CULTIVATING HOPE: CHILDREN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN POST-ACCORD COLOMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation takes children and youth participation in peacebuilding as a node for studying how processes of collective memory affect young people’s self-constructions and political identities in a transitional context. Although much has been written about the Colombian armed conflict, children's perspectives on their participation in collective and historical memory during the post-accord has seldom been the focus of academic research. Furthermore, the dissertation analyzes how understandings of childhood as a pre-political stage defined by its futurity, is affected by children’s and youth’s reconstruction of a protracted, violent, past. My ethnography fills this important gap in existing research and focuses on understanding the participation of children and youth in collective memory in both rural and urban contexts in Colombia.

To do so, I analyze how the young museum workers of Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, exercise the pedagogical technique of diálogos de saberes (knowledge dialogues) as a way to engage the children and the youth visiting as part of the Peace Chair. These dialogues represent the museum’s peace pedagogy and its educational goal of humanizing the conflict while engaging children in historical and political literacy. The museum proposes the methodology of living memory as a solution
to children’s and youth’s participation in the reconstruction of the past without discussing
the graphic details of the violence that victims have suffered. Living memory is then, a
continuation of collective memory in which children and young people can participate in
the reconstruction of the past, regardless of their victimhood status. The dialogues also
allow for an interpretation of the role that the figure of the victim plays in the
reconstruction of the past. Children and youth would often express that “we are all
victims of the conflict” as a way to insert themselves as members of a marginalized
community that due to the post-accord context, has gained great visibility and political
agency in Colombia. This dissertation also grapples with how, in contexts of high
intensity violence, like San Carlos, children’s identity is seldom about reaffirming their
status as children. Rather collective constructions of the self, such as being campesino, are
reinforced.
Acknowledgments

This project began to form in my mind around the end of 2017. I was obsessively following every step of the peace process, with a sense of fear that this time would be just another attempt that did not come to fruition. It worked! Peace was signed and so began the conversations with family and friends about the peace agreement. As Colombia once again became polarized, this time around the idea of whether we wanted peace (as if that were even a question), I knew my project would be about children and youth participation in collective memory in the post accord context. Little did I know that my 7 months in the field would be one of the best experiences of my life, or that I would write my dissertation isolated while the world seemed to be tearing at the seams facing a pandemic.

Through it all, I could not have asked for a better committee. Sarada, you were so critical, caring, and encouraging. I wish academia were full of people like you. John, Karen, and Manuel, thank you so much for sharing with me your incredible minds and for supporting my work. To the rest of the Childhood Studies department, thank you for being a community that encourages and supports its international students. To my colleagues and friends, this process would have been so lonely without you. Thank you for the zoom meetings, writing sessions, last minute reading proofs, Monday morning breakfasts, shows of care and support, and going on for a run.

To the Red Colombiana de Lugares de Memoria, the Museo Casa se la Memoria, and CARE, thank you for letting me be part of the peace building processes that you continue to carry out. Most importantly, to the young mediators whose names I cannot disclose but I will never forget, to Mónica and to Pastora, I learned so much every
single minute I spent with you. Thank you for your words, for letting me get to know you, for the laughs, and for being an example that peace is constructed in the simplicity of the everyday, and that wisdom does not come with age or academic degrees.

I cannot see the world through depoliticized eyes, and I owe that to my family. Mami y Pa, I have missed you every step of the way. Thank you for your unyielding belief, support, and love. Juan Pablo, thank you for your example of discipline and hard work. I believe in you, although you are just half of an Iron Man. To my aunts and cousins, if I am an academic it is because of all of you. You are the most open-minded, supportive, and loving family. Santi y Fede, gracias por hacérmee reír, reflexionar y aprender a su lado. And to my friends, I am so proud to have so many amazing women in my life. I am my best when I am with you. I love you and cherish all of our friendships so much!

Peace, always.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

While quietly situating ourselves around a mural of images that represented the multiple forms of violence suffered by the victims of the Colombian armed conflict, Carolina (21), a museum worker, asked the group of 11th graders to identify the one image that stood out for them. The twenty-nine triptychs that made up the “Multiple Faces of Violence” exhibit crowded this section of the Museo Casa de la Memoria requiring the twenty-five students, two teachers, two mediators, and myself to take turns to look at these images. After a couple of seconds, a male student around seventeen years old, raised his hand, cleared his throat, and stood next to the triptych titled DISPLACEMENT (Figure 1). He briefly looked at the mediators and then addressed the group:

“I am originally from Barbosa¹, and growing up I never understood why my brother had a different last name than I. When I was a bit older, maybe five years ago or so, I was told that my brother’s father had been one of the people killed in the massacre. I know this didn’t happen to me directly but, for me, it is very important to know what really happened”.

The group quietly listened to their classmate who continued to explain how forced displacement had been an intermittent presence in his life. He and his family finally fled Barbosa for Medellín and experienced further displacement within this city. He felt a deep connection with los desplazados and these images really moved him. The young museum workers, or mediators, thanked him for sharing his story with the group and used this as an opportunity to explain how in Colombia, “we are all victims of the armed conflict” in one way or another. The mediators told the group that only through true

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¹ Barbosa is a municipality 39 km Northeast of Medellín. This area was heavily impacted by the confrontations between the ELN guerrilla and the AUC paramilitaries between 1998 and 2005.
empathy and conscientious interest and study about everyone’s suffering, would it be possible to construct a stronger social fabric and finally say “Ya Basta” [Enough!] to the continuous violence that has marked the lives of all Colombians.

In this project I explore the ways in which children and youth participate in the construction of collective memory in two sites that have been heavily impacted by the Colombian armed conflict, Medellín and San Carlos, both located in the department of Antioquia. As former director of the National Center for Historical Memory (NCHM) Gonzalo Sánchez explained, collective memory efforts in Colombia are not the result of a post-conflict context. Instead, grassroots communities have used collective memory work as a way to cope with war and resist the attempts to silence victims. Collective memory
in this context is “an expression of rebellion in the face of violence and impunity. It has become a tool to come to terms with or confront the conflict, or to reveal it in the public spotlight” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016). In this way, collective memory and remembrance are key, observable, cultural practices that involve “the public enactment of affective and cognitive relations to the past using whatever media and cultural forms are available and appropriate to the particular context” (Rigney 2015, 68). As an ongoing dynamic carried out in the midst of violence, collective memory gives victims the public recognition that they have been historically denied (Tota and Hagen 2015). This also entails how negotiations, whose past is made visible through public discourse, contribute to transforming shared understandings and, thereby, help reshape collective identities.

In this project I ask, how do spaces and pedagogical projects, such as the Museo Casa de la Memoria, curate the participation of children and youth in collective memory efforts? To what extent does the participation of children and youth in collective memory work incorporate their experiences with the armed conflict? What are the methodologies employed to render collective memory work child-friendly and what are the tensions that mark its proper functioning? How is this involvement on the part of children and youth changing our understandings about childhood, victimhood, and children’s political participation? And lastly, what are the moral and ethical implications of the involvement of children in the reconstruction of an unspeakable past and how does it affect the construction of their identities?

To better understand the ways in which children and youth participate in the reconstruction of the past through collective memory practices, it is necessary to
contextualize my project. To do so, in the first section of this chapter I will provide a brief historical account of the Colombian armed conflict. However, the linear and temporal explanation of the main historical events paint an incomplete picture of the complexities that mark the Colombian armed conflict. The narration of this history as a sequence of events was often questioned by the children visiting the museum prompting them to occasionally ask “who has caused more harm”, “who were the real bad guys” or “who gets to be recognized as a victim of the conflict.” These tendencies to explain the armed conflict in terms of a progression or a sequence, as a binary framing of good versus evil —or according to the children visiting the museum, between the bad guys and the worst — also reflects the pitfalls posed by simplistic analyses of the Colombian armed conflict. Therefore, this section considers two main particularities that complicate the reconstruction of the past. Furthermore, these two traits also separate Colombia’s intractable, internal, conflict from others around the world. These are: the multiplicity of actors who have simultaneously fought over for control of (mainly rural) territories, and the social proximity (Rettberg 2013) between the armed actors and the victims in terms of their socio-economic and geographic origins, which has obliterated all trust within the affected communities. The final part of this first section will focus on the research that has been carried out on the impact that the armed conflict has had on Colombian children and youth.

The second section of this chapter will focus on the existing research and literature on children’s involvement with armed conflicts. To do so, first I provide a review on existing literature on the topic. Second, I review the literature on the ways in which children living in the midst of violence have refused and resisted it and, thus,
constructed peace. Lastly, the third section looks at the ways in which children have participated in transitional contexts and I review the debate around children’s political agency.

1. Colombia: violence, inequality, and the infinite struggle for peace

One of the questions that was frequently asked during the school visits to the museum was this: “when did the conflict begin?” Sometimes it was posed by the mediators, and at other times by the visitors, and although it was always answered, the responses were not necessarily identical. These inconsistencies were not due to ignorance, but they actually reflect two questions that scholars of the Colombian armed conflict continue to grapple with: when and what were the circumstances in which the conflict originated? And, due to its duration in time, what are the typologies that best describe it? These two questions were also the main starting points for the conversations between the children and the youths visiting the museum and the young museum workers. Sometimes they would begin with a historical account and then proceed to a description of the main armed actors. But a constant throughout the school visits was the feeling that when recalling Colombia’s history, one cannot disentangle it from violence. War is ubiquitous, and its “recurrence suggests that a mythic temporality is also present as a frame of reference, within which the same violence has been here ‘forever’ and reproduces itself without end” (Pécaut 2000, 140).

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2 The issue around the origin of the armed conflict is not only a matter of academic debate, but it has actual implications for the recognition and reparation of the victims of the armed conflict. Some of the reiterative dates are 1948, 1958, 1963, and some see violence as omnipresent since the wars of Independence. The issue about the origin of the conflict is further discussed in the section “The 60-year war?”.
The analysis of the Colombian armed conflict has traditionally focused on three aspects: land control and reform, the dynamics and flow of the violence, and the reconstruction of new subjectivities produced by the different forms of violence. However according to Pécaut (2000), the logic of terror thrust upon by armed groups on civilians, in addition to the conflict’s duration in time and its inevitable degradation, progressively transformed violence into an aphasic phenomenon (145). Gutiérrez Sanín, Wills and Sánchez Gómez (2005) also argue that the Colombian armed conflict is an unnamable war: it resists being named due to the nameless atrocities and also because of the academic obsession that it has generated among Colombian and international academics for decades (8).

However, some academics manage to encompass the instability, the changing dynamics, the degradation, and the influx of multiple actors that have influenced the continuation of the armed conflict in time, by classifying the Colombian armed conflict as intractable. According to Crocker, Hampson and Aall (2005), the term intractable conflict refers to those conflicts which are unresolvable and that “have persisted over time and refused to yield to efforts—through either direct negotiations by the parties or mediation with third-party assistance—to arrive at a political settlement” (5). But unlike other intractable conflicts that are based on ethnic, racial, or religious exclusion, in the

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4 For more on intractable conflicts, On Grasping the nettle (2005), Crocker, Hampson and Aall present a comparative study that include the cases of Colombia, Sudan, Angola, Kashmir, Israel-Palestina, the Korean Peninsula, and the Balkans.
case of Colombia the causes for the conflict have shifted through time, making it even more unresolvable.

The 60-year war? Historicizing the Colombian Armed Conflict

Since its independence from Spain in 1810, Colombia experienced civil confrontations throughout the nineteenth century between the two traditional parties, the conservadores who supported Simón Bolívar’s model of a centralized government and the liberales who supported Francisco de Paula Santander’s federalist model. Since the beginning of its state formation, Colombia’s weak institutionality was founded on partisan sentiments, and its population remained mainly rural throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. The latter can also be explained due to the topography that not only made urbanization difficult but delayed processes around the centralization of power, infrastructure, and communication, which produced increased sentiments of regionalism alongside the well-stablished partisan sentiments (Lopez-Alves 2012). As a result, from 1810 until 1902 Colombia went through six civil conflicts during which time partisan sentiments consolidated as a key feature of the country’s identity.

Interestingly, when one considers the moment of origin of the conflict, few analyses refer to the post-colonial period. My own project explains children’s participation in a conflict that has lasted for decades, not centuries. However, when the mediators asked the children visiting the museum to specify a date or period for the

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5 Coloquially known as El Libertador [the liberator], Simón Bolívar was born in Caracas (Venezuela) and was Colombia’s first president (1819-1830). At the time the new nation was known as Gran Colombia which included present day Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela. His vice president was Francisco de Paula Santander, who succeeded him as president of the Republic of the New Granada from 1832-1837.
beginning of the war, some students would explain: “When the Spanish arrived, and they brought folks from Africa and enslaved everyone”. In the mind of the younger children visiting the museum, Colombia’s origin and existence is not possible without violence. This supports some academic analyses that propose that Colombia is a country of permanent and endemic warfare (Sánchez and Bakewell 1985). Furthermore, these colonial and post-colonial periods also prefigure the future struggles that transformed political violence into structural violence, specifically around land ownership rights.

These partisan confrontations were dramatically changed on the 9th of April 1948 when political leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá. Considered the first candidate to address the needs of the common people, his assassination culminated in a mass upheaval in what is known as El Bogotazo, which spread throughout the country. Campesinos and campesinas who strongly supported the liberal candidate decided to organize in arms and the violence between the two political parties reached new levels in terms of intensity, crudeness, and recurrence, resulting in the deaths of an estimated of two hundred thousand Colombians (Sánchez and Bakewell 1985). This partisan confrontation, known as La Violencia mainly took place in rural areas and confronted the elites of landowners and colonos, with campesino movements. La Violencia ended with the consolidation of the Frente Nacional (1958-1974), an

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6 Since 2011, as a commemoration of Gaitán and the victims of the armed conflict, Colombia celebrates the Day of the Victims on this date.
7 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was born in a working-class family in Bogotá. Trained as a lawyer, he began his political career as a Union leader, and founded the Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria [National Leftist Revolutionary Union] in 1933.
8 When the news about the assassination of Gaitán spread, a massive riot engulfed downtown Bogotá for over ten hours. When the assassination occurred, the radio reported that the Conservative Party and President Ospina Perez were behind the assassination and asked the people to take the streets with whatever was at hand. Gaitán’s killer was killed by the mob and his body was left in front of the President’s residency (Palacio Casa de Nariño). The cost of the damages, the number of fatalities, and the reasons and perpetrators of Gaitán’s assassination remain unclear.
agreement reached in 1957 between the elites of the two political parties to share and rotate power. The agreement was based on the alternation of the presidency and the equal distribution of the senate between liberals and conservatives.

Although the National Front brought an end to the partisan violence, the new peasant and labor movements that had developed in the country since the 1920’s were disenfranchised and denied any form of political participation. Furthermore, the consolidation of state power materialized in the consolidation of a national army that had marginal national presence and did little to end the massive expulsion of campesinos, campesinas and small landowners during the 1950’s (Arnson and Whitfield 2005). Paired with the reluctance from the central government to reform the inequity in land tenure and distribution, sympathy for the nascent guerrillas had grown considerably by the beginning of the 1960’s.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, then FARC-EP founded in 1966), the National Liberation Army (ELN founded in 1965), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL founded in 1967) were the first of a long list of guerrilla movements created since the 1960s. Other prominent guerrilla movements were the April 19th or M-19 (founded in 1974) and the Quintin Lame Revolutionary Movement (founded in 1985). Some argue that this period of insurgence was influenced by the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War and received collaboration from the Colombian Communist

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9 In contrast to the discombobulated ontology of the armed conflict, the guerrillas, particularly the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [FARC] have a clear foundational myth: Marquetalia. At the beginning of the 1960’s, the newly formed guerrillas had taken control of certain territories were the state had minimal or null presence. These territories were called independent republics and were the focus of the anti-insurgent project of then President Guillermo León Valencia (1962-1966, Conservative). One of these so-called independent territories was Marquetalia, located in the Tolima Department. For an analysis on how the confrontation between the government and FARC transformed into the foundational myth see Olave, G. (2013) The eternal return of Marquetalia: on the founding myth of the FARC-EP.
party (Gutiérrez Sanín, Wills and Sánchez Gómez 2005). The mediators at the Museo often referred to this period as the origins of the contemporary Colombian armed conflict, and a time during which the guerrillas were “fighting for the good of the people” or “had yet to be corrupted by greed and money”. This period of war focused on ideological struggles between the communist and capitalist views of rural governance, land ownership and poverty alleviation strategies (Krystalli 2019).

By the 1980’s, new circumstances rearranged the dynamics of the armed conflict. First, the drug trafficking networks that had been established by the cartels during the 1970’s were now consolidated. In order to combat the increase of guerrilla groups and their influence in some territories, landowners, drug cartels, wealthy live-stock farmers and emerald barons created private armies (sometimes with the assistance of the national army) that culminated in the consolidation of the paramilitary forces. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent loss of support from the Soviet bloc, left the guerrillas without ideological and material support which pushed them to negotiate peace in 1985 with conservative president Belisario Betancur (1982-1986). By then, FARC had already added EP to their name, which stood for Ejército del Pueblo\(^\text{10}\) [army of the people] in 1982, and by 1984 founded the Unión Patriótica [Patriotic Union Party (UP)] in an effort to transition from armed to political struggle. In the meantime, the guerrillas had already institutionalized kidnappings and assassinations of what they called the oligarchy, and the destruction of mega-infrastructure projects as a means to finance their war effort. But

\(^{10}\) During the Seventh Conference held by FARC in 1982, FARC decided to change its strategy around ideology and warfare. One of the key changes was what is known as “the combination of all forms of struggle” which sought to combine political and armed struggle. However, these new policies were not supported by some members who chose to only support the political negotiation of the conflict. This discrepancy led to the assassination of militants of the communist party by FARC members, increasing the ideological distance within FARC.
despite the negotiations with the guerrillas, by the end of the 1980’s Colombia was going through a period of uncertainty and fear. The historically weak Colombian state declared war against the drug cartels with the support of the United States. As a consequence, prominent judges, political candidates, union leaders, and human rights activists were assassinated. And just like forty years before, it was the assassination of liberal presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán\textsuperscript{11} in 1989, that marked a new pivotal point in the Colombian armed conflict.

Galán’s assassination was only one of a long list of magnicides that took place at the end of the 1980’s and the beginning of the 1990’s\textsuperscript{12}. The UP Party was also heavily persecuted, and its members were systematically assassinated in what is now recognized as the only political genocide in history. It was around this time that the drug cartels were dismantled, and the drug trafficking structures became the new locus of dispute between the multiple actors of the conflict. Despite the United States influence, coca cultivation rapidly expanded, and Colombia became the world’s main producer. As a consequence, the guerrillas and paramilitaries economic structures became dependent of drug trafficking networks. As Arnson and Whitfield (2005) explain, the abundance of the economic resources for cocaine trafficking “meant that the armed actors had the capacity to arm and sustain substantially larger numbers of fighters” (242). After 200 years of civil conflict, the war in Colombia had morphed from partisan struggles, to struggles for social

\textsuperscript{11} A supporter of extradition, Luis Carlos Galan was an outspoken enemy of the drug cartels. He was predicted to win the 1990 elections with a 60% margin. His campaign centered on the dismantling of the narcotraffic influence on Colombian politics. His assassination was orchestrated between military officers, the drug cartels, and paramilitaries.

