these harms and a lack of tools and pathways for reporting and protection. Despite training in psychological first aid and trauma-informed facilitation, educator-mentors carry the emotional weight of what they hear. To respond, the team holds debriefs after sensitive sessions, schedules confidential check-ins with

the program psychologist, and convenes dialogues with feminist activists—reframing pain as shared knowledge and political responsibility. When needed, psychologists activate referral routes to education, health, and protection services and follow up with families to reduce risks of revictimization. Rather than re-describe procedures already outlined, I emphasize their effects: girls feel accompanied and better equipped to act; mentors are not left alone with what they hold; and testimony becomes care-driven action.

At the same time, structural barriers demand sustained accompaniment. Supporting adolescent mothers, out-of-school girls, or participants facing functional illiteracy exposes how bureaucratic and unequal the system remains. Educator-mentors and psychologists mobilize local networks to secure school re-enrollment, migratory regularization, and connections to protection services. Weekly reflection meetings help the team process frustration and devise collective strategies. Each concrete step—a girl returning to school, accessing psychosocial care, receiving migratory documentation—materializes feminist solidarity in action. Sustained presence amid deep vulnerability can also produce fatigue and blurred boundaries; the program addresses this through clear consent practices, rotating facilitation roles, scheduled rest periods, and mid-cycle renewals of collective agreements. Naming these limits underscores the need for institutional commitments to care, sustainability, and the emotional labor that feminist accompaniment requires.

The texture of safety is tangible. Across cohorts, Venezuelan and Peruvian adolescents repeatedly say, “This is my safe space.” Safety is not abstract—it appears in the tears the girls allow themselves to shed as they explain that they have been unable to say goodbye to friends or family; that they have packed their lives into a single backpack; that they have traveled by car for days; that migration has never been their choice; and that, even so, they feel pressured to be “mature enough” not to “burden” their parents with their “emotional problems.” Many also describe discrimination from peers and teachers and the need to mask their identities to avoid conflict and gain conditional acceptance. *CheA* offers a physical, emotional, and symbolic space of encounter where their trajectories can be recognized as shared, confidentiality and tenderness are guaranteed, and a form of conscious affection displaces the everyday cynicism of mere survival.

Mental health is central to this scaffolding of safety. Nearly 70 percent of participants in each cohort arrive with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, or migratory grief—traces of trauma experienced before, during, and after displacement. For many, *CheA* is their first sustained arena for mental health support and the beginning of their healing process. Through the program’s psychosocial component, girls are referred to community counseling centers or allied organizations for specialized psychiatric care. Some attend only the first workshops yet complete all their individual therapy sessions, and return later for the closing ceremony, where they are welcomed like returning daugh-

ters. Ana, a Venezuelan participant who joined in 2021 attended mainly her psychological sessions but was invited to join the following cohort during which she participated in all *CheA* activities. Ana now self-identifies as a feminist activist and speaks at national and international forums about the mental health of migrant youth. This continuity of care—offered without conditionality or judgment—embodies *CheA*'s feminist ethic of presence.

In Judith Herman's (1992) terms, recovery requires safety, remembrance, and agency. *CheA* operationalizes these as pedagogy: safety through predictable relational routines and clear consent; remembrance through guided, voluntary narration that refuses extraction; and agency through collective analysis linked to concrete options for reporting and support.

For mentors, bearing witness does not stop at acknowledgment; it reorganizes relations and responsibilities. By treating testimony as political knowledge—rather than private confession—*CheA* converts individual disclosures into collective commitments to protect, to refer, to accompany, to inform about rights and routes, and to advocate.

From Healing to Public Action

As safety and recognition take root, girls translate testimony into public action. Across territories, participants design advocacy projects that respond to everyday injustices. Permanent and mobile murals denounce sexual harassment on public transportation, GbV, and gendered xenophobia in schools, while calling for solidarity between Peruvian and Venezuelan girls and for accountability from authorities. These collective works do not merely raise awareness; they assert presence and authorship in spaces that often erase adolescent migrant voices.

Crucially, *testimonios* also reorient girls' sense of futurity. Many begin to envision themselves as future mentors, advocates, and leaders, a through-line of continuity rather than closure. As a Peruvian participant, Micaela, (2021) affirmed,

I will help to eradicate all forms of violence against Venezuelan adolescent girls. . . to build more bridges so that Peruvian and Venezuelan girls and adolescents realize we have more in common and that together we can create change.