\textsuperscript{12} Other prominent political figures assassinated during this period were Jaime Pardo Leal (1941 - 1986, UP Party), Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa (1955-1990, UP Party), Carlos Pizarro Leongómez (1951-1990, AD M-19), Álvaro Gómez Hurtado (1919-1995, Conservative Party).
and land reform to a conflict for the territorial control of the regions linked to the production and extraction of drugs.

Despite the pivotal moment marked by the 1991 Constitutional reform\textsuperscript{13}, the decade of the 1990s was characterized by the weak administrations of Ernesto Samper\textsuperscript{14} (1994 – 1998) and Andres Pastrana\textsuperscript{15} (1998-2002). Furthermore, despite the campaigns for the eradication of illicit crops, drug cultivation continued to rise throughout the 90s. Meanwhile, the illegal armed groups increasingly resorted to terror as their main strategy to control their territories (Pécaut 2000). The country was once again moving from a period of low intensity confrontations to a policy of ending the war via armed struggle. By the end of the 1990’s, the illegal armed actors had been strengthened with resources from drug trafficking and the Colombian military had received military and financial aid from the United States through what is known as the \textit{Plan Colombia}\textsuperscript{16}. Despite the demilitarization of Caguán, FARC continued to break the ceasefire agreement and the overall public opinion was that FARC was mocking the Colombian government. This in

\textsuperscript{13} Thanks to this reform, which culminated in the creation of the Colombian Constitution of 1991, the democratic institutions were reformed to accept a broader number of participants beyond the two traditional parties. Furthermore, the election of local authorities (which were previously designated by the president) was established. It also allowed the demobilization of three guerrilla movements (M-19, PRT and EPL). It also created a new Colombian identity based on notions of pluri-culturalism and gave senate seats to Indigenous and Afro-Colombian representatives.

\textsuperscript{14} Samper Pizano’s presidency was wrapped in crisis and scandal in what is known as the Procedure 8,000: a legal investigation of the allegations that Samper had received funding from the Cali Cartel. Though Samper continues to defend his innocence to this day (he recently participated in the JEP in a public hearing), it has been proven that drug trafficking had a pervasive hold of the Colombian political system by the mid-90s.

\textsuperscript{15} Pastrana’s campaign and election focused on the end of the conflict with FARC ad ELN via peace negotiations. To do so, he demilitarized \textit{El Caguán}, an area the size of Switzerland, and FARC was to halt their criminal activities. However, the peace process collapsed, and a new era of intensification of the war ensued.

\textsuperscript{16} Plan Colombia was a bilateral aid policy between US President Bill Clinton and Pastrana Arango that allegedly sought to end the Colombian armed conflict. Plan Colombia existed until 2015, and has transformed into Peace Colombia, a program that seeks to aid Colombia with the implementation of the Peace agreement. However, this relation has been read in the hemisphere as an interventionist policy that has at times created tensions with the countries in the South American region.
turn had the unfavorable consequence that led to Álvaro Uribe Velez´s (2002-2006; 2006-2010) election in 2002.

Uribe´s platform proposed a military campaign to recover the country´s territory that produced an intensification of the war against the guerrilla forces. However, Uribe´s government negotiated a massive demobilization of paramilitary groups in what has been characterized as “controversial negotiations” (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016). As the Centro de Memoria Histórica (2016) explained in its analysis of the armed conflict from 1958-2012, “the government´s pressure on the Armed Forces, combined with incentives for results, had perverse consequences in the form of criminal conducts like the ‘false positives’” (185). Another consequence of Uribe’s “Democratic Security policy” was the surveillance carried out by the Colombian intelligence agency, formerly known as DAS, of political and social organizations that opposed to the government, including journalists, judges, and social leaders. But despite his combative response towards his opposition, in his second mandate, Uribe and the leaders of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – AUC’s [United Self-defense Forces of Colombia] signed the demobilization of the paramilitary group in 2005. However, the lack of cohesion within the paramilitary forces prevented the ending of these group as a key armed actor.

According to the Basta Ya! Report (2016) “by 2006, the limited demobilization of the paramilitary forces was setting the stage for the imminent rearming of these groups, which accelerated during 2008 and 2010, and registered a significant rise in their criminal acts between 2011 and 2012” (192). Today, these groups continue to be active in many areas of the country were narco-economies thrive.
The rise of authoritarian policies during the Uribe era resulted in an increase in human rights violations and the assassination of human rights activists and social leaders that continues until today. However, it is because of his negotiation with the AUC’s that his former Defense Minister, Juan Manuel Santos, was able to launch a presidential campaign around the continuation of the democratic security policy. When elected, Santos (2010-2012; 2012-2018) confronted the guerrillas at a time where they had been militarily weakened and the rearming of the paramilitary was volatile and fragmented (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 199). However, his government marked a break in the history of the Colombian armed conflict when through the creation of the Victims Law of 2011, conflict victims were given social and political recognition. This marked a breaking point in the consolidation of transitional justice institutions in the history of Colombia.

At the time of writing, a minority of former FARC leaders have already rearmed and broken the peace agreement while other remain in compliance with the peace accord. During one of the school visits, one of the mediators asked a group of 10th graders what they thought about Colombia’s peace process, to which the group responded with a laugh. The mediator laughed too and casually said:

“Yeah right. You all are like ‘listen to this fool’ cause to think of a Colombia in peace is borderline ridiculous”.

The kaleidoscopic conflict?

As the historical account has proven, the Colombian armed conflict is a multi-party dispute. Though the three main armed actors tend to be classified between the leftist guerrillas, the extreme-right paramilitaries, and the Colombian Armed forces, other

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17 Further analyzed in Chapter 5.
participants have sometimes entered the scene such as the drug trafficking armies. This constant influx of actors increased feelings of uncertainty and fear amongst the population. In the most disputed territories, it was not clear who was in control and the boundaries, particularly in rural areas, were fluid and permeable (Pécaut 2000).

Another consequence of the unpredictability and the loose control of the armed actors was the shifting identities of the members of some of these groups. According to Pécaut (2000), it was a common praxis among the paramilitaries to recruit former guerrilleros (135), and the guerrillas relied on social connections among their members to recruit new combatants (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). Furthermore, neighbors and even family members could not be trusted since given enough time they could be coerced into becoming sapos [informants], those who would single out who were “sympathizers” for the next impending killing or massacre. As Pécaut (2000) explains and some of the testimonies I encountered confirm “selling a piece of merchandise, providing aid to someone, or moving into a site near a particular person or group are actions that may draw condemnation” (136) during the high intensity periods of the conflict.

The combination of these two characteristics of the armed conflict degraded the war to a point in which “the banal and extraordinary manifestations of the violence quickly confounded with one another in an indistinct texture of experience” (Pécaut 2000, 140). In addition, notions of Colombians being “violent by nature”, “savages” on one extreme, or that “we are all victims” on the other, explain the causes, impacts, and consequences of the conflict by “naturalizing” it. Furthermore, the construction of collective memory focuses on the extraordinary violence that has not been arranged into a
linear historical narrative but in a “kaleidoscopic apprehension of the configurations of the violence” (Pécaut 2000, 143) where our comprehension of the conflict is constantly shifting. Therefore, if time is no longer experienced in a linear fashion, the comprehension of children’s experiences with the armed conflict must also be open to reconsideration. In a context where linear and progressive temporality is absent, traditional understandings of childhood as a becoming must also be questioned and reconstructed. The future mixes with the present and the past constantly. The next section briefly discusses existing research around children’s experiences with the armed conflict.

**A war with no name or age: children victims of the Colombian armed conflict**

Understanding the extent to which the Colombian armed conflict is impacting children is a question that many sectors such as the government, academia, non-governmental agencies, among others, are still trying to address. According to the data collected by the Victims Unit of the Colombian government in 2013, between 1985 and 2012, 2,520,512 minors had been forcibly displaced, 70 had been victims of sexual violence, 154 of forced disappearance, 154 of homicide and 342 of anti-personnel mines (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2016, 320). With regard to recruitment, various academic accounts agree that in Colombia the recruitment and participation of children in the armed conflict is a historical phenomenon that is far from static and has varied among the different armed actors (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017).

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18 In Colombia, census data is collected for *children*, understood as anyone between 0 and 14 and *youth* who encompasses anyone between the ages of 14 to 28. According to the most recent census data (2018) there are 10,906,500 children and 12,768,157 young people in Colombia. This adds to more or less 49% of the total Colombian population (48,258,494).
According to the National Center of Historical Memory, a particular feature that distinguishes child soldiers in Colombia is that a high percentage (around 40%) claim to have been persuaded to join the illegal armed groups (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017, 55). As explained in the previous section this can be explained by the two characteristics of the conflict: the multiplicity of actors and its social proximity. In urban centers, juvenile gangs would constantly change their allegiances (Pécaut 2000, 135) and in rural areas, displaced and orphaned children either joined the guerrillas, joined the paramilitaries, joined the army, or fled to the nearest urban center (Sanford 2006, 71). Furthermore, recruitment of children varied among the armed actors. FARC presented the highest levels of recruitment overall (54%) and the highest recruitment of girls (around two thousand). Paramilitaries were the only ones who paid their recruits a salary and promised other types of economic compensation. Unsurprisingly, the main sources of recruitment for each group were their historical territories of influence (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017).

Another difficulty regarding the study and analysis of children’s participation in the armed conflict is the absence of government efforts to systematize and comprehend this phenomenon. This incommensurable obstacle has created “incomplete data, fake data, and mythical data” (Gutiérrez Sanín, Wills and Sánchez Gómez 2005, 15). Given that the efforts to collect the data was unsystematic and irregular, it was not surprising that these numbers drastically increased at the moment the government ratified the UNCRC (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). Furthermore, most of the research in Colombia aligns with traditional constructions of children-victims of the armed conflict as passive and apolitical.
However, the transitional justice institution created to ensure the transition to peace by the Santos administration, particularly in the form of the Victims Law, made possible for children-victims of the armed conflict to exercise their political agency. It included provisions that allowed victimized children and youth to access compensation rights. Furthermore, if a child joined and left an illegal armed group underage, they were recognized as victims. However, if they left the armed group of age, they would be prosecuted as perpetrators —irrespective of whether they joined the guerrillas or the paramilitaries as minors— and will not be entitled to any form of compensation (C. d. Colombia 2011). This legal logic denies the characteristics of recruitment and the differences between the zones of influence of each group, as well as the child’s decision to be part of the conflict.

This legal framework also ignores academic findings like the ones presented by political scientists, Roos Haer and Tobias Böhmelt (2017). Haer’s and Böhmelt’s study on the relation between child recruitment and the duration of civil conflicts, including the Colombian one, demonstrated that children’s recruitment in a civil war is related to the extended duration of the conflict. Children would not only choose to join but their decision to stay with these armed groups was often because it served as a means to receive payment, schooling, military training, and other forms of social recognition and power (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017; Moreno Martín, Carmona Parra and Tobón Hoyos 2010; Obregón 2005).

This project seeks to broaden existing research by working with children who may not have been recruited, but who are also victims of the armed conflict. According to Riaño-Alcalá (2006), memory serves as a perfect site to examine the cultural dimensions
of violence. Young people’s memory practices provide a unique perspective from which we can examine how collective memory works and its relation to violence in society.

2. Mambrú: childhood and armed conflict

Student: You’d think it’s only a drawing, right? But if you really think about it, and look beyond it, it’s so sad that these children are not drawing flowers, or butterflies, or birds, or rivers, but they have to draw these things. This really gets you because children, they draw what is around them, what they feel, how they see their lives. And for their drawings to be these things, and that they know the names of the people killed, that’s so shocking. A seven-year-old boy should be drawing happy things. Not drawing how they are seeing people be killed, thousands of them, their friends, neighbors, and families.

Mediator: You guys remember the massacre I told you about? This drawing represents that massacre. And in addition to what the compañera [classmate] is saying that we all agree with, this drawing is also a denuncia [denunciation] of the collaboration between the army and the paramilitaries. Why? You guys might know that the army cannot hide their faces. It does not matter if they are in an antiguerrilla operation [...]. So, besides this drawing showing the horrors of war and a child’s experiences, it is also a testimony.

Earlier during that same school visit, Catalina told the group about the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, and the massacre that took place in this area of Antioquia in the year 2000. The drawing shows the army’s helicopter hovering over the attack; to the left the encapuchados, referring to men wearing military gear but whose faces were covered with black balaclavas. Next to each victim, “Yeison” included each of the victims’ name.
The interaction between the student and the mediator is a good example of the two overarching perspectives regarding children’s involvement in the conflict. The student presents the common societal anxiety that views the experiences of children living in such contexts through feelings of failure and dispair. The child is a victim and adults have “robbed them of their childhood”. Furthermore, she singles out societal constructions of childhood as a time of vulnerability and innocence. Her suffering is heightened by knowing the age of the child-victim at the moment of the drawing (seven), and imagining the emotional and psychological trauma the child must have faced after seeing loved ones being killed. And while the mediator acknowledges and agrees with the student’s feelings, for her, the image is not only powerful as a source of testimony, but also for its political denuncia. It is in this communicative act of retelling past trauma that the child-victim changes into a child-witness. He is disclosing to his audience that his loved ones were killed not only by the paramilitaries but with the assistance of the Colombian army. It is in this exchange in which the voiceless, passive, child-victim, transforms into an active, agentic child-witness whose voice aids in the reconstruction of the past and in the disclosing of the truth.

“Mambrú se fue a la guerra”: a review on children and armed conflict

“Mambrú se fue a la guerra,
Que dolor, que dolor, que pena.
Mambrú se fue a la guerra,
No sé cuándo vendrá”\textsuperscript{20}.

\textsuperscript{20} The rhyme translates: "Mambrú left to war, how painful, how painful, how sad. Mambrú left to war, I don’t know when he’ll be back”. Based on Marlrouh s’en va-t-en-guerre” a French folk song, the translation of this traditional, popular, children’s rhyme has been used in governmental campaigns as a symbol of childhoods lost to war, specifically due to the recruitment of child soldiers.
Children and youths’ involvement in armed conflict has been well documented from a multidisciplinary perspective and in a wide variety of contexts and conflicts. Cook and Wall (2011), Seymour (2014), McEvoy-Levy (2006) and Wells, et al. (2014) present us with sociological and ethnographic accounts that collect children’s perspectives on their lived realities while growing up in the midst of violence. These scholars also invite us to see children in contexts of armed conflict beyond the reductive dichotomies of victims-perpetrators and agency-passivity that stem from Western cultural constructions of childhood. De La Ferriere (2014), Dubinsky (2012) and Filipovic and Challenger (2006) center children’s voices in relation to the politics of representation, by questioning and analyzing children’s testimonies about war through different mediums such as film, diaries, and written testimonies. The sentimental portrayal of children and war in pop culture representations, and the consumption of these images, also question our failures as a society.

This attention however, tends to impose binary models in which children living in contexts of armed conflict are either victims or perpetrators. In addition, it narrows the inquiry about the children’s capacity to participate and make autonomous choices, something closely related to the idea of children’s agency, a key concept in childhood studies (Hanson 2016, 471). This is due to the focus on (young) children as victims and youth as perpetrators (McEvoy-Levy 2006), particularly in the form of child-soldiers and their impact on the continuation of war (Haer and Böhmelt 2017; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017; Rosen 2005). However, children affected by war cannot be reduced to monolithic terms. Just like each context determines the dynamics of each conflict, children’s experiences are also determined by variables such as the children’s
diversity in terms of age, social class, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, religion, to name a few (Cook and Wall 2011). Furthermore, children are not necessarily victimized via recruitment or fighting at the frontlines, but serve other roles such as cooks, spies, couriers, sexual workers, or coca-growers (McEvoy-Levy 2006). Moreover, when analyzing children’s lived experiences with political violence, we must also consider the children’s precarious conditions in circumstances of weak statehood and structural violence and how armed conflict tends to exacerbate such conditions (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013). Most importantly, this narrow framing in combination with fragmented views of children only as victims disregard the fluidity of the categories: a former child-soldier could have joined an illegal armed group as an act of revenge for a past victimization and can now be a peace advocate in his own community (Sanford 2006). Children and young people’s experiences, possibilities, and spheres of action will be determined by their context and subjectivity including the extent to which adults accept their participation in contexts of transition and peacebuilding. Thus, this research looks at the ways in which children and youths’ participation in memory construction is supported, prevented, and allowed by adults. Furthermore, I analyze if this participation allows children and youths to exercise their political agency in the reconstruction of the past by questioning aspects of their subjectivity as children, as Colombians, and as the “post-accord generation”.

**Children and peacebuilding in the midst of violence**

In comparison with the research on children and armed conflict, the study of children as key peacebuilding agents in their own communities during armed conflict, or in times of transition, is considerably less common (Berents 2018, McEvoy-Levy 2006, Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013). Not only because children and youths tend to be
sidelined in the planning and execution of peacebuilding activities, but because they also tend to not be considered as key beneficiaries of peacebuilding programs (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013). Instead, their integrations seem to be reduced to peace education endeavors around conflict management, prevention, and resolution, or linked to the reparations and benefits that their parents or tutors receive. However, in most contexts of armed conflict, children and youths participate in peacebuilding and non-violent grassroots organizations, intergenerational dialogues, and progressive politics (McEvoy-Levy 2006, 7). Some of these communitarian processes may include public healing rituals and collective memory projects. Furthermore, in contexts of everyday violence in intractable conflicts, children and young people have played a crucial role in the negotiation of peace in everyday life in their communities but are rarely acknowledged (Berents 2018; Brocklehurst 2006; Sanford 2006). If our interest lies in understanding the experiences of children living in contexts of armed conflict, then our academic objectives must be geared towards locating children’s everyday understandings of violence and peace and their expertise in dealing with the banality of violence and its attendant processes of peacebuilding. One way this is possible is by analyzing how children and youth co-narrate the conflict, their own experiences, and the mechanisms they implement to cope with violence at different levels (individual, political, and structural). By considering children’s and youth’s participation in peacebuilding strategies in the midst of violence seriously, their role as peace constructors in periods of transition becomes even more important. If society involves children and youth in peace processes and decision making then, these communities have a better chance of restoring and sustaining peace (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013).
**Children, peacebuilding, and transitional contexts**

Periods of transition from political violence or armed conflict are particularly challenging for children and youth since new patterns of violence may emerge that directly or indirectly affect them (O'Kane, Feinstein and Giertsen 2013). One of the instances in which children and youths have participated in processes of transition has been in contexts of transitional justice. The role of children in truth commissions specifically, signals a shift around the increasing recognition of children’s viewpoints during the last thirty years. The truth commissions of the 1980s and the 1990s (Chile 1990-1991, El Salvador 1992-1993, and Haiti 1994-1996) documented violations against children, and Guatemala (1997-1999) and South Africa (1995-2002) investigated and reported a higher number of victimizations to children and youth than previous commissions. It was not until the truth commission in Timor-Leste (2002-2005) when children participated in public hearings sharing their own experiences. The truth commissions in Sierra Leone (2002-2004) and Liberia (2005-2009) had specific activities that included children in their mandate and systematically listened to them. Their findings were presented in specific chapters that considered children and youths’ experiences with the war (UNICEF. Innocenti Research Centre 2010). As Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2013) point out, “if post-conflict peacebuilding efforts do not succeed in giving child and youth concerns the political space and attention they require, international and national peacebuilding activities are incomplete at best and will possibly fail to become sustainable” (235).

Children’s participation in times of conflict and transition also enable their communities to provide evidence of human rights violations and to seek justice (McEvoy-Levy 2006). But peacebuilding is seldom limited to activities performed in
institutional settings such as truth commissions. Peacebuilding also encompasses a broad range of efforts that seek to reform, heal, prevent, and memorialize the conditions that elicit and sustain violent conflict in post-accord settings. Children and youths’ peace efforts exist regardless of what is happening at the national or governmental level. Processes of *denuncia* and collective memory like the ones that take place in the Museo, are instances in which children are giving their own testimonies, co-constructing the narratives around the armed conflict, expressing their fears in relation to the burden of being part of the “post-accord generation”, or even expressing their apathy and distrust regarding a peaceful future. By omitting children’s political subjectivity in transitional contexts, adults perpetuate the notion that childhood is a time of innocence and vulnerability and that children are defenseless objects in need of protection (Dubinsky 2012).

This project aligns with the theorists that see children not only as victims and seeks to go beyond the question of agency. Rather, I see children and youth as participants in the reconstruction of the past and the post-accord present, considering their unique experiences with political and structural violence. Furthermore, I see children’s participation in peacebuilding as an expression of their national and local identities and their citizenship. Thus, this project understands children not as citizens in the making or pre-political beings, but rather, as marginalized political subjects. I see the children’s and youths’ role as active citizens as being paramount to the success of transitional contexts. What this also requires is a reconceptualization of citizenship and power dynamics between children, youths, and adults.
**Children, peace-building and political agency**

This project sees children’s participation in collective memory not only as the materialization of their right to partake and contribute (UNICEF 1990, Article 12), and their right to access truth, justice, and reparation (United Nations 1985), but as a broadening of our understandings of who gets to be a political subject. In contexts of political violence, political agency is often attacked, disrupted, and denied regardless of the victims’ age. In his article regarding democratic representation and childhood, Wall (2011) argues that “the right to vote should be as expansive as possible because those voted into office are given power over the lives of all” (97). When one extrapolates this intention to contexts of armed conflict, children’s right to participate in peacebuilding and collective memory should also be as expansive as possible because in circumstances of extreme violence, it affected the lives of all. This becomes more apparent in children whose political participation is already limited and, in contexts of armed conflict, suppressed under notions of “the best interest of the child”. Following Moosa-Mitha (2005) this view of children as “not-yet-citizens” is due to the adultist scope of liberal citizenship models in which children’s rights to autonomy and equality are always in construction. By adopting a difference-centered citizenship approach, children's citizenship is not understood secondary but interdependent with that of adults (Cockburn 2005). By taking the difference-centered approach, “citizenship also signifies 'belonging' through an acknowledgment of citizens' subjective desires to belong as a full member of the society rather than through a normative stance of socially prescribed activities assumed to be citizenry” (Moosa-Mitha 2005, 372).

Quite often, the children and youth in my research questioned their lived realities and laughed at the possibility of a future without violence. They would reflect on their
own histories and the opportunities they had been granted or denied while growing up in a context of intractable conflict. Drawing from these conceptualizations of the lived everyday experiences of children living in contexts of armed conflict, this project seeks to understand how children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory broadens our understanding of their political subjectification and the construction of their national and political identities. However, the questions about what it means to be Colombian, or how Colombia’s violent past affects their subjective understanding were themes that came up during my fieldwork. My original intention was to look into the children’s and youth’s conceptualization of collective memory, but it became apparent that I could not separate their understandings of the past from their understandings of a (national) self. Therefore, *Cultivating Hope* also presents how the children and the youth who participated in my research understood collective memory.

3. **Dissertation Outline**

The chapters of this study draw from eight months of fieldwork in two research sites: *Museo Casa de la Memoria* (Memory House Museum) in Medellín, and CARE – *Centro para la reconciliación y reparación* (Center for Reconciliation and Reparation) in the rural area of San Carlos. I explored the multiple aspects that shaped children and young people’s processes in the construction of their political identities through collective memory. I paid particular attention to how the materiality of museum spaces, the critical pedagogy of peace education, and the ongoing trauma of the conflict, affect these identities in rural and urban contexts. The dissertation proceeds as follows.

The third chapter focuses on the tension between the contemporary understanding of collective memory as a space of political participation, and that of the *living memory* that occurs within the Museo as a *child-friendly* strategy. To understand this tension, I
draw from existing literature on memory studies and museums studies, and I suggest that
the spatial characteristics of the museum in addition to the generational interchange
between the young mediators and the children visiting the museum, result in a living
memory. I also explore how the (adult) museum staff’s attempts to create programs that
enhance and support the children’s participation in collective memory, paradoxically
limit their efforts due to their dominant framing of children as vulnerable and lacking in
knowledge of the armed conflict. Children and youth, however, appear to find ways to
contest these assumptions and to assert their roles as co-creators of the narratives around
the armed conflict, thereby exercising their right to participate in the reconstruction of a
national narrative.

In the fourth chapter I explore the methodological and pedagogical frameworks
that shape the mediation carried out by the young people working in the museum space.
To do so, I describe how critical peace education has developed in Colombia, particularly
considering the characterizations of the armed conflict as intractable and with multiple
protagonists. Most of the literature on children as peacebuilders that intertwines with
research on peace education occurs in the school setting. By focusing on an alternative
educational setting like the Museo, the relationship between the learner and the
pedagogist is expanded. Drawing from the interactions between the young mediators and
the children and youths visiting the museum, I focus on the methodology of Diálogo de
Saberes (knowledge dialogues), which encourages the visitors to learn through embodied
and emotional memory, as a way to include children as active participants. I look at the
ways in which the museum workers engage in the co-construction of the narrative of the
armed conflict and identify the types of knowledge being produced in these encounters.
This chapter provides new perspectives on how the children visiting the museum and the young mediators question and modify their understanding about violence, peace, suffering, and responsibility, not only at the macro-level of the children living within an armed conflict, but within the everyday life of their own communities.

The fifth chapter focuses on the production of the rhetorical figure of the victim within the interactions between mediators and the young visitors. Most of the literature around children and armed conflict focuses on the way children are directly impacted by war. However, this chapter understands children as constructors of meaning, in this case, the ways in which the generation entrusted with the post-conflict period, understands victimhood. To do so, I look at some of the existing literature in victimhood studies. The chapter also gives a historical explanation of the ways in which frameworks of transitional justice have been created and implemented in Colombia’s history and the ways in which children have been included or ignored. More importantly, I look at the ways in which the construction of the figure of the victim has implications for the configuration of individual, collective, and national identities. This configuration entails serious implications for the (de)construction of the figure of the child-victim and its importance for the construction of collective memory about the Colombian armed conflict.

The sixth chapter looks into the collective memory work carried out with children in the rural area of San Carlos, in eastern Antioquia. Drawing from archival and ethnographic research, I examined the ways in which children participate in collective memory initiatives after the demobilization of the paramilitary forces in 2005. To do so I focused on over eighty testimonies written by San Carlitan youth as part of a four-year
school project. Drawing from literature on childhood war testimonies, I looked at the ways in which children grapple with the aphasic quality of the conflict and “speak the unspeakable” (Scarry 1985). This chapter examines how, by analyzing children’s voices via written testimonies, we can reconstruct their perceptions about their reality in periods of high intensity conflict. This portion of the study allowed me to broaden our understanding of how the everyday life of San Carlitan youth was deconstructed and reconstructed by the uncertainty and horror of war, as well as some of the strategies that the children created and used to cope with the banalization of violence furthering our understanding about children’s lives in the midst of war.

The project concludes with some recommendations for future researchers who want to focus not only on children and youth’s participation in collective memory in contexts of protracted violence, but for scholars interested in children’s political agency and their participation in contexts of transition. It also highlights the need for further exploration in the ways in which children construct their subjecthood in relation to a communal Other. This sense of being part of a victimized community is more salient and important for the construction of a political self than that of being a child. Therefore, the idea of a political child who participates in collective memory and peacebuilding endeavors, opens new possibilities for childhood studies scholars to comprehend how children and youth socially construct notions of time.
Chapter 2. Methods and Ethics

“Nunca me he ido, siempre he estado regresando, nunca me acabé de ir. Me iré con la muerte”.
Fernando Vallejo.

“I have never left, I have always been coming back, I have never been completely gone. I will leave with death” (Padilla 2018) was the way in which Colombian writer Fernando Vallejo explained his complicated relationship with Colombia when he came back after the death of his partner after living abroad for 47 years. I have also been living outside of Colombia since 2013 when I left for my masters at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. And like Vallejo, I never feel like I truly leave Colombia behind. Not only because of my unbreakable nexus with my family and friends, but also due to the fact that my academic work has always centered the everyday experiences of children in Colombia and has relied on feminist ethnographic methods to do so. Therefore, I am always conscious about how my identity as a cisgender-woman, straight, white-mestiza, well-educated, Bogotana, influences my work and the decisions I make along the way. This has been particularly true for my dissertation research given its focus on children’s and youth’s experiences with individual and collective memory of suffering and trauma.

Overall, during my seven months of fieldwork between July 2019 and January 2020, I conducted 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with mediators, museum staff, victims’ representatives, victims’ advocates who also identify as victims, and children participating in collective memory projects. In the Museo Casa de la Memoria, I was part of 13 training sessions for the mediators (Encuentros para la mediación) during which I participated in discussions on the meanings of peace, reconciliation, and justice for
Colombia, joined exchanges around healing and forgiveness, joined in pedagogy trainings in peace education, and shared in selfcare workshops. I observed 15 school visits with over 300 children and youth. I also joined the mediators during their días culturales [culture days] in which we would go to the nearby tiendita [similar to a corner store] and unwind after a workday by sharing some beers and listening to whatever music we chose to. The mediators went so often to the tiendita that the owner not only gave them full control of the computer to play music, but they would also get their tabs fiadas [on credit]. In CARE, I assisted the collectivity with the organization of an environmental campaign and aided in the English translation of some of their digital content. I was invited to join the local victims’ unit in several meetings and workshops with the NGO Forjando Futuros and alongside the victims’ unit of neighboring municipalities Granada and Santuario. Additionally, I interviewed 7 local victims’ leaders, helped the children with their schoolwork and attended cultural activities with the children from the Hogar Campesino [Campesino Home].

But regardless of our rapport and our time in formal and informal settings, my young interlocutors were permanently aware of my researcher identity. Whenever they gossiped or told dark jokes, someone would say “Hey, muchachos [fellas] pilas [careful], remember we are being observed by the researcher, calm down”, while we laughed it off. Besides being “the researcher”, throughout my research I was given different superlatives to readily identify me: la señora (ma’am), la rola (person from Bogotá), la gomela (person from middle or upper-class), la professional de Bogotá were the most common and they constantly reappeared during my fieldwork. In this chapter I describe the methods and the ethics that influenced my work with children and youth regarding
collective memory participation. I begin by locating my research spatially as well as temporally, following which I discuss the methods I used to collect my data. I then move on to explaining some of the ethical concerns that came up during my fieldwork as well later on when I was analyzing and writing up my findings. Both the methods and the ethics sections foreground the children and the youth who participated in my research, highlighting the most important power relation in childhood studies research: the child subject and the adult researcher with the complexities that the Colombian context brings. McEvoy-Levy (2006) points out that some of the difficulties of working in the field of armed conflict or in regions in transition from war include “access, personal safety, and work-related ethical dilemmas, stress, and trauma” (24). In this chapter I attempt to discuss all of these issues, as well as highlight how as a researcher my continuous efforts were directed at maintaining the wellbeing of all of those who were involved in this research.

1. Locating my research

Locating my research in space

During my preliminary fieldwork on December 2018, I met with Mónica, the main liaison in Bogotá of the Red Colombiana de Lugares de Memoria [Colombian Network of Places of Memory, RCLM] to discuss my collaboration and research plan with the network for the fall of 2019. We had met for the first time during the summer and we had been exchanging emails and messages on WhatsApp throughout the semester. This time we were meeting at a café on one of the busiest streets in Bogotá,

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21 In 2018, after months of groundwork by several entities, the RCLM was born as grassroots, collective efforts to strengthen the multiple memory organizations that exist in Colombia. The goal was to create an association of collective memory organizations that will allow all its members to increase their visibility, funding, and advocacy.
Carrera 7a, and as she patiently listened while having a smoke and having a much-needed cup of coffee, I explained my research plan. We were meeting to decide which of the 30 locations that composed the network would be most suitable for my research. She explained that only a few of them explicitly worked with children, but since women had been the central engine of collective memory endeavors, children and youth were always present. From the five options, considering that my fieldwork was only going to be 7 months, some security concerns in some locations, and the long distances between them, we decided to narrow it down to the Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín and the Centro de Acercamiento para la Reconciliación – CARE in San Carlos, both located in the department of Antioquia. Each of these places have been impacted by the war in dissimilar ways, with Medellín being historically tied to narco-traffic and gangs, and San Carlos being described as the rural municipality that, “could condense the history of horror of the conflict of Colombia (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2011) in which 92% of its population are victims of the armed conflict (Caracol 2016).

The proximity of Medellín and San Carlos also meant my two research sites shared cultural similarities, paisa culture. Moreover, these regional similarities impacted the dynamics of the armed conflict that took place in the region of South-Eastern Antioquia, particularly in terms of forced displacement, producing a relation between the two in which Medellín was often the receptive city for displaced San Carlitans. But most importantly, I decided, with Mónica, to focus my observation on

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22 The five options were Tumaco in the Pacific coast, Montes de María near the Caribbean coast, Cartagena del Chairá in the Colombian Amazons, Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, and CARE in San Carlos.

23 Colombia’s political organization is Departments. Antioquia is the Department where I developed my fieldwork. Colloquially the folks from this Area are known as paisas and their culture is based in coffee plantation, agriculture, traditional values, being a distinctively catholic area, and sexism.
these locations because the two sites would allow me to evaluate aspects of children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory construction from both urban and rural experiences. While the MCM in Medellín represents institutional memory and therefore, official histories, it was a great site to analyze children’s and youth’s collaboration in collective memory construction at a site heavily curated by a politics of representation. San Carlos on the other hand, was more of a grassroots initiative in which memory construction would be from below and, it was my hope, with less moderation by adults.

**Medellín – Museo Casa de la Memoria (MCM)**

Broadening the list of museums that showcase the horrors of war and the communities who resisted the multiple forms of violence, MCM seeks to be a “house of dialogue and encounter to understand what happened and is happening in our society, to rediscover hope and think about other possible futures” where “open and plural dialogues, with critical and reflexive views, aid to the understanding and overcoming of the Colombian armed conflict and the diverse violences found in Medellín, Antioquia, and Colombia” (Memoria n.d.). Located in a public park in downtown Medellín, the MCM is surrounded by working class neighborhoods and flanked by a small river that feeds the greenery of the area. Like other major Colombian cities, the constant singing of birds combines with the rumbling of the 1960’s buses engines, the honking and swearing of impatient taxi drivers and the screaming of the street vendors whom in this particular area, share their daily selling activities with street drug dealers who cater to their customers.

Inaugurated in 2012, the MCM was the result of the joint efforts between local victims’ organizations and the Medellín Mayor’s office and in 2014 the “Mediators School” was created. Although the museum was constructed with some international
support, at the moment of this writing the museum was being financed with public funding.

From a panoramic view, the museum is a tall, grey, pyramidal structure that attempts to imitate the mountains that surround the city and compose the Aburrá Valley. To reach the main entrance, the visitor has to walk uphill through an urban garden that decorates the open space and reaches a mural (Figure 3). Inside, the museum is divided in three levels. The first floor consists of the auditorium, the rooms for the temporary exhibitions, the kitchen and the public restrooms; the third floor incorporates the library on humans’ rights and armed conflict (CRAM), the workspaces for the museum’s management and staff and a book corner for children (Figure 4). This reading corner was the only place specifically designed for children (Rasmussen 2004) in the entire museum, as evidenced by its cheerful color palette.
The main entrance is decorated with a mural that reflects the temporary exhibition. During my fieldwork I witnessed how a local arts collective created the mural for *La voz de las manos: prácticas que reconcilian* (Voice of Hands: Practices that reconcile) in the course of 5 days (Figure 5). The main entrance takes the visitor to the second floor where the lobby and reception area are located. The reception area is decorated with phrases about the meaning and purpose of the museum and was often overlooked by visitors in their rush to enter to the permanent exhibit *Medellín: memorias de violencia y resistencia* (Medellín: Memories of Violence and Resistance). Once the visitor has registered, they cross a sliding door that takes them to the main exhibit. Installed in a dark room, the lack of windows and the absence of natural light, heightens the museum’s goal to showcase the hardships of war. In this room, most of the light comes from the seventeen memory technologies or “experiences” that compose the exhibit (*Appendix A*).

**Learning the organization’s vernacular**

During the early days of my fieldwork, mediators wanted to make sure that I acquired the museum’s terminology. On several occasions they stressed that they were not “just guides” (*no somos simples guías*) of the exhibits, they were mediators. Though their identities as mediators was important to them this coexisted with recognition that it’s significance was lost on other employees at the museum who saw them as “just
guides”. During our interview, I asked Juan (23) if he had ever felt discriminated against due to his age. He explained:

“In this space? Never because of my age, but only because of my role. I think it is because los de arriba [the people working upstairs] they understand the mediator as a guide and we are in charge of selling the city, selling this place. Which I can do, because I know what it is they want me to say. But then I realize they do not understand what a mediator is” (Juan, interview with the author, November 8, 2019).

Juan understood that one of the main purposes of the museum is to represent the “success” story of the city of Medellín to its visitors as well as the investors. The museum not only is a place for the victims, but a place to rebrand the city of Medellín as a compassionate, enduring, pujante24 and resilient city.

Luis (22), a youth and social leader in his comuna, also explained to me that the other workers in the museum seemed to feel some superiority due to the mediators’ lack of professional status. To be a mediator, one of the stipulations is to be enrolled in either college or technical school. He also pointed to me the fact that the mediators were the only team in the museum who used uniforms much like the maintenance crew. Luis also commented on the mediators’ status in the museum when he explained that:

“we are the ones in the bottom. [We laughed] No, but really. I mean we are always in the main exhibit, while the rest of the museum is always upstairs, on the third floor, and they never ever come to the main exhibit” (Luis, interview with the author, August 29, 2019).