In keeping with Ochy Curiel's (2007) insistence that political practices must be grounded in collective responsibility and embodied ties, these commitments show how girls transform recognition into long-term feminist projects that bind care, struggle, and intergenerational solidarity.

Writing becomes another arena of political emergence. Participants author opinion pieces in national and migrant-led outlets on mental health, the hypersexualization of migrant girls, adolescent labor, education, and political participation. Audio platforms extend this repertoire: with CARE Perú, *Sammy y las Chamas al Micro* (CARE Perú 2022) addresses school xenophobic bullying; with

UNHCR and Amnesty International, *Desenredando: Informando el presente para transformar el futuro* (Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados 2022) focuses on GbV against migrant and local adolescents. In each case, girls move from narration to co-production of knowledge, building civic literacies and media skills alongside political voice.

These actions consolidate networks. Several graduates are active members of youth activist groups; others earn university scholarships linked to civic engagement, and each year at least two join Quinta Ola's National Advisory Board of Adolescents and Youth, shaping the organization's agenda from within. In sum, *CheA* shifts testimony from the private to the public without abandoning care. Murals, op-eds, podcasts, and organizing practices form a durable repertoire through which girls exercise rights, cultivate leadership, and weave supportive networks. Mentorship thus operates as a relational technology of continuity: what begins as "This is my safe space" becomes a shared capacity to contest harm, claim belonging, and sustain feminist futures—often through girls' own commitments to mentor younger peers, speak in community spaces, and carry this learning into schools and families.

Conclusion

CheA demonstrates how feminist empowerment becomes a sustained relational and political practice rather than a sequence of programmed activities. Throughout this article, I have shown how *testimonios* function to allow girls to interpret violence, claim belonging, and imagine futures grounded in dignity—processes that unfold slowly, in community, and under conditions in which their experiences are treated as knowledge.

A central contribution of *CheA* is that it allows girls to enact being adolescents again—an experience often interrupted by migration, xenophobia, and premature adultification. Through ludic practices, they reconnect with joy, with their inner-child, and with emotional terrains disciplined by crisis. These practices center what girls feel and desire, enabling emotional release and creative exploration as conditions for political voice. This transformation is evident in their words. When Lucia committed to "build more bridges so that Peruvian and Venezuelan girls realize we have more in common," she reframed recognition as accountability. In a context in which public discourse fuels antagonism between Peruvian and Venezuelan women, her statement interrupts that logic and affirms a social horizon grounded in tenderness, reciprocity, and the refusal to see one another as adversaries. Kamila's declaration—"We demand respect. . . we are united for a society without violence"—emerges from similar experiences of relational safety such as predictable routines, clear boundaries, mentors who listen, and peers who acknowledge her humanity. Through these

anchors, girls name structural violence while asserting feminist horizons shaped by collective struggle.

Understanding *CheA* as an infrastructure of feminist accompaniment clarifies how these shifts take place. Mentorship is deliberate, multifaceted, and responsive to context, mentors, conscious of privilege and positionality, act as bridges toward opportunities for recreation, education, emotional care, and advocacy. This is a conscious feminist praxis aimed at catalyzing collective empowerment.

Equally crucial is that *CheA* is an explicitly feminist space. Its language, methods, and content situate girls' experiences within broader histories of resistance, making visible the structural nature of xenophobia, racism, and patriarchy. This framing helps girls understand their struggles as part of a larger movement and explains why many contact *CheA* months or years after the program ends: they joined an ongoing feminist community, not a temporary cycle of activities. This distinguishes *CheA* from humanitarian or development programs whose timelines rarely sustain long-term relational responsibility.

More broadly, *CheA* offers insight into what feminist grassroots organizations can make possible for adolescent girls facing xenophobia, gender-based violence, and institutional abandonment. Such work requires ethical presence, emotional labor, and long-term care.

Ultimately, the lessons from *CheA* contribute to debates in girlhood studies by showing that adolescent girls' agency is inherently relational. Through *testimonios* as political knowledge and mentorship as relational praxis, Venezuelan and Peruvian girls in Peru are reimagining community, contesting harm, and building feminist futures in places where their lives have long been devalued.

Acknowledgements

This article exists thanks to the voices, strength, and trust of *CheA*'s participants. I am deeply grateful for their *testimonios*, their dreams, and their courage. I also thank Quinta Ola for its sustained commitment to feminist education and collective care, and the mentors, allies, and partner organizations that make this work possible across territories.



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Notes

1. All direct quotations from participants' *testimonios* and published op-eds originally in Spanish are cited here in my own English translation.

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