Another example when the mediators had felt marginalized due to their age and role in the museum is when they interact with adult audiences. Particularly interactions between a female mediator and an older male visitor. The mediators felt as if they had to “try even harder”. Some of these adults even use infantilizing terms such as pelaita when

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24 That does not quit, vigorous.
addressing the mediators. And although the mediation team was sometimes referred to as the “heart of the museum” by management, for the mediators, and especially those who have been in the museum through different directors, the mediator’s position within the museum structure, has been a role that they have earned _a pulso_, working hard, learning and expanding their knowledge about the armed conflict to a degree in which they are sometimes even more knowledgeable than some of “the people upstairs”.

The other term that the mediators stressed I needed to adopt was that of “experiences” to name the multimodal devices or memory technologies that composed the main exhibit. Although they never referenced the term’s wide use in interactive exhibits across museums, for the mediators the experiential element was a key feature that separated the MCM from the other museums in Medellín. Therefore, the memory technologies were understood as dialectical devices that elicited a response from participants to share their knowledge during visits. By framing the memory technologies as experiences, they were more than artifacts to be seen, but artifacts to be lived, to be experienced.

Each of the exhibits also include a description of its aim and intentionality in Spanish with translations also available in English and French. The descriptions are always in first-person plural, blurring the communicative intentionality of an “I” vis-a-vis a “You”, and making the collective memory work a matter of “Ours” and at the
same time blurring the issues that arise in a transitional context around shared blame and suffering (Figure 6).

**San Carlos – Centro de Acercamiento Para la Reconciliación, CARE**

San Carlos is a rural municipality located in a strategic territory in eastern Antioquia. Its natural richness, particularly in terms of water resources, gained the attention of the central government followed by multinational enterprises that developed multiple macro-industrial dam projects during the 1980s. San Carlos now procures 33% of the energy of the country. The construction of this hydroelectric complex, paired with the closeness to the Medellín-Bogotá highway and the José María International airport, are part of a modernizing project key to the country's development. However, these projects were developed without the community’s participation, consent, or benefit. This exclusion of the local *campesinos* and *campesinas*, ignited the political activism of the locals that resulted in the consolidation of impactful grassroots organizations and collective actions. It was this human capital in terms of political agency that drew the guerrillas to the area as part of their expansion and recruitment project. The guerrillas saw in San Carlos and its opposition to the hydroelectric projects an opportunity to capitalize on the community’s efforts by adding to their anticapitalist discourse, an objection to this form of infrastructural projects. This predatory support was what pushed the paramilitaries to target San Carlos as a guerrilla bastion and “reclaim” the municipality, with the occasional aid from the military and the police forces.

CARE is located in a house found in the urban area of the municipality of San Carlos. Once a hotel, during the period of high intensity combat between the armed actors, the hotel was made into a paramilitary command. After the paramilitaries demobilized, the house was confiscated by the government, but left abandoned due to the
community’s fear of the death, torture and disappearance that had routinely taken place in *La Casita del Terror* [The little house of terror]. However, in 2006, social organizations, took over the house and a “work of transformation of imaginaries, construction of memory and attention to victims and victimizers was initiated” (Memoria n.d.).

The origin and main objective of the CARE has been the construction and recovery of all the victims at individual and collective levels by promoting actions for the physical and spiritual well-being of the population of San Carlos (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2011). During my fieldwork I observed some of these transformations when during a two-day event, the backyard transformed into a healing space: multiple murals were created that represent the memory of the resistance to violence that the community employed during the conflict and a “perpetual flame” was lit up in honor of the local victims of the armed conflict. Unlike the MCM, CARE is a non-profit organization that is not financed by local authorities, but relies on donors, grants, and its relationship to the RCLM.
When one enters CARE the visitor is greeted by at least one hundred drawings that serve as testimonies of the experiences of the victims of the armed conflict in San Carlos (Figure 7). Some stories show death, sorrow, suffering while others include hope, and nostalgia for what has been lost. The open space serves as communitarian dining area, meeting venue, and information center. CARE also serves as a museum focused on the violences faced by the community and its exhibits include the shield of a detonated landmine, the images of the search unit composed by family members of the disappeared walking shoulder-to-shoulder with the few agents of the state that were sent to investigate, and a public library.

**Locating my research in time**

According to Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) when investigating collective memory, the question is not simply what actually happened but how a community remembers it (2). In the case of the reconstruction of the narrative of the past by children and youth, what was happening in Colombia at the time of my research impacted the way in which historical and collective memory were being negotiated in both research sites. In particular, there
were two contextual events that impacted my fieldwork: the rearne, and the paro
nacional.

A desolate start

“Quién dijo que todo está perdido?

Yo vengo a ofrecer mi corazón.
Tanta sangre que se llevó el río,
Yo vengo a ofrecer mi corazón.
No será tan fácil, ya sé qué pasa.
No será tan fácil como pensaba.
Como abrir el pecho y sacar el alma,
Una cuchillada del amor”25.

Fito Paez

On Thursday, August 29th, my first interview with a mediator, Luis (22), was
scheduled during their lunch break. Luis was one of the most experienced mediators,
having joined the museum when he was nineteen and having worked here for four years.
This meeting was my best chance at interviewing him since he had gotten a new job at
another museum and Thursday was going to be his last day. I had already been in the
museum for about three weeks, and the day before the interview, I was feeling
confident about the rapport I had been able to build with the young mediators during those weeks to
have a comfortable conversation. However, when I arrived the next day at the museum
there was an overwhelming feeling of despair. At three in the morning, “Ivan Marquez”
and “Jesus Santritch” broke the peace agreement and announced rearmament in a video

25 The lyrics of Paez song say: “Who said everything is lost? I come to offer my heart. So much blood that
the river has taken. I came to offer my heart. It won’t be as easy, I know what happens. It won’t be as easy
as I thought. Like opening my chest and pulling out my soul. A stab to my love.”
message. They announced that a second Marquetalia —the mythical place of FARC’s origin— had begun and blamed President Ivan Duque’s (2018-2022) lack of support to the peace agreement. This was quite shocking as Marquez had been missing for over a year having gone into hiding when news broke out that he still had nexus with narcotraffic networks.

When I arrived in the museum the young mediators were visibly solemn wondering what the rearmament implied for the overall peace agreement. Echoing my thoughts, the main topic of conversation was the shared fear that advancements in terms of transitional justice had been in vain. Later as I was writing out my initial impressions of the museum in my fieldnotes, I heard Luis strumming an acoustic guitar and playing Yo vengo a ofrecer mi corazón by Fito Páez. It felt like every person in his proximity was holding their breath listening to Páez’s emotional lyrics. As my eyes watered, I noticed one of the mediators openly crying in front of the children visiting the museum. This feeling of despair was present for the next couple of weeks. However, the rearmament news quickly diffused and became just another anecdote to consider when explaining the armed conflict.

#21N –Latin America in the streets, Colombia was not the exception

Following similar demonstrations throughout Latin America, on the 21st of November, an unprecedented amount of people took the streets to protest and support the peace process threatened by the dissidents’ rearmament and President Duque’s opposition to the agreement. A central catalyst and mobilizing force were the students’ organizations whose concern originated from the corruption scandals around the defunding of public universities which lead to some of them declaring bankruptcy. Alongside the students’ movements, labor unions, Indigenous organizations, Afro-Colombian organizations,
campesino organizations, and public figures joined the protests advertised on social media under the #21N. Other motivations for the national demonstrations were the proposed pension reform, the killing of social leaders, the killing of ex-combatants, and economic and tax reforms that were to benefit upper-middle classes.

The mediators did not hesitate to support the protests. However, then mayor of Medellín, Federico Gutierrez, was a government supporter and mandated that all public institutions were to function without halting operations. However, los de arriba, management, allowed for folks to remain in their homes or join the protests as long as they did not greet visitors. This meant that everyone in the museum was given permission to join the protests except the mediators who were scheduled to work on November 21st.

On November 19th while we were attending one of the mediation encounters, the mediators expressed their disagreement with the Museo administration and told me how on the museum’s WhatsApp group they had been warned that if they did not come to work, their contract would be terminated. It was one of the rare occasions in which I saw them fed up with the administration. They could not understand how a collective memory organization was preventing them from exercising their political right to protest.

The protests took over the country and, in some areas, lasted for months. I was scheduled to travel to San Carlos that Friday (November 22nd), but I decided to travel before the protests began. In San Carlos, the protest only took place on the scheduled day, organized by the victims’ unit. While the majority of the demonstrations were peaceful, after three days there were 17 deaths, 75 cases of possible abuse by the special anti-riot police force, unlawful detentions that included allegations of sexual abuse, and other forms of human rights violations. In January 2020, Duque’s government began meetings
and negotiations with the organizing committee of the protests, but everything had to be paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic that officially reached Colombia on March 6th, 2020.

2. **Toolbox for Research**

As a Colombian graduate student in an educational institution in the United States, the majority of my training has been shaped by Global North scholarship and paradigms. However, my positionality, identity, and advocacy are influenced by Colombian and Latin-American thought, and my interests lie in the need to widen the discussion around children’s experiences and the notion of “global childhoods”. This requires a critique of the social and economic structures that have perpetuated the inequalities that shape children’s lives as well as the inclusion and amplification of children’s and youth’s perspectives on these structures that sustain their precarity at the local, national, and international levels (De Castro 2012). To do so, I chose to rely on ethnographic methods.

**Why Ethnography?**

The use of qualitative methodologies, especially ethnography, has been key for childhood studies. This has allowed our field to recognize children as competent interpreters and constructors of the social world in their communities not only because of their value as the future, but in the everyday construction of the social world (Best 2007; Eder and Corsaro 1999; James 2001; Lareau 2011). Furthermore, my project is not only assessing children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory work, but how they comprehend and reconstruct what collective memory is (chapter 3), how they reinterpret and co-narrate Colombia’s violent past (chapter 4), what the concept of victimhood represents in the Colombian context (chapter 5), and children’s testimonies regarding
unspeakable suffering (chapter 6). This would not be possible without recognizing children’s and youth’s capacity to theorize. Children and youth are the main theorists in my project, explaining and changing my understanding of the Colombian armed conflict and what this entails for the construction of “Colombian childhoods”. The specific ethnographic methods that I used for my research included participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

**Participant Observation**

I was able to achieve familiarity with the context via participant observation (Maxwell 2013). As I already explained, my participant observation took place during the school visits, training sessions, workshops, events, and social gatherings that I was invited to by my research interlocutors. Although I had originally planned to divide my seven months between the two sites, circumstances prevented me from spending an adequate amount of time in San Carlos. These circumstances ranged from having to suddenly leave on the advice of my main contact because of the fear of increased violence, to periods of heavy rain that closed the road. Once the road had been partially cleared, the number of buses were reduced for safety reasons. Furthermore, there were events being organized or cancelled with short notice, which led me to conclude that adjusting to this uncertainty in relation to San Carlos was going to be a constant I needed to accommodate to.

**Semi-structured interviews**

According to Miller and Glassner (2011), interviews provide the researcher with the “means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects” (133). This method also allows the interviewee to freely reflect what the subject considers to be important giving space for new significant issues to emerge in the course of the interview (Bryman
and I would add the overall ethnographic project. For my particular project, interviews served the purpose of not only knowing what my research participants thought about collective memory and its relation to children and youth in Colombia, but they also allowed me to have a constant reflexive approach during my project. I also carried out semi-structured interviews with adults in both sites that allowed me to understand how this age group, as gatekeepers of collective memory construction, understood, allowed, prevented, or encouraged, children’s and youth’s participation.

**On the mediators**

Much like cultural anthropologist Kirin Narayan (1993) who stated, “I often shared an unspoken emotional understanding with the people with whom I work” (674), in many ways, I also identified with the young people I encountered during my fieldwork, despite the already mentioned differences. To convey the complex and rich identities of the children and the youth that participated in my research I would require another project. However, in this section I will present a summary that will give you an idea of who the mediators were, without disclosing their identities.

During my fieldwork, the mediation team was composed of 17 mediators, 14 of whom were categorized as young mediators, and three were adults who also identified as victims. The young mediators ranged from 21 to 28 years-old and they were equally divided between women and men. Two of them were attending private university, and the rest were either in a public university or training school. They were going to school for degrees in pedagogy, journalism, law, social work, philosophy, anthropology, communitarian management, film, and political science. There was one openly gay mediator and one single mother. Most of them were also part of youth organizations either in their own neighborhoods or with their church. One of them had even started the
process to become ordained as a priest but changed his mind. Aspects of social class often figured in our interactions as they often were on consumer cultures including clothing brands, restaurants, and dance halls with two mediators often being teased for being “gomelos” [wealthy or rich]. In contrast, race never came up explicitly in our conversations, probably because we all identified as mestizo or mestiza and no one belonged to an Indigenous community or identified as Afro-Colombian. The most experienced mediator had been in the MCM for four years, two mediators left during my fieldwork, and two new mediators were hired to replace them. Only three of the young mediators identified as a victim of the armed conflict during our conversations or interviews. Finally, in terms of political views, which were discussed in every situation, it is not surprising that all of them identified with political parties that were on the left of the ideological spectrum, openly declared their dislike for particular public figures, and were advocates of the peace agreement.

Interrupted Promises

I had planned to do a follow up visit to my field sites during the summer of 2020 to conduct follow-up interviews with my research participants at the two sites. I had hoped to share some of my preliminary results and the plan was to work closely with the mediator coordinator on ways to strengthen the political literacy aspects of the museum’s pedagogy. In San Carlos, I was going to spend an uninterrupted month with the children from the Hogar Campesino, to expand my primary data collection from that setting. However, in March everything came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Colombia, there was a national lockdown that lasted from April until September. The museum and CARE closed its doors and my plans to visit have been postponed. However, thanks to social media and more specifically, WhatsApp and
Instagram, I have been able to continue to keep in touch with some of the mediators and we are hoping to continue with our collaborative work in the near future.

3. **Reflexivity & position in the field**

   Reality construction is not only mediated by the relationship between researcher and participants. Intersubjectivity is also mediated between the researcher and, the research context, the media used to collect the data, and the identity and culture of those involved in the research (Pink, 2001; Bryman, 2012). In this section I want to explain the main ways in which I dealt with the power structures that influenced my positionality in the field as well as the ethics that guided my project. A central element of critical and informed research with children and youth is the key aspect of reflexivity. As Claiborne (2020) points out, researchers in the field of children and youth studies need to continuously examine their motivations for, and place within, the research (1355). However, reflexivity in ethnographic research is present in the planning, the execution, and the writing stages.

   Four power relations were the most salient ones during my fieldwork and during the writing of this dissertation and will be addressed throughout this section: age and the adult-child relation; regionalism and the *rola-paisa* relation; the knowledge production imbalance between my positionality as a well-educated scholar and the traditional, empiric and lived experiences of my interlocutors; and the issues around the ownership of the knowledge that is being produced as a result of this project. However, I am aware that because of my position as a bilingual researcher, I might fail to acknowledge all the privileges that stem from my position in power (Eder and Corsaro 1999). Nevertheless, particular aspects of my identity shifted in importance depending on who my interlocutor was or where I was located. Therefore, I am also aware of how I was “shifting..."
identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations”
(Narayan 1993, 671).

**The impossibility of being “Native”**

The last in-depth interview of my project was during my last day in San Carlos with Laura (30), the director of a local arts project that collaborates with the *Hogar Campesino*. Twice a week, Laura and her partner met with the children in an after-school program that combines arts, collective memory, and environmental advocacy. Laura was fourteen years old when her cousin, who she considered more of a sister, was assassinated after which Laura was forcibly displaced and left for Medellín. She described herself as a true *campesina*: hardworking, loves the land and animals, respectful but *frente* [sincere, not afraid to speak her mind or sugarcoat things]. After having to cancel on two occasions our interview, we met on a Friday morning in the community theater she and her partner were building in the *Hogar’s* premises. She arrived 20 minutes late, flustered, and upset. When I asked her if everything was okay, she told me she was having some issues with the local youth organization who were working with the new language school that had opened for business a year ago.

When I shared with her that I knew nothing about the language school, she explained that a year before my fieldwork, a couple from Medellín had opened a language school in San Carlos that catered to *gringos*, tourists from the Global North, who wanted to learn Spanish in “the *pueblito* that survived the war”. The language school’s publicity materials advertised a fully immersive Spanish course in a rural town in Colombia in which all inhabitants are victims of the armed conflict. The language school had joined efforts with a youth collective and the latter were in charge of organizing excursions for the foreign students. This war tourism experience had increased
the number of international tourists in San Carlos much to the displeasure of some of the locals who were returning to reclaim their lands after being displaced by the war. Laura continued to explain how unfair she felt it was that these “outsiders” were coming and claiming San Carlos as their own. She was however, not referring to the gringos, but to the folks from Medellín.

Noticing her frustration, I got a bit concerned because I was, after all, an outsider myself. After working with some of the members of the youth collective through CARE, I was under the impression that they were “local”, and when I told her so, she explained that some were San Carlitans but they had also invited to the organization folks from Medellín who were either their partners or friends, and together they had created this youth organization to “save” San Carlos. I did not mention how I thought this resembled her own situation, in which as a returning desplazada, she was now living with her partner, a Medellín native, and they had been working to set up a theater company for the past three years. I did mention how I was an “outsider” too, even more so than the youth: I was not only a rola from Bogotá, but I lived in the United States, and my presence in San Carlos was coming to an end. I will never know if she truly meant her following statement, or if she was trying to be polite, or both, but I was surprised when she said “yeah, but you are different. You did not come here to try and teach us, improve us, or save us. You want to learn. You appreciate San Carlos; you are not changing it. That makes you one of us. And next time, when you come back, because you will, no more hotel, you are living with us”.

As a Colombian trained in her bachelors as a political scientist, I could be considered an ‘indigenous’, or ‘native’ or ‘insider’ ethnographer. This would give me the
possibility to describe what was happening in my fieldwork from a position of intimate affinity and from an authentic voice. However, “the extent to which anyone is an authentic insider is questionable” (Narayan 1993, 671). Considering my project centers children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory work and their experiences with political violence, the fact that I am an adult, who has not been directly affected by the armed conflict, already makes the idea of being “native” a fiction. As Eder and Corsaro (1999) point out, “the establishment of membership status and an insider’s perspective is especially difficult in carrying out ethnographies with children and youth” (522). Furthermore, that I was from Bogotá was especially important for my interlocutors. In contrast with some of the international ethnographers I read who also study the Colombian armed conflict (Berents 2018; Krystalli 2019), they positioned themselves as simply non-Colombians, but their nationality became secondary. However, the historically tense relation between the region of Antioquia and Bogotá was central to the way in which my research participants interacted with me and how they shifted me from “insider” to “outsider” depending on the circumstances.

In the MCM, during one lunch break with the mediators, Jose asked me “Dianis, how did you [plural] live the Escobar era in Bogota?” With that question Jose was able to highlight my age (I am old enough to remember the early 1990s) and my place of

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26 Similarly to some of the mediators, my grandparents’ generation was affected by the armed conflict. During the time of The Violence, my mother’s family were forcibly displaced. However, this does not qualify me or my direct family as victims of the armed conflict. Furthermore, my family’s collective memory has never centered the displacement. Therefore, I identified with some of the mediators who explained that although they had not been directly affected by the armed conflict, they felt an obligation to work on issues around human rights, political literacy, or political participation.

27 In Colombia a common way to show affection and friendship is by changing our names, usually through diminutives. After the first month, the mediators were usually calling mi Dianis. Other petnames I was given were amor (love) in the MCM, and corazón (sweetheart) by Pastora and Laura in San Carlos. I never felt harassed or that the superlatives came from an aggressive place, so I welcomed them comfortably.
origin. Furthermore, it was an acknowledgement of the disparities on the ways in which Medellín and Bogotá have experienced the armed conflict in widely dissimilar ways, although we are the two biggest cities in Colombia. I told them of my early memories with the energy shortcuts, the constant fear of the bombs’ threats from P. Escobar, the day the news reported his death and the joy I felt as a seven-year-old in 1993, and the 2003 bombing of country club _El Nogal_ by FARC. It was a moment in which as a group we recognized that the threat of political violence in Colombia has been ubiquitous, but that its impact was more on some than others. Jose ended the conversation by saying, “yeah, I think the fact that all the power is concentrated in Bogotá has played to your benefit”.

**On shifting and complex identities**

During the writing of this dissertation, I am choosing to let my subjects decide who they are and who I am. My young interlocutors are not only defined because of their age or their roles as mediators or school-age children. During our conversations, some aspects of their complex identities were more salient than others. At times they were, a _lidereza social_ (female social leader), a victim, a youth leader, a philosopher, a teacher, a journalist, catholic or feminist. Similarly, they would draw from different aspects of my identity to create connections and highlight similarities or discrepancies in our experiences and our assessments of the situations we were sharing. As Narayan (1993) explained, “in some ways, the study of one’s own society involves an inverse process from the study of an alien one. Instead of learning conceptual categories and then, through fieldwork, finding the contexts in which to apply them, those of us who study societies in which we have preexisting experience absorb analytic categories that rename
and reframe what is already known” (678). Therefore, my fieldwork is not only broadening my conceptual understanding around childhood, victimhood, memory, or the Colombian armed conflict, but it is also changing my own experiences with these categories.

**Dealing with power and privilege**

Around my third or fourth school visit, I had established a sort of flow with the mediators. I knew that we would always meet at the entrance of the museum to wait for the incoming group, and in the meantime, we would go over the planned activities for the day. Once the visiting group had arrived, we would make sure everyone had registered and begin by introducing ourselves to the group. The first two or three school visits, I was introduced by the mediators as follows: “And this is Diana, she is a researcher from Bogotá who will be joining us today”. However, after three weeks in the museum, the mediators spontaneously “gave me permission” to introduce myself. Silently the mediator in charged with greeting the group pointed at me and gave me an unspoken cue to address and greet the group. After the first two times I had unconsciously created a script: “Hi todos y todas\(^{28}\), my name is Diana García and I am a here as a collaborator of the museum. And like you, I am here because I want to learn about the importance of collective memory and why places like this museum are important”. Organically, I came up with a script that would allow me to minimize my adult role and my position of authority with the children and youth visiting the museum (Eder and Corsaro 1999). I

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\(^{28}\) As a feminist ethnographer I recognize that our words and the discourses we use in research matter (Wiben 2016). Therefore, I would always use *todos y todas* to greet everyone regardless of their gender identification. Among feminists in Spanish-speaking communities, there is a conversation on the use of the term *todos* as gender neutral or *todxs*. However, considering my interaction relied on discursive, oral, text, I decided to use the feminine and the masculine as part of my research script.
refrained from being a researcher from Bogotá, and rather chose to be a collaborator learning alongside the children and the youth. However, this attempt to reduce the inherent power imbalance between adults and children had its limitations.

During some of the visits, I was asked by the mediators to explain aspects of the armed conflict, clarify terminology, or voice my opinion around political issues. On other occasions, towards the second half of my fieldwork, the mediators were no longer dividing the school-group into two, but into three, and I was also sharing the work of mediating with them. They never formally asked me if I wanted to mediate, and I was happy to help. Therefore, in the school visits that followed, I was viewed as one of the mediators which was an especially important position of power in itself vis-à-vis the children visiting the museum.

Refusals

However, the shared positionality as a mediator did not necessarily mean that I had gained “insider” status. During my interviews with the mediators, I asked them about meaningful or impactful instances during any visit. And although most of them shared with me memories of particular interactions that had changed the way they saw the armed conflict, or that changed the way they saw themselves, one of them chose to not give me an answer. He said:

"a particular moment that was meaningful. That is the hardest question because there have been plenty. But there was one in particular that almost broke me and I do not want to talk about it. I hold it close to my heart and it still shapes who I want to be not only as a mediator, but as a pedagogist, let’s leave it at that”.

At the moment, I downplayed his refusal and we continued with our interview, but it was a central teaching moment for me as a novice ethnographer. As Tuck and Wayne Yang (2014) explain, "refusal, and stances of refusal in research, are attempts to
place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can't be known” (225). It made me question not only if my inquiry was overstepping into a realm of private experiences that should remain private. But it also showed me that as an ethnographer, I do not “have inherent rights to these experiences but that we are privileged to be able to be part of them” (Eder and Corsaro 1999, 526).

Furthermore, considering the nature of my research in which I am seeking people’s experiences and insights about the Colombian armed conflict I must be reflexive in the ways in which I am asking and writing about “the struggle of the subaltern” and not conflate it with my own work as an intellectual (Spivak 2003). It also forced me to contemplate the use, trust, and even faith, that is given to collective memory as a repairing act. By claiming that collective memory is a space that should be conceived as a “way of fighting against oblivion, a 'remembering so as not to repeat', which becomes a way to exercise that past in order to be able to face the future” (Torres Dujisin 2015, 380), we are also stating that being silent, the will to not forgive, or the desire to forget are behaviors that should be condemned. Torres argues for a democratic memory in which “conflict and plurality allow current and future generations to know what happened” (Torres Dujisin 2015, 380). However, we tend to understand plurality in terms of voices, of what is to be spoken or not, in terms of silences. Some of my participants did not always share with me what they deemed as sacred, or what they thought should be forgotten, in order for some wounds to be repaired. And that is as meaningful as everything that was verbally shared. This concern about my participant’s speech and silence also raises the issue around translation.
Translation

An aspect that I have considered with great care throughout my research but particularly at the stage of writing this dissertation has been the one about translation. Linguists have shown that translation is not only difficult, but that a perfect translation is impossible (Sturge 1997, 22 citing Leach 1973, in Asad 1986, 142). In the particular case of this dissertation my participants’ language included regionalisms, colloquialisms, youth slang, swearing all of which generate a specific world to them. In addition, I am translating all these versions of Spanish into academic writing for a primarily English-speaking audience. As the translator between my subjects and my English-speaking readers, I am supposed to be able to reproduce both the content and the context. Sturge (1997) explains that one way in which the ethnographic translation into English could be possible is by playing down the foreignness of the source-language into familiar English terms of reference “so that an impression of the normality and internal coherence of the original utterances is produced. The problem is that content and context may be changed beyond recognition” (Sturge 1997, 26). Given this, I rely on two translation strategies throughout my writing. Following Sturge’s warning, most of the texts (oral and written) are being translated in a way in which I attempt to maintain as much as possible the context in which they were produced. However, there are some words that are continually left in its original form. This decision was made to preserve a salient aspect of my interlocutor’s identity that felt meaningful in the communicative act. An example is that of the term campesino or campesina, that could be translated into farmer or peasant but it erases the true meaning of the work for rural, agricultural, working class, postcolonial experiences across Latin America.
Knowledge Ownership

Powerfully framing the need for translation is the fact that I currently live in the United States, a neocolonial power that has been involved in the perpetuation of the Colombian armed conflict via financial and military intervention strategies like Plan Colombia. Therefore, I recognize how the knowledge that is being produced as a result of this research project benefits what the mediators view as a source of oppression. As Wibben (2016) points out, feminist scholarship must go beyond a simple call for equality and must always question the contexts within the power relations that affect our inquiries (9). In my particular case, as a Colombian graduate student at a university in the United States, my subjects and I are aware that my work is not only representing my participants’ experiences but is serving an academic structure embedded in coloniality and imperialism (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2014). Therefore, to avoid any type of epistemic violence, the matter of reciprocity is key. To ensure that my knowledge production is not only profitable for the United States academic institutions, I also participated in research projects, forums, and discussions with some of the mediators in special events that they organized during the pandemic. Furthermore, I have supported the RNLM with the translation of materials that have showcased the networks’ work in international forums.

4. “Bueno muy bonito todo pero, ¿y esto pa’ qué?”: Over-researching the armed conflict?

During one of the workshops with the NGO Forjando Futuros and the regional Victims Unit, Don Jorge, one of the San Carlitans victims raised his hand and said: “Alejandro, all of these training regarding the importance of a webpage, and social media, and learning how to interview folks and how to present ourselves it’s very interesting and very bonito but, ¿y esto pa’ qué? [what is this for]. I mean how are all of
these strategies going to help us to really improve the conditions of the people in our municipalities, assure them they will get their stolen land back, and other forms of reparation? What is the usage of all of this training?”. Alejandro continued to explain the importance of digital presence for the organization and also chose to use it as a way to involve people from different generations in the victim’s unit. Some of the returnees were actually young professionals who wanted to aid in the new era San Carlos was experiencing and were keen to broaden and strengthen CARE’s online presence. Don Jorge did not look to convinced, but he thanked Alejandro for the training sessions and the answer.

Researchers and practitioners must always consider how our interventions in the everyday lives of our subjects might interrupt, strain, complicate, and impact their social processes. After all, “social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification. However, these same stories of pain and humiliation are part of the collective wisdom that often informs the writings of researchers who attempt to position their intellectual work as decolonization” (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2014, 223). In a way, I am translating and representing the social suffering and the pain that the youth working in the MCM and collaborating with CARE experience on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the instances I have shared about Don Jorge and Laura also allude at the research fatigue that communities like San Carlos have to face. The stories of hope and resilience that showcase these communities as success stories paired with the real decrease in the intensity in the violence, has attracted numerous scholars, practitioners, and other forms of outsiders to the municipality. This has increased the risk of
commodification of San Carlitans suffering and the fatigue of always being researched, spoken to and for, and represented.

I went into the field aware, in the abstract, of these complexities of power, commodification, fatigue and trauma that were a part of researching armed conflict in the lives of children and youth. While in the field it was my interlocutors that pointed me to bigger questions than I had known to ask, questions that the contemporary landscape of post-conflict Colombia posed for children and youth, as adults and future citizens. They placed the trauma and victimization they endure alongside a constellation of hope that they had for the country, and it is different aspects of this complex weave, as reflected in efforts around collective memory, pedagogy, trauma, and suffering, that I share in the following chapters.
Chapter 3. LIVING MEMORY
How Children and Youth reclaim the collective memory museum

As we were nearing the end of our interview Catalina, the mediator considered “the child expert” by the museum’s staff, said, “before we wrap up, I want to add something else. One time a group of children were visiting the museum and they went into Memory’s Space. A girl stormed out, she could not handle it, and she sat and began to cry, here on the stairs. Why do you think that girl was crying?” I assumed the girl visiting the museum either knew a victim or was unaware of the types of violence that characterizes the Colombian armed conflict. Catalina, unsurprised by my answer explained that, when her colleague followed the girl and asked what was wrong, the girl who was crying said: “the problem is that my family does all those things” (Catalina, interview with the author, September 18, 2019).

From the seventeen experiences that compose the permanent exhibit Medellín: memorias de violencia y resistencia29 in the Museo Casa de la Memoria (from now on MCM), some of the most meaningful encounters between the young mediators, like Catalina, and the children visiting the museum happened in Memory’s Space. Traditionally, museums have been key sites for the education of the public. According to Milligan and Brayfield (2004) “it is as important for museums to state that education is a goal to appear legitimate and to be able to cite high attendance figures as it is for their programs to actually ‘educate’” (296). However, when the topic of the museum is that of

29 Medellín: Memories of Violence and Resistance. For a detailed explanation of the memory technologies see Chapter 2, appendix 1.
collective memory and ongoing political violence, and one of the key audiences are children, how does the museum’s materiality promote children and youth participation in collective memory? Furthermore, to what extent does the spatial layout of the museum enable children’s experiential understandings of the violence that has marked Colombia’s past? Are the children and the youth also being regarded as collective memory constructors in the museum’s retelling of the past and to what extent do the museum’s memory technologies engage with what it means to be a child in a context of intractable conflict?

This chapter explores the tension between collective memory and living memory in the space of the museum. To understand this tension better I suggest that we should pay close attention to how the materiality of museum spaces affect the participation of children and youth in collective memory. In this chapter, I suggest that living memory lends itself as a method in which children and youth participate in memory construction by utilizing the museum’s memory technologies and affordances. This participation relies on dialogic encounters, where children and youth appropriate and reclaim the space of the museum by actively engaging in the participation of collective memory construction. Furthermore, these conversations also shape the way in which children and youth see their own roles as collective memory narrators.

To do so, in the first section of this chapter I provide a historical and spatial description of the museum and how it has engaged with children as a public. In the second section, I explain the tridimensionality of memory: biographical, institutional, and collective, and introduce the concept of living memory. I pay special attention to the relation between collective and living memory since the transformation from collective
memory to living memory is what allows the young museum workers convey their factual and experiential knowledge about the armed conflict. In the third and final section, I describe how the praxis of living memory shapes children’s and youth’s participation in the construction of collective memory. Drawing from my ethnographic work, I conclude that while museum staff strive to create programs to enhance and support children’s participation in collective memory, their dominant framing of children as vulnerable and seemingly lacking in knowledge of the armed conflict paradoxically limits their efforts. Despite these assumptions, children and youth find ways to participate in the construction of narratives on the armed conflict that aid in broadening existing understandings of the conflict as well as helps shed light on the roles’ children and youth play as constructors of meaning in spaces like the museum.

1. The Museum: history, typology, and its engagement with children

Museums are educational settings where the visitors, and especially children, acquire skills and knowledge to become ideal citizens (Carvalho and Lopes 2016; Jensen 1994; Milligan and Brayfield 2004; van den Dungen and Yamane 2015). These skills vary from appreciation of the arts to the creation of environmental consciousness and to the becoming of informed citizens (Milligan and Brayfield 2004). Within this tradition, what makes children an interesting audience is that, unlike adults, they are seen as an audience with limited experience with the subject matter being presented. Thus, by engaging children with the artifacts on display, and the interaction of others (such as the accompanying families, museum professionals or classmates), museums are seen as “educational powerhouses” for children (van den Dungen and Yamane 2015). However, in contrast with arts or natural history museums, the content of collective memory
museums, possess’ different qualities that allow children and youth to problematize preconceived notions of children’s primary identities as learners within museum spaces. This section explains how the evolution and expansion of the (collective memory) museum, allows children and youth to participate in memorializing process and the construction of narratives around the armed conflict.

The evolution of the museum as a site of difference

Museums have been described as the epitome of institutions created during the Enlightenment in which visitors would acquire some of the knowledge that characterize the “good citizen” (Lord 2006; Fyfe 2008). Therefore, museums are spaces for shaping the political, scientific, or aesthetic imagination of its visitors (Hetherington 2011). This is achieved through the selection, curation and exhibition of the artefacts and ideas that are deemed examples of this “ideal society”. To understand how contemporary museums elicit children and youth participation in collective memory work, I briefly describe how museums transformed from their initial forms of imperial and colonial power in the West, to the institutions we know today worldwide.

According to Milligan and Brayfield (2004), premodern museums began as the private collections of European aristocracy in the form of royal galleries only for the pleasure of the gallery owners and their guests (277). With the expansion of the bourgeoisie, in the eighteenth century the museum sought to “discipline the mob into a more regulated crowd or audience of citizens through the power relations of regulated spectacle” (Hetherington 2011, 460) thus making museums public. Museums also became instances of state power in which through the categorization, classification, and order of the “ideal society”, the colonizing project through its objective of universalization of the “civilized-man” became possible. Therefore, from the seventeenth
well into the late twentieth century, the museum was the place in which imperialism could form individuals by shaping their knowledge and identity “within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space” (Lord 2006, 2).

The nineteenth century marked another shift for the museum. With the growing fascination for botanical, archeological and anthropological expeditions, time, history, and evolution became the frameworks for the display of collections. According to Lord (2006), “the museum can be – and has been – characterized as an Enlightenment institution whose power to collect and display objects is a function of capitalism and imperialism, and whose power to form individuals is exercised through the careful and ordered deployment of knowledge within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space. It was at this time that museums became concerned with exhibiting artifacts as historical and presenting visitors with the narrative of “the totality of time” contained in a single, albeit sometimes temporary space, such as the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. By the end of the nineteenth century up until the mid-twentieth century, the museum was a well-established and recognized cultural site of colonial, imperialist, and white supremacist power.

But it was not until the 1960’s that the museum became a place where notions of citizenship, identity and oppression were challenged in part due to the politics of identity associated with the rise of new social movements such as the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, and the student movements of 1968 (Fyfe, 2008). These contemporary ideas around alterity, shaped the way in which museums represented the past by challenging their underlying politics of representation. From the 1960’s onward, the museum has broadened its modes of representation around subjects such as
citizenship, identity, and power by adding more languages, modalities and technologies to its exhibits. New social sectors are part of the curatorial process and this has expanded the who, what, and how we see in museums across different genres. The inclusion of victims of the armed conflict to the curatorial process of the MCM is an example of these shifts. Postmodern understandings of history led museums to "share the goal of intensifying acceptance of the diversity of cultures and identities, and of reinforcing weaker identities" (Beier-de Haan 2008, 420). This is especially true when we think of collective memory museums where the experiences of the historically marginalized are at the center.

This tension between universalism and particularism faced by contemporary museums invites us to rethink the power struggles that characterize the museum as a site of representation. One of the ways in which this struggle occurs is the tensions between the narrative imposed by the museum through the arrangement of its displays and the curatorial process, and the preexisting knowledge that visitors bring to it. Just like Catalina explained in our interview, there have been instances in which children do not react as expected because they “know more than what we [adults] think”.

**The MCM’s Narrative of the Colombian armed conflict**

The museum’s intention with the Memory’s Space³⁰ is to pay the victims “a homage to life”. According to the section’s label, this is where the visitors “share and celebrate the lives of our victims, their dreams and their loving presence in our history”. However, due to the lived experiences of the visitors, it is impossible to always foresee how a visitor might react. This was particularly true for children who tend to be seen as

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³⁰ The discussion about the Memory’s Space and its implications for children’s participation in the museum will be further explained in the last section of this chapter.
ignorant or unaware of the armed conflict. But on many occasions, I witnessed how children’s knowledge and desire to reconstruct the narrative of the armed conflict, surprised the young mediators and the adults accompanying them during the school visits. This is why I am particularly drawn to the assumption that as a space in which competing narratives around historical events are represented and contested, the museum allows for (without not necessarily encouraging) the serious consideration of children’s participation in peacebuilding and collective memory work.

In the case of the MCM, the narrative that the museum presents attempts to condense the multiple and diverse experiences of the victims of the armed conflict. In a way, the collective memory narratives of the different victims represented in the museum, becomes the official narrative. At the same time, the understanding and experiences of the armed conflict by its visitors, becomes the alternative narrative that might contest this official narrative. When the girl left the Memory Space crying, her own personal story, that of being closely related (and perhaps a witness) to perpetrators of some of the violence represented, collided with the museum’s assumption of children as inherently innocent and vulnerable. Furthermore, the technologies goal to remember the victims from a place of joy, imposes a narrative where issues around responsibility for a war that has lasted for over half a century, get blurred in an effort to achieve national reconciliation.

This particular instance had a major consequence for the young mediators in terms of the way in which they relate to children. It invited them to reconsider their

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31 For a more detail analysis around the construction of the victim, see chapter 5.
earlier understandings of children as innocent, vulnerable, or ignorant and instead recognize:

“The child is an actor; the child has something to say about it [the armed conflict]. Ask them\textsuperscript{32}, engage in a conversation with what they know. Create a dialogue, or else let’s just talk to an expert. Cause, we easily do this with a violentologist\textsuperscript{33} that knows the history of the conflict. A child does too. I mean, they won’t speak about data, or statistics, or won’t speak of philosophical, legal, sociological or anthropological concepts, but they can speak from their human and political understanding of what is happening. So for me, we can’t just explain to a child what happened, but listen to them” (Catalina, interview with the author, September 18, 2019).

For Catalina, the space of the museum sparks this reconceptualization of children’s roles as narrators of the conflict. This is possible because the museum serves as a thirdspace between school and home (Bellamy and Oppenheim 2009) but in this circumstance, the space is occupied by the children visiting and the young mediators. According to critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, thirdspace is meant to be liminal and a site for the exercise of political power by the marginalized (Davis 2010; Jabri 2012). It is a site of cultural translation and dialogical negotiation “in the midst of a markedly asymmetrical and unequal engagement of forces” (Bhabha 2009) that opens up through the process of dialogue. For geographer Edward Soja, thirdspace is the lived space where we recognize that space also oppresses, encloses, dominates, shapes, and frustrates our daily lives in different ways. His understanding of spatiality allows us to see that the sum

\textsuperscript{32} In Spanish, the singular noun niño (child) can refer to both girls and boys or to only boys and the interpretation is determined by the context. In order to stay true to the intention of the speaker, I will direct my reader’s interpretation of the situation by using plural or singular nouns when necessary.

\textsuperscript{33} In 1987, when the country was facing a spike in the violences and an increase of the number of illegal armed groups, former president Virgilio Barco hired a group of academics known as los violentólogos (the violentologists) to research the causes of the armed conflict. This generation of academics proposed that there were objective causes for the armed conflict and proposed policy changes in terms of agrarian reform, human rights, and even partisan reforms for a more inclusive democracy. Cata is referring to this group as the most elite experts in terms of understanding the armed conflict.
of sociocultural understandings of childhood combined with what the museum as a site allows children to experience, shapes the expectancies and resistances of children’s participation in collective memory (Soja 2009). By conceptualizing the museum as a third space, we see how the museum’s assumptions around childhood as always innocent, vulnerable, and separated from the dynamics of the armed conflict, do not necessarily prevent children and youth from expressing their own experiences with the armed conflict. Furthermore, in these encounters children and youth themselves rethink and contest the museum’s assumptions around childhood.

Understanding the museum as a thridspace, gives us the conceptual tools to see how children and youth lived the museum. By contesting the assumptions that the museum staff and other adults (like the teachers accompanying the school visits or the male adult visitors) have about the children and the youth in the museum, we can see how the museum can be both a site that invites children and youth to learn about the armed conflict as well as where they question adultist assumptions around childhood. Catalina as well as the other mediators that told me about the girl in the Memory’s Space, recognized that the child as an audience was being primarily characterized as innocent, deemed in need of protection from the horrors of war, or unable to comprehend the causes for the armed conflict. This marginal position resonated with the young mediators’ own experiences within the museum structure as the most overseen and overworked team. However, both the children visiting the museum and the young mediators have contested these imposed notions. Is this behavior by children and youth only possible because we are discussing a collective memory museum? The next section explains what differentiates collective memory museums from other types of museums and why these
spaces are important when we analyze children and youth participation in the
construction of narratives about the armed conflict.

**Remembering the marginalized: collective memory museums**

Museums can be classified in multiple ways. Sometimes, museums are classified
by their collections: natural history, science and technology, art, or history. Other times,
museums are classified according to their funding: national, local, private, or municipal.
Museums can also be classified according to the communities that are represented and the
extent to which these peoples participated in the curation of the museum: indigenous
peoples, African-diasporas, victims of civil conflicts. All of these elements combine to
shape the visitor’s experience. Therefore, to understand the specificities of children’s and
youth’s experiences in collective memory museums, we need to understand what
differentiates collective memory museums from other forms of museums.

Museums are a form of memory technology. This means museums like
monuments or books, are places where memory is stored. Museums externalize the
mental function of remembering in a perpetual present reaffirming and constructing
identities, regardless the fact that the remembering never happens in exactly the same
way (Crane 2008). However, as it has been discussed, the artifacts chosen are not the
only component of the museum. Hence, the information being archived in the museum
only comes to life when the narrative being told, is able to “stimulate its own
reproduction in a new form: to procreate” (Rigney 2015, 68). Collective memory
museums in particular wish for their visitors to imagine a political community that is both
reflective of its past and also open to imagining a new collective possibility for the future
(Meirovich 2018, 178). Though collective memory museums could be compared to
history museums, what sets them apart is that the former showcases the stories of the
marginalized, those who have been the victims of a conflict, and seek the reimagina
tion of a collective, national, political, project. The latter focuses on official and national
stories in terms of good versus evil, heroism and great narratives that often homogenize
those who are featured in them.

During the school visits and even in some interviews, the mediators stressed how
the three main armed actors (leftist guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the Colombian armed
forces) are neither good nor bad. They explained to me and to the children visiting the
museum, that the reasons why someone joins an illegal armed group or the public forces,
is a complicated matter that goes beyond the good guys and the bad guys. Furthermore,
the voices of the “good guys” tend to be displaced onto other individuals or communities
who belong to the official narratives expressed in the museum about the armed conflict
(i.e., academics, social leaders, human rights defenders).

Another distinct characteristic of collective memory museums is the way in which
conflict and violence is represented and interpreted. Collective memory museums are
supposed to counteract the collective forgetting that is the catastrophic result of violence
(Crane 2008, 247) and the creation of a singular national narrative. This gives collective
memory museums the task to represent the open wounds left by the horrors of war. For
Crane (2008) “when war is the basis of collective memories, their multiplicity renders
difficult any attempt to educate a public, recall a particular version of the past, or create a
new narrative of its meaning” (258). This is why at the MCM, in order to interpret these
violences, the mediation exercise centers on a dialogue between visitors and the young
mediators. This dialogue is interpreted as a way to prevent the museum from telling a

34 The assumptions behind this idea that “we are all victims” is further reviewed in Chapter 5.
35 For a detailed analysis on the pedagogy around the dialogues, see Chapter 4.
singular story but instead works to acknowledge that every visitor has their own unique relation with the armed conflict.

Finally, most research done about collective memory museums focuses on adult publics. When analyzing children’s experiences in museums, most of the research carried out has been about art and history museums. It seems as if, since the main objective of collective memory museums is to deal with the horrors of war, neither staff nor academia regarded collective memory museums as “appropriate” sites for children. Therefore, this project serves as an initial effort to understand children’s and youth’s experiences in collective memory museums.

**Too Marginalized? Children and museums**

In order to better frame my argument around the affordances of the spatiality of the MCM as a thirddspace, it is important that we understand how children have been studied as museum audiences in more traditional museum settings like art and history museums. According to Milligan and Brayfield (2004), “[art and science] museums contribute to the organizational frameworks of childhood in that they deliberately attempt to teach particular ‘lessons’ to children through planned activities for families and school groups” (275). Therefore, museums are privileged locations for education, normally considered reliable, objective, and trustworthy (Carvalho and Lopes 2016; Nixon Chen 2013).

The three lessons that museums attempt to teach children are about content, culture and the importance of museums as learning institutions (Milligan and Brayfield

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Content lessons are based on the teaching of “factual”, “objective” information, deemed as important by the museum authorities. Cultural lessons include the systems of values, beliefs, and behavior that the museums authorities consider important. These cultural lessons are seen as factual though subjective. Finally, museums have to convince adult gatekeepers that their educational goal is important for children. It is through this “alliance” between schools and museums, that children often gain access to museums. For these authors, the success of a school tour is tied to the training and beliefs of the tour guides, the appropriateness of the museum space for children as a participatory audience, and the disciplining techniques used to regulate children’s behavior.

But museums are not solely imparting lessons. They are also socializing children into systems of beliefs and behaviors. Therefore, previous research on children in museums has additionally focused on the cultural conceptions that children bring into museums (Kindler and Darras 1997), the relation between museum programs and childhood education (Faraday 1990), and the factors that influenced children’s experiences when visiting museums (Jensen 1994).

The few times children are mentioned in relation to collective memory museums is when museum scholars’ broadly assert that the task of collective memory museums is to preserve the past for future generations. This is well demonstrated in Meirovich’s critique of the Memory and Human Rights Museum in Chile (MMDH). Meirovich (2018) explains that following the Chilean truth commission’s recommendations, the MMDH was supposed to not only contribute to the symbolic reparation of the victims of the dictatorship, but it had to “serve the new generations and reorient their thinking towards
a construction of the present and the future centered around human dignity” (159).

However, the author’s detailed account of the Chilean museum is based on an adultist perspective in which children figure as members of the public for whom the museum is built but are seldom highlighted as its intended audience and their value is reduced to their futurity.

In relation to the MCM, children are not mentioned in any of the museum’s specific objectives. Furthermore, before 2018, school visits were directed at children of fourteen years of age or older. Hence, for the mediators with more experience, the two main obstacles they faced regarding the recent acceptance of younger children into the museum were that on the one hand the museum “was not thought with this public [children] in mind” (Lily, interview with the author, September 17, 2019). And on the other hand, mediators were concerned that the museum’s content and graphic displays of some of the most emblematic cases of violence in the Colombian armed conflict, could be traumatic for children (Jose, interview with the author, October 2, 2019). These two obstacles appeared to shape the content, cultural and pedagogic lessons of the museum.

Similarly, for collective museum scholars’ children have been an object of marginal interest at best or viewed as an inappropriate public at worst. This is also true for the MCM. The content lessons in the museum ranged from teaching about emblematic assassinations and massacres to the urban development of Medellín. These cultural lessons are grounded in two core values: life is sacred over all things and, what ties us together as a community is our humanity. And though the main values could be seen as simple, the mediators often expressed concern on how to teach them. Often, they were worried that they were being too conceptual and theoretical and therefore young
children would not be able to understand them; and other times they were concerned with
the graphic representations of violence. We can also see Milligan’s and Brayfield’s point
on education being a populist goal for museums exemplified in the MCM when we look
into its history. It was not until 2018 that the museum decided to increase and strengthen
its alliances with local schools and therefore opening the museum space for children
under the ages of 14 and continuously receiving this public.

This way of thinking about children (as a core public, yet inappropriate and
marginal) creates a contradiction. On one hand, children are invited to participate in the
creation of the narrative through collective memory work. However, when children do in
fact want to participate in the re-signification of what is being showcased in the museum,
that participation is accommodated by the more knowledgeable adults, including the
young mediators, within a pedagogic effort to correct, or at least complement, children’s
responses. This is why when a child shares not only an awareness but firsthand
experience with the armed conflict, the adults in the museum space feel their authority is
being questioned and even challenged. Jose, a young mediator, even qualified young
children (under the age of fourteen), as the public he feared the most. One time when we
were hanging out in the museum, he told me he preferred to lead a visit with ex
paramilitaries or ex guerrilleros rather than children. Considering he is the most
experienced of all of the mediators, he is always given the most “difficult” visits. But for
him, in the odd occasions he has to mediate a school visit, he gets stressed. I witnessed
fist hand his frustration when one of the mediators had to stay home due to sickness, and
Jose was asked to accompany a school visit with children between ages eight and ten. In
the beginning of the school trip, he was really quiet and interacted with the group as little
as possible, relying instead on his teammate Fede and myself. As time passed, he relaxed more, and I saw him joking with some of the children. After the visit I congratulated him and teased him telling him he “had survived”. And he was actually proud of how well the school trip had gone. In our interview I asked him about this point, and he explained:

“It is like children generate in me a type of, not aversion, but like, that they are going to question me, and I don’t want to be stressed out, to be bothered. So, yes, I’ve said it. I’d rather have visits with former combatants than visits with children. When I am scheduled visits with children, I go into crisis mode. I don’t know what language to use, or how to express myself properly” (Jose, interview with the author, October 2, 2019).

Because museums preserve the past for the future, children seem to be the perfect audience, nonetheless an audience who is viewed as always lacking. However, by understanding the museum as a thirddspace, we see how children and youth push the boundaries of their participation in collective memory work. Nonetheless, the narrative created by the museum exhibits, and the narrative co-constructed between the mediators and the visitors via diálogo de saberes, around the armed conflict, entail a reconciliation of the individual and the collective experience of the armed conflict. In the next section I will explain the differences between biographical, collective, and historical memory, paying special attention to collective memory and its relation to what the mediators referred to as living memory.

2. Researching Memory: A Typology

The constant reconstruction in my interviews with some of the mediators around the event of the girl crying was not only meaningful because it changed the way in which the mediators perceived childhood. But because when I was asking about the importance of children participating in memory construction, the mediators that were aware of this
situation brought it up. It marked an event between one mediator and one visitor, that gained importance within the collective memory of the mediators. It seemed as if everyone involved in that exchange had been in some way transformed. It was a shared memory that many mediators brought up during our interviews regardless of them being physically present as it held significant meanings for their role as mediators. By going back on multiple occasions to that moment, we see how memory is an object of study that is perpetually elusive and evolving (Tota and Hagen 2015, 1). For the mediator Lily (23), a philosophy undergraduate who was part of a local theater company, memory "does not reside in the past. Memory is something that encompasses all temporalities. I feel as though memory is something where past, present but also future converge. When constructing memory, always, it has to be a continuum, with critical thinking, that does not rely on finished official versions, but it is a work one always has to revisit, always critiques, always doubts from, and always has to go back to whatever has been forgotten, to the ashes of history" (Lily, interview with the author, September 17, 2019).

Memory is multi-dimensional, being a combined function of history, collectivity, and individuals. It allows us to question our individual and collective values systems and analyze the reconciliation processes of societies. Working and researching memory on the other hand, also requires that we question the “egological mode of subjectivity” (Ricoeur 2004) of those involved. Some of the incidental functions of memory are "the forgetting or ignoring of wrongdoing, legitimating, and challenging power, exaggerating and underestimating virtuous acts, [and] giving voice to the marginalized" (Schwartz 2015, 9). So, while history seeks an objective and academic standpoint to understand the causes and consequences of past events, memory in its tri-dimensionality, is context
dependent and explores the emotional experiences of the past and the way such
comprehensions affect the construction of group identity (Schwartz 2015; de Zan 2008).
Das and Kleinman (2000) use the terms cultural memory, public memory, and the
sensory memory of individuals (13) while Halbwachs (1992) proposed the terms
collective memory, historical memory, and autobiographical memory. Though I find
these categorizations an interesting point to begin this conversation, I prefer the terms
collective memory, historical memory, and biographical memory. These categories will
allow me to converse with other memory scholars as well as the organizations in
Colombia who are working around memory.

These three dimensions are not independent. Rather, these dimensions converge
to construct identities that could be based on postmodern notions of a subject in which
alterity is premised on difference and separation or in relationality and solidarity
(Alexander 2005). An example could be the adoption of a national, mestizo identity by
most Colombians as a result of the multicultural constitution of 1991. This constitution
promulgated “a new official rhetoric of multiculturalism that altered the conceptual and
legal status of indigenous actors and communities within the nation, replacing previous
exclusionary and assimilationist discourses with new spaces for indigenous
representation in Colombia’s political and media landscapes” (Wood 2010, 154). After
1991, the legitimacy of the new “multicultural national identity” was based on the
collective memory of the pueblos originarios from a rationale of alterity of difference in
which, indigenous groups were legitimized as a part of the Colombian identity even while
they continued to be marginalized and disproportionally affected by the armed conflict.
Though the collective circumstances of indigenous peoples remain unaltered, a new
national consciousness got set in place and became institutionalized in the constitution. It was at this time when a new historical memory about what it means to be Colombian got produced.

Hence, historical memory refers to all memory work carried out by those in a position of power. According to Halbwachs, historical memory reaches the social actor only through records and is kept alive through commemorations or enactments (Halbwachs 1992, 23). This also holds true more broadly for memory technologies such as books, films, museums, and monuments. Hence, the key difference between collective memory and historical memory is the tension in the construction of the official narrative in terms of “what happened” and “that which is said to have happened” and the capabilities and moments of fact creation by those involved (Trouillot 2015).

So, if historical memory is the memory of the victorious, of those who get to “write history”, is collective memory the memory of the defeated, the victims?

Collective memory is more than adding the individual memories of the members that compose a group (Halbwachs 1992). It can be understood as a set of social representations concerning the past which each group produces, institutionalizes, guards, and transmits through the interaction of its members, (Kevers 2016, 626) and the distribution of narratives, frameworks among the individuals that constitute the collective (Anastasio, et al. 2012). It is also a communicative act in which "in its declarative phase, memory enters into the region of language; memories spoken of, pronounced are already a kind of discourse that the subject engages in with herself. What is pronounced in this discourse occurs in the common language, most often in the mother tongue, which, it must be said, is the language of others" (Ricoeur 2004, 129). It also includes
commemoration and memorialization projects that have been central during transitional justice contexts and historical memory interventions as “one of the key mechanisms that can help societies and groups come to terms with a past of war or mass violence and move societies towards non-violence and no repetition” (Riaño Alcalá 2014, 13). Hence in post-conflict or transitional contexts, the goal is to center the narrative around groups of people who have been historically denied the right to participate.

The intersection of historical and collective memory is further complicated by individual or biographical memory. Collective memory then can be understood as a dialogical act between the individual victim, the collectives who have been victimized but also the perpetrators (as members of a collectivity), and the historical account of the armed conflict. This dialogical relation allows us to see how those who identify as victims, the perpetrators and Colombian civil society constitute each other through remembrance. This brings us to the subject of experiences as evidence. We draw from our experiences to construct our collective memory narratives. Analyzing these experiences "entails focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of 'experience' and on the politics of its construction" (Scott 1991, 797). Experience is both an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted, which means that we need to pay attention to the ways in which subjectivities are formed. However, because we all inhabit the world differently, our interpretations will also vary.

Drawing from Henri Lefebvre, Soja suggests that our experience is shaped by the material, the imagined and the lived experiences of being. Childhood Studies scholars add that we also need to consider age as a determinant to our experiences. Considering that Colombia is defined as a pluricultural and diverse society, the collective memory
endeavor has included the experiences of Afro-Colombian women, indigenous peoples, former female combatants, and the economic elite, to name a few. What is missing is an understanding of how age also affects participation in the construction of a shared narrative as it intersects with other aspects of their subjectivities, e.g. campesino children. Therefore, analyzing collective memory becomes even more important. If "in history, power begins at the source" (Trouillot 2015, 29), then in collective memory the power is embedded in the communal act of co-constructing the narrative.

By framing remembering as a communal act, collective memory is created through a dialogic relation between the willing actors of the collectivity who might have competing, and polarized memories of traumatic events. Furthermore, what is remembered and forgotten is socially negotiated (Kevers 2016, 626). These negotiations are molded by power relations, since “those in power can control, frame, and eventually even mask or bury the memory a group or individual holds of collective violence. Therefore, another common social response to a traumatic past event is silence and inhibition” (Kevers 2016, 627). The Center for Historical Memory and the Law of Victims also recognize that in the Colombian conflict, it is necessary to challenge the existing power imbalances between “the personal stories of victims and the institutionalized versions of the past of political leaders, armed groups, state officials, or the media” (Riaño Alcalán 2014, 14). Hence, a multiplicity of spaces (such as the Museo Casa de la Memoria or CARE) have been created, where the powerless, the marginalized, the subalterns, share their experiences and memories of the war in relation to similar experiences that have also been historically silenced by institutional memory narratives.
In many of the school trips to the MCM, I would hear the mediators ask children to try and tell a story without including anybody else. The mediators would pause and give children time to participate. However, since this activity would always be at the beginning of the school trips, both the shyness of participating first and the impossibility of the task, would cause children to murmur and giggle while they recognized that all of our stories include someone else thereby effectively grounding our existence in relationality and a sense of belonging to a collectivity. This notion of intersubjectivity complicates de Zan’s point when he stresses that children are “innocent because (s)he does not have a past or a memory”. According to de Zan (2008), children’s participation in collective memory is an impossibility since for the author, children, as apolitical beings, do not share the responsibility of the collective to reconstruct our past. However, this argument erases children’s and youth’s participation as political agents in different instances of transitional justice such as truth commissions, or as collective memory narrators in territories that face everyday violence.

It seems that children’s lack of power in the public sphere is their biggest obstacle to be part of the construction of collective memory. While some silences and forgetfulness are socially accepted and encouraged to restore normal life after conflict, it often turns out that memories that challenge the legitimacy of authority are silenced in favor of the official, institutionalized narratives (Kevers 2016, 628). Children then, are considered to lack both the psychological and the political tools to be part of the collective memory process, while having limited access to collective memory technologies. However, the MCM found a way to tie the relationship between youth and
children through collective memory work, that is through the dialogical praxis of *living memory*.

**Living Memory in the lived space of the museum**

Scarcely any research has been undertaken about collective memory as living memory. The closest definition to living memory is about this being the everyday praxis of collective memory, in which collective memory transforms itself from the memory of the marginalized to an official way of remembering, that is historical memory (Levitt 2013). According to Levitt (2013), memory is dynamic in nature as well as performative. Thinking of the process of collective memory work means that we pay attention to the ways in which the mediators and even me as an observer, read and reread our ongoing encounters with both the artifacts being displayed and the different visitors we engaged with. Every school visit felt different because we were experiencing different things, creating new narratives with new participants and our interpretations of Colombia, our shared history and ourselves changed. This ongoing process is what Levitt understands as living memory. It is the tension between the past and the present. Memory opens up an ever-shifting present. When remembering, I am recollecting the past, but I am also always questioning my present or as Juan explained to me, through living memory we are continuously constructing our todays: “Memory is that. Is what is made today because memory is not done yesterday. Memory is being made today in this moment. It pertains to the historical moment of today [the present]” (Juan, interview with the author, November 8, 2019).

For the mediators, collective memory was done *in* the dialogues between them and the visitors. This is the essence of the mediation exercise, which depends on the collaborative construction of collective memory work. And as we have seen, it is in these
conversations, that those involved get to question their roles in a society that is still in conflict. Therefore, the value of living memory is that it not only helps to construct the idea of a self in relation to others, but it also helps to contest the preconceived ideas of who gets to participate in the process of collective memory. As explained in the section about children and museums, the children visiting the museum tend to be categorized as an innocent and vulnerable public in need of education and entertainment. This tacitly denies children the possibility to be direct actors within the construction of the narratives about the armed conflict within the collective memory framework. In relation to the young mediators, living memory entails a praxis based on reliving the ongoing suffering of the more than nine million victims. As Federico discussed, living memory is “the acknowledgement that we are doing collective memory work of a conflict that is still ongoing and discussing violences that are still occurring. That some of our visitors are survivors and have a story to share.” (Federico, interview with the author, December 3, 2019).

Riaño Alcalá also discusses living memory in her research with youth leaders in Medellín. In her research she noticed that the violences these youth suffered, acted as a force that displaces, territorializes, blurs and transforms our connections with our space. She argues that, space exists as palimpsests where several layers of memories survive and are either silenced or coexist with contradicting narratives of past events (Riaño Alcalá 2000, 25).

Unlike Riaño Alcalá, my research was carried out mainly in built public spaces and with museum employees. However, being a mediator at the MCM is crucial for the young mediators’ identity which also forges a sense of belonging and ownership similar
to the one found in Riaño Alcalá’s youth in relation to their neighborhoods. The difference between Riaño Alcalá and my research is that in the former, living memory refers to the ways in which the subjects of her research keep alive the memory of those who are gone. But the way the mediators conceptualized living memory refers to the ways in which they carry out the praxis of collective memory in the space of the museum by always bringing the past violences and victimizations to the present. This task is not exclusively carried out by the mediators or the artifacts that compose the exhibits. Shifting interpretations of the armed conflict can also be created by a visitor or a mediator who has connections to the ongoing conflict. Hence, while Riaño Alcalá’s living memory is about the memory of those who are no longer with us, for my research, living memory is the presentist element that collective memory has in the museum. What appears to overlap in Alcalá and my analysis is that by participating in collective memory work via living memory, the past continues to be a key element of one’s identity. These past experiences are always a lens through which we understand our present. However, who is remembered varies. In Riaño Alcalá’s research, the youth had personal connections to the persons being remembered. For the mediators, the persons being remembered are more distant which might make living memory work more challenging in the museum context. However, this is only possible in collective memory museums where the visitor is invited to contest the official narrative being presented.

In the last section of this chapter, I describe the tensions that arise between the museum’s narrative of the armed conflict, and the lived experiences that affect the visitors actual engagement with the exhibit. By focusing on two memory technologies that compose the main exhibit, I proceed to explain how the collective memory of the
victims, encapsulated and curated by the museum, is contested by the participants in the *dialogo de saberes*. It is in this discursive interaction that living memory gets produced in the MCM.

### 3. Mediating the MCM

This last section shows the frictions that arise when the mediators’ and child visitors’ biographical experiences with the armed conflict disrupt the museum’s intentionality. As explained in the second chapter, the main exhibit is composed of seventeen memory technologies or experiences. By framing the memory technologies as experiences, the museum intentionally curates these as artifacts that are not only to be seen but to be lived. These technologies are understood as didactic devices that invite the different participants to supplement their knowledge of the armed conflict. The curation of the exhibit in the museum originates from the assumption that the public is there to be (re)educated. This assumes an unawarness or incomplete knowledge on the part of the visitor and a teaching moment for the mediator. However, the degree to which each of the experiences manages to transform collective memory into living memory varies. This variation is not only dependent on the actual design and affordances of the artifacts, but the emotions and reflections elicited in the visitors in conjunction with the biographical memory of the armed conflict. To explain this in greater detail, I focus on *Memory’s Space* and *Multiple Faces of Violence*.

**Memory’s Space**
Separated from the rest of the room by a black curtain, Memory Space pays “a homage to life”. According to the section label describing the Memory Space, “In this space we want to share and celebrate the lives of our victims, their dreams and their loving presence in our history”. When the visitor passes the curtain, they enter a completely dark room surrounded with screens of different sizes and small lights that were interpreted as stars or angels in different occasions by both mediators and children visiting the museum. The screens showcase images portraying daily activities that most Colombians have lived: your family wearing their best clothes as they celebrate a first communion, hanging out with friends before a football game, or a family around a fire cooking a sancocho during a Sunday trip. All photographs begin in color but after some seconds, the image turns black and white and only the victim remains in color. The change from color to white and black, seeks to signal that time is not static and that the museum is fighting against the social forgetting of those who have been lost (Figure 8).

With this particular device, the museum is inviting its participants to remember the armed conflict victims in color, in moments when they were experiencing happiness and joy. This is the museum’s attempt to humanize the data. On multiple occasions I heard the mediators say during school trips “It is not useful to know we have 9 million of victims, muchachos. These people had families, friends, loved ones. We have to remember them”. This remembrance is grounded on a sense of nostalgia and what it
means to be Colombian in everyday scenarios. Hence, the museum’s intention is to show the victims in the privacy of their homes during family dinners, friends’ gatherings, and celebrations. We see everyday people, living everyday lives until violence interrupted their paths. After we see the altered photograph, the image fades and over a black background the visitor reads the victim’s name, the year they were victimized and the type of victimization they suffered. The experience is multimodal since it is also accompanied with everyday sounds such as children’s laughter, the exciting scream of a recently scored soccer goal and footsteps. Perhaps the visceral effect produced by the photographs and sounds triggered, in the young visitor, the horrific realization of her family’s involvement in the violence. Or she might have been moved by the small lights scattered throughout the exhibit that are never turned off and which according to a mediator, symbolize the angels looking after those who had died.

It is difficult to deny the emotions elicited by this particular exhibition. In my case, the first time I entered the Memory Space I felt indignation. The dates ranged from the 1980s to 2018 and the balance between male and female as well as the broad age range of the victims, intensified the way I felt. And like me, during the school visits most of the children felt sad, or even afraid by “seeing all these dead people who are even children, like us”. For Daniela, a mediator who is also a youth leader in her vereda, the Space had a huge impact both in her sense of collective identity and in terms of representation. When she visited the museum for the first time before becoming a mediator, she realized that all the types of violence and forms of victimizations she had lived in La Loma.

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37 La Loma is the name of the rural neighborhood (or vereda) were Daniela lives. Because of its peripheral location, La Loma was used as a corridor by different armed groups who were bringing drugs and guns from the pacific region of Colombia into Medellin. Therefore, there was presence of both guerrilla and paramilitary groups. It was also the first place to be raided during the famous Operación Orión in which the Colombian Army and the Paramilitaries allegedly
where not intrinsic to La Loma but had affected other areas of Medellín and Colombia. In our interview she shared how the first time she visited the museum it was a harsh experience because she was,

"not only seeing the victims that were encapsulated in that space, but MY victims. And I saw when in La Loma I was left in the emptiness. And I saw when every single week I was burying someone [...] a family member, a person close to me, someone who like me was resisting, and that hurt. And just like some got killed for being perpetrators, there were some who were killed for being innocent, for simply resisting, they were murdered. And today I am alive, but that could have also been me, for raising my voice, and in that moment, in that dark room, in the emptiness, looking at all those lights, all those angels, because for me they are angels that represent me, and they were telling me to carry on" (Daniela, interview with the author, October 1, 2019).

For her, the Memory’s Space solidified her commitment to grassroots work in her neighborhood but at the same time, allowed her to identify beyond the borders of a place where she felt trapped. It was in her realization that her pain was shared that allowed her to identify as a victim of the armed conflict. Furthermore, visiting the Memory’s Space allowed her to recognize her personal and local experiences with the armed conflict within a larger narrative of what it means to be a victim of the Colombian armed conflict. We see how the narrative presented by the museum affected Daniela’s narrative of herself due to the thirldspace characteristics of this memory technology. We also see how she brought all her past experiences with death, trauma, and resistance to the present, thereby creating living memory.

For Mateo, a mediator who used to live near La Loma, until illegal armed groups forced him to leave, and who still heads a rap group in the vereda, his first visit to Memory’s Space enabled him to finally feel compassion, empathy, and the opportunity to

worked together to “clean” the area of guerrilleros. During two days of relentless conflict, many were signaled, killed, and disappeared. To this date, the number of victims remains unclear.
identify with *the other*. During our conversation, he explained how because of all the violence he had endured in his childhood and youth, he developed a coping mechanism that blocked feelings of empathy by distrusting other people’s emotions. For him, emotions were used to obtain something from someone. At the age of thirteen, his cousin invited him to join a local organization that combined hip hop with urban farming. Here his “journey of healing began” (Mateo, interview with the author, November 8, 2019) and he realized he was in a better place the moment when he visited the Memory’s Space and began to cry:

“It’s a matter of identifying with the another. I, to say it in a way, I have to be thankful because none of my family members has been murdered. We have been through some very difficult situations, but no one has been murdered, no one has been disappeared. But for me, from my emotions, it is not too foreign to also feel what the other is going through when they begin to cry and tell you they have lost a family member who was murdered, disappeared, etc. That creates a very powerful tie and it has helped me to recognize that if I do not help to heal the other’s pain or I do not help in some way to at least lessen it, to help with the emotional weight, it also represents for me, that I am not helping myself” (Mateo, interview with the author, November 8, 2019).

Just like Daniela, the *Memory’s space* not only solidifies Mateo’s commitment to communitarian work, but it also allows him to recognize his own growth and healing process. For him, his purpose comes from recognizing a shared story of pain, healing, and growth with a victimized (an)other highlighting his path to become a subject is premised on relationality and solidarity.

Therefore, *Memory’s Space* has been central for powerful experiences between mediators and children but also for the mediators’ personal growth. When looking at these instances, the ideal that the museum has about the *Memory’s space* intentionality as a joyful remembrance is ambiguous (Díaz de la Torre and Palacios Aguirre 2016) Given,
the distinct narrative displayed in collective memory museums, the governmentality exercised in this space is distinct. We are not only being disciplined in terms of a civilizing project like anthropological or art museums, but we are also being told what counts as suffering, what we should remember and what we should forget as members of a shared community seeking peace from a subaltern perspective.

Thus, the step further that the collective memory museums seeks as a memory technology is not only telling its visitor what to remember but how to remember. In relation to Memory’s Space, this goal seems to escape the museum’s control by asking its visitors to remember not as an experience moved by sadness or longing but by happiness and joy. Instead, both visitors and mediators seemed to have complicated feelings with this particular memory technology due to their personal experiences with the armed conflict or their relived experiences with the memory technology itself. It was a symbol of the unjust and extensive violence in Colombia and this elicited frustration, sadness and even guilt among its visitors.

Another example of a memory technology in which we can analyze how the museum transforms collective memory into living memory is that of Multiple Faces of Violence.
Multiple Faces of Violence

Multiple faces of violence\(^{38}\) (Figure 9) was one of the memory technologies that I noticed drew the attention of children’s during school visits. It was also popular among mediators, so it was always included in the school visits and served different purposes. Mainly, this technology served as a place of reflection. The mediators would ask the students to sit across the experience, frame the narrative about what photography and photojournalism has done for the armed conflict, and ask them to choose the image that impacted them the most. Then, some of the children would explain why they chose that image, and the mediators would provide information regarding the context where the photograph was taken.

Multiple faces consist of 7 columns, 29 triptychs and over 100 photographs. Each triptych represented a different theme and out of the 29 themes, 18 included images with children in them. Only two of the triptychs were specifically dedicated to children: “Armed children” and “Children as witnesses”. Both frame children as victims of the armed conflict. The former, by focusing on the children who have been “stolen by war”; the latter showcase children witnessing the horrors of war. Children were also the main subjects of some of the photographs on other triptychs. For example, in the triptych

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\(^{38}\) Mediators would refer to this memory technology as *multiple faces* instead of the complete name. I will do the same from now on.
dedicated to “Pain”, one of the sides showcases a young girl covering her face with her right hand while crying over a closed coffin. In her other hand she holds a frame that contains the photograph of her father who was a victim of the paramilitaries. However, more often than not, the images showed children as mis-en-scene and not as subjects of the war.

There was not a pattern in relation to which images were chosen during the school visits. However, there was a pattern in the conversations that were carried out around this memory technology. Because the encompassing theme of this device is that of the multiplicity of the types of violence and its effects on the Colombian civilian population, children would sometimes disrupt the pedagogic moment and share their own experiences with the war. When the mediator would ask what forms of victimization the children knew, assassination, disappearance and particularly forced displacement were common answers. On several occasions, children would retell what they knew about their personal story and how their mom, dad, grandfather, or themselves when they were “very little” had been victims of forced displacement. For example, during one of the school trips when we were explaining forced displacement, a girl around eleven years of age explained how her mother told her of the time she had to run away and could take nothing due to the pressures of FARC. On these occasions, mediators were less surprised by the children’s responses. Rather, they would take the opportunity to expand on the idea that the duration of the conflict in a way ties us all together. They would explain how in some way or another, Colombia, and particularly the city of Medellín, was inextricably tied to stories of forced displacement and other forms of violence. By discussing the
extent to which forced displacement has been perpetuated in Colombia, both children and youth were able to construct a common narrative around the armed conflict.

4. Conclusions

By understanding the collective memory museum as a thirdspace, children and youth were able to create dialogic connections between their experiences with the armed conflict and the official representations of the collective memories of the victims. As Soja (2009) and Bhabha (1994) explained, space is not just material, perceived or imagined, but it is also constituted in the interactions among the occupants of these lived spaces. And these interactions are determined by the inseparable encounter of the tridimensional character of memory in relation to the armed conflict. Therefore space is not objective or neutral, but it is always a site of struggle. And it is amongst these interactions that the assumptions around childhood and children as pre-political subjects in the museum get subverted in the dialogical interactions created between mediators and the children visiting the museum. In a way, because children encounter barriers in accessing the spaces where the official narrative around the armed conflict is negotiated, they are relegated to the construction of alternative narratives via living memory. By allowing for the encounter of the official memory of the exhibit and the lived experience of the mediators and the visitors, a continuous construction of the past and the present takes place. However, the museum also delimits the reach of living memory as the mediators cannot openly voice their political views on the matters discussed. The intentionality is to remember what has happened without falling into the allocation of responsibility. These constraints debilitate the museum’s intentionality to be a thirdspace, by constricting the mediation exercise to scripted forms of what it is to be memorialized. Furthermore, mediators were always careful to be both critical without being too political or reveal
their true ideology and views. This friction, however also allows children and mediators to contest the roles that have been allocated to them by the adults that accompany them in the MCM.

In this space, living memory is the idea that by experiencing and understanding and preserving our violent past, the children visiting the museum will work towards political and social change and will develop collective will. The young mediators were able to connect with children during school visits regardless of whether the child had been directly impacted by the armed conflict. And in this interactions questions around guilt and responsibility arose. Many Colombians believe that violence is organic to our country, and as Pastora, the social leader I met in San Carlos and who has found more than 30 victims of forced disappearance in mass graves in her town, once said, "No todos somos responsables de lo que pasó, pero todos somos responsables de lo que va a pasar" (all of us are not responsible for what happened, but all of us are responsible for what is about to come).

It is in the praxis of living memory within collective memory that the issue of shared responsibility becomes central. By understanding living memory in this way, we can also understand the conciliatory element that memory has to its participants. It is a form of political participation in which the plea for past justice is also the plea for justice in the present. In relation to the young mediators, because the MCM’s collective memory work is based on a dialogical paradigm, their role as mediators is intended to be that of a bridge across the multiple voices within the museum. This key element of translating past offenses to the lens of the present, which is characteristic of living memory, also allowed mediators to reframe the role that children play within collective memory work.
It is from this awareness, that the mediators have fought for the inclusion of children within collective memory work in the MCM. By understanding the MCM as a heterotopia and a third space, children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory becomes possible through the dialogical process of living memory. The way this praxis is carried out relies not only on *living* the devices that compose the main exhibit, but through the dialogical and pedagogical mediation carried out by the young mediators. In the next chapter I will take a closer look at how the mediators carry out the pedagogic objective of teaching these young visitors about the armed conflict through utilizing peace education and *educación popular* and the implications that this has on these visitors’ subjectivities as children living in a context of intractable conflict.
Chapter 4. FROM CONOCER TO SABER

The unique process of learning about the Colombian armed conflict

While I was accompanying the mediator Mateo and a group of about twenty 9th graders, Mateo asked the group to participate in an exercise where: “we are all going to think of a childhood sound. Whatever comes to mind. About anything. It could be the sound an object makes when you move it, a song, or the sound of a cartoon. Anything. Let’s go to that childhood sound and think about it for a bit”.

After some seconds in silence, Mateo invited students to share with the group. A 16-year-old boy said he had thought of the noise keys made against the lock when his father came back home, and how he would always go and welcome him. He explained that “this sound persists today. Whenever I hear the keys, I know dad is home”. A girl, around 15-years-old, said she thought of the time when she was younger, and she was growing up in Los Llanos and every night she would listen to the “little crickets”. One of the students said she had a funny one: “When I was growing up, I lived in an area that was located far away from main roads so you couldn’t really listen to cars. But I would always listen carefully for the Donut Truck. And my dad would only buy me one once in a while, but every day I would listen with my dad to the sound of the Donut Truck”. To this Mateo asked if she was referring to the “Super Donut Truck” and she laughed and

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39 The Colombian planes are located in the Eastern area of the country, limiting with Venezuela.
said Yes! Mateo told the group that he lives in a rural area on the periphery of the city, where the Donut Truck “reaches far up where he lives”40 and was always a temptation.

After a couple of other interventions, Mateo explained to the group how these aural memories serve as examples of everyday experiences that we narrate as individuals. Though we narrate them individually, they are actually shared by many of us. This highlights our shared identity. To further his point, he then said “I’m going to talk about an extremely specific sound. I won’t imitate it because I can’t”—to which we laughed. “If I tell you the sound made by ‘una olleta, una chocolatera’”, he said, as he started to rub his hands together, then asked, “where does it take you?” Some of the students began to speak at the same time: “the smell of chocolate”; “to my family”; “to my home”. After letting them speak for a while, Mateo then asked, “has everyone heard that sound?” To which the students responded with a loud, collective, and prolonged “YES!” followed. He then asked, “but what specifically?” A girl who had recently relocated from Bogotá said, “to the cold days in Bogotá”. Someone else said “My abuelita”, and another said, “My mom making breakfast every Sunday”. Mateo then explained that although we can all connect to something as “everyday” as the sound made by the olleta, our experiences with the armed conflict can re-signify and give different meanings to these otherwise mundane experiences. He uses this as an opportunity to tell the group that he is a survivor of urban displacement, having been forcibly displaced three times within the city of Medellín. His memory of the “chocolatera” goes back to when he was 6 years old. It was early morning, when his family was making breakfast, and there was no other sound. It

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40 Medellín is composed of different subregions known as comunas and is located in the Aburrá Valley (Valle de Aburrá). Due to the urban development of the city, the lower income comunas are located on the hillsides, while some of the affluent areas are located towards the center of the valley.
was “a strange silence”. He soon began to relate that sound to the unsettling silence that signaled the rare moments of cease of fire during the altercations between illegal armed groups in his neighborhood.

These conversations between the mediators and the children and youth visiting the museum, served as an entryway to discuss the historical, political, cultural, and social implications of the armed conflict. These conversations also allow the mediators to build rapport with the visitors so that they, too, feel comfortable in sharing their own memories and experiences growing up in Colombia. The mediators would often draw from everyday experiences that we might take for granted and juxtapose them against the backdrop of the armed conflict. This juxtaposition would open up conversations about how the armed conflict affects Colombians at the individual, collective and national levels.

For the young mediators, these dialogic interactions with the visitors were the central moments of the “learning” experience that happened in the museum. I use the term learning, not teaching, because for Mateo and the other mediators the conversation originates from the understanding that everyone has something to say, share, and therefore, teach (Freire 1996). Hence, in these learning experiences, knowledge appears to be constructed in situ, in the exchanges of personal, everyday, stories about the armed conflict that are embedded in mundane and shared experiences.

In this chapter I ask: What characterizes the peace pedagogy that takes place in the Museo Casa de la Memoria? What can these learning experiences tell us about

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41 During the school visits, the mediators that identified as victims would share their stories of victimization if they felt comfortable to do so. Although I never directly asked them why they chose to disclose or not their experiences with the armed conflict, I did notice that this occurred when the visiting groups was engaged asking questions, or participating in a critical narration of the armed conflict.
collective memory construction with children and youth in contexts of intractable conflict? Lastly, how are these pedagogies affecting children and youth’s willingness to share their stories of victimization and views about the armed conflict? I propose that participation in these conversations relied on sensorial learning experiences to create mnemonic connections in two ways: first, by drawing from shared and everyday experiences, and second, by attempting to create emotional connections between the visitors and the collective memory of the victims showcased in the museum.

Relying on theories of peace education and critical pedagogies, in this chapter I explain the mediation exercise as a pedagogy. This pedagogy manages to not only question the traditional teacher-learner hierarchy, but also expands on the notion that the museum serves as a pedagogical thirspace\textsuperscript{42}, separated from the learning that occurs in the classroom or in the home. For the mediators, the peace education that took place in the museum was to be “learned” and not “taught”. To address these questions, first I discuss the growth of the pedagogical tradition of peace education. In this section I will also describe why learning about peace in Colombia is a process that differs from other peace education processes - even in contexts of similarly intractable conflict. Secondly, I explain the pedagogy employed by the mediators, \textit{el arte de mediar}. Defined by the mediators as an art, the peace pedagogy that the mediators engaged with consisted of a critical engagement with violence, fostering a horizontal learning experience, and commitment to the idea that everyone involved is a potential peace builder. The third section describes the pedagogic technique of \textit{diálogos de saberes}\textsuperscript{43} and how it expands

\textsuperscript{42} For more one the museum as a thirdspace, see Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{43} The mediators also explored play as a way to apply peace education methodologies. Some of these games are described in Appendix B. However, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the \textit{diálogos de saberes}. 
the notion of liberal peace education by including the binary of saber and conocer.

Lastly, I describe what type of content is shared and co-constructed between the mediators and the children visiting the museum.

1. On Peace Education

Bajaj (2015), Galtung (2014), Ospina (2009) and Jares (1999) agree that peace education as a field can be traced back to the end of the First and Second World Wars, as some began to see education as a solution to prevent future international wars. This goal and approach were supported by the newly created supranational organization, The United Nations, and its specialized agency, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) both created in late 1945. According to educators at the time, peace education should promote nonviolence as the ideal way of conflict resolution as well as the belief that a human being’s goodness is inevitable if (s)he is educated in a suitable and peaceful environment. This form of peace education was based on liberal ideals and proposed that violence in all its forms ought to be eradicated. It also defined clear hierarchies between educators and learners and framed educational spaces as sites of possibility and transformation (Bajaj 2015). As Jares (1999) points out, this early stage of peace education had a utopian view of education as the ultimate panacea.

During the second part of the twentieth century, however, this early conception of peace education was contested. Local, everyday experiences, of peacebuilding, were acknowledged, highlighting the need to close the gap between international prescriptions of what peace is and the realities of the communities that live in the midst of violence (Richmond 2008). Of importance was the birth of the field of peace research in the 1960s, thanks to the key contributions by sociologist Johan Galtung (Violence, Peace, and Peace Research 1969). Galtung expanded previous understandings of peace reduced
to the absence of conflict (this being a critique to the first phase of peace education), to include structural and cultural violences. Galtung’s contributions produced a qualitative leap in this research, expanding the objectives sought by peace studies as a field and peace education as a pedagogic strategy. Galtung’s contributions also allowed for the introduction of new areas of inquiry such as the study of social movements, rooting peace culture in strategies and praxis as well as the teaching of non-violence and it’s values.

Since then, the field of peace education has responded to needs to address multiple forms of violences and to include “power, local meaning, and enabling voice, participation and agency through the peace education process” (Bajaj 2015, 154).

These needs allowed for the rise of critical peace education and the inclusion of theoretical frameworks and conceptual resources that draw from fields such as social justice education, post-colonial theory, critical pedagogy, critical race theory and post-structural theory. More importantly for this project, there needs to be a self-critique of the Latin American context and the ways in which it still upholds Eurocentric modernist frameworks and centers on the individual as the source of emancipation and transformative agency (Zembylas 2017, 2). For Zembylas (2017), there is a space of convergence between critical peace education and postcolonial and decolonial thinking. Central to critical peace education projects and scholarship is that they pay attention to issues of structural inequality and aim at cultivating a sense of transformative agency to create new social, epistemic and political structures that advance peace, social justice and human rights. Postcolonial and decolonial thinking aligns well with critical peace education goals, highlighting that capitalism, modernity and coloniality are largely responsible for structural inequalities. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge how
larger structural, material, and political realities, influence understandings and pedagogies of peace (Zembylas 2017, 2).

Some of the contextual demands in Latin America were the need to oppose the privatization of education, and democratization of life after the period of dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s (Quintar 2018). Responding to these conditions, critical pedagogists across Latin America applied Paulo Freire’s pedagogy at multiple levels (regional, national, local, and communitarian). For Freire (1996), when pedagogy is being discussed, the emphasis is not on the methods or the curriculum, but in the learning process. Learning, thus, is seen as a transformative, reciprocal, exchange and interaction, that occurs by engaging in critical dialogues (Gill and Niens 2014). This conceptualization of education aimed to contribute to changing the world by humanizing it, educating people into agents of change, and providing them with the capacities to influence economic, social, political, and cultural relations as subjects of transformation (Gittins 2016).

This local turn in peace building and peace education (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013) also includes peace education initiatives that take place in contexts of intractable conflict. There are two characteristics that make peace education in contexts of intractable conflict different from spaces with other forms of violences: first, the main focus is on the need to develop conflict resolution skills for the belligerent communities (while in traditional peace education or in peace education in contexts of non-protracted conflict). For analysis of peace education initiatives in contexts of intractable conflict see: Kupermintz, Haggai, and Gavriel. Salomon. “Lessons to be learned from research on peace education in the context of intractable conflict.” Theory into practice 44, no. 4 (2005): 293-302 on the context of Israel/Palestine; Burde, Dana. Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan. Columbia University Press, 2014; King, Elisabeth. From classrooms to conflict in Rwanda. Cambridge University Press, also present
violence, the focus tend to land on the individual); second, each of the collectivities has created, through time, deeply rooted narratives that construct their and the Other(s) identity and therefore their right to be part of the armed conflict becomes part of their cultural narrative (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005). However, in Colombia, the idea of who is on each side is complicated by the two main characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict: that of the multiplicity of actors and the social proximity between perpetrators and victims. The next section focuses on how peace education developed in Colombia.

**The Need to Learn Peace in Colombia**

In Colombia, peace is both a right and a moral value according to the guidelines of the Colombian educational system. The Colombian constitution as well as the 115 law of 1994, the 1732 law of 2014 and the 1038 Decree of 2015, regulate peace education, particularly under what has been coined Cátedra para la Paz (Peace Chair). Under these laws, peace education is mandatory in all educational institutions (preschool, elementary and secondary education, as well as public and private) and should promote the process of appropriation of knowledge and skills related to one’s “territory, culture, economic and social context and historical memory, in order to rebuild the social fabric, promote general prosperity and guarantee the effectiveness of principles, rights and duties enshrined in the Constitution” (1038 2015). The fundamental objectives of the Peace Chair in schools is to contribute to children’s learning, and the reflection and dialogue on the topics of justice and human rights; sustainable use of natural resources; protection of the cultural and natural wealth of the Nation; peaceful conflict resolution; prevention of

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45 These two characteristics are explained in detailed in Chapter 3.
bullying; diversity and plurality; political participation; historical memory; moral dilemmas; social impact projects; history of national and international peace agreements; and, life projects and risk prevention (1038 2015).

However, one of the issues with the peace chair is that although it institutionalizes the teaching of peace, this does not necessarily mean that the educational institutions in Colombia are mandated to teach the armed conflict as it is still seen as a contentious epistemological space. This depoliticization of peace education in Colombia is why Sánchez Cardona (2010) argues that the Peace Chair still remains at a level of abstraction that undermines its success (142). Although the Colombian government has made peace education mandatory, the lack of state support in the most vulnerable areas of the country forces rural and public-school teachers to be solely responsible for designing the pedagogical strategies that best suit their own understandings of peace education and tailoring them to the needs of their local contexts.

The study by Salamanca Rangel et. al (2009), discloses the multiple innovations that peace educators and critical pedagogists have developed in Colombia since the 1970s through the NGO “New School, let’s go back to the people”. Furthermore, according to the authors, in Colombia the need to support peace education stems from the nature of the Colombian armed conflict. In their words, peace educators see peace education as the main vehicle to prevent, manage and resolve the everyday violence that has been

\[46\] To illustrate the divisions in Colombia around the teaching of the armed conflict, at the moment of the writing of this dissertation, on April 7th 2021, there was a media frenzy around a 9th grade teacher who gave her students an assignment about the extra-judicial killings in Colombia. The teacher asked her students to research the historical conditions that elicited the systematization of this form of victimization. Shortly after, supporters of former president Alvaro Uribe and his party attacked the teacher on social media while at the same time the teachers’ union and other opposition supported the teacher’s endeavor.
normalized due to the conflict’s longevity. As a consequence, Colombian children and youth have “grown up, validating violent attitudes, beliefs and behaviors” (Salamanca Rangel, Casas Casas and Otoya Mejía 2009., 49). Some of the most salient characteristics are its duration and the significant number of perpetrators. Salamanca et. al also found that peace education can be carried out in formal, informal and communitarian spaces. This requires that peace education is not only carried out and proposed to children and youth, but to citizens in conflict areas regardless of their age (Salamanca Rangel, Casas Casas and Otoya Mejía 2009., 35).

In contrast to Salamanca et.al., Gómez Arévalo and Gamboa Suárez (2017) ground the need for peace education in Colombia due to our “inherently violent culture”. A culture in which “Colombian children have grown up in the past decades amid the death rattle of armed violence and the criminal flow of illicit money. For as future citizens, problems are solved with bullets and the hard way, and everything can be solved with influence, money, and weapons” (241). This dramatic reading of what growing up in Colombia has meant for at least four generations ignores not only the geographic inequalities that characterize the armed conflict, but the fact that many communities have opposed violence historically through peacebuilding and collective memory endeavors.

Examples of this peacebuilding in the midst of the conflict are the multiple ways in which Colombian educators combine the pedagogic objectives of peace education mandated by the government with critical pedagogy perspectives. As Sánchez Cardona (2010) explains, peace education was reframed by Colombian educators by infusing it with the philosophy of educación popular. If the goal shared by the government, the educational community, and civil society is to construct a long-lasting peace, the
combination of peace education with *educación popular* elicits new paradigms and understandings around who is a teacher and who is a learner. However, despite the somewhat opposing views, researchers and practitioners agree there is a need for peace education in Colombia - one which foments a change from a culture of violence to a culture of peace and one that “invites [children and] youth to be constructors of peace and not recipients of peace” (Rodríguez 2016, 15).

In sum, peace education in Colombia seems to play two central roles: first, it has an ethical and moral role where values such as justice, cooperation, solidarity, individual development, and creativity are at the center of the pedagogy; and second, peace educators seek to transform the entire educational community in which parents, student body, teachers and staff are invited to participate actively in these initiatives. There is, then, a clear communitarian approach to peace education (Salamanca Rangel, Casas Casas and Otoya Mejía 2009, 37). These communitarian characteristics, alongside the notion that everyone involved in the educational community must participate in the peace education projects, constitute some of the elements that shape the mediation pedagogy.

The next section examines the characteristics of the dialogical pedagogy between the children and youth visiting the museum and the mediators. It also looks at the way in which the pedagogy constructed a collective narration of the armed conflict. This dialogical pedagogy was *el arte de mediar*. 
2. *El Arte de Mediar*: mediation as a pedagogy

One of the objectives of peace education is the eradication of a culture of violence by eliminating violence in all its forms. In order to achieve this, the mediators and the children visiting the museum had to share what they knew about the types of violence that have taken place during the armed conflict.

During one of the visits, Federico asked the group if they were born in Medellín. When most of them said yes, he asked if their parents had also been born in Medellín and a few said their parents came from nearby villages. He then asked about their grandparents, and most of them said the names of the rural areas where their families came from. By posing this set of questions to the group of nine- and ten-year-old students, Federico used their responses to not only highlight the commonality of the shared experience of migrating from rural to urban areas, but to explain the circumstances of forced displacement caused by the armed conflict. Federico then asked the group if they knew who the armed actors were and one of the boys eagerly explained:

“Yes! Our teacher told us a story of a town. What was the name of the town? It doesn’t matter, the point is some men came and they would chop people’s heads off”, some of his classmates readily agreed and he continued to explain, “and I think they used some type of boomerang, and just like that, whoosh, chop people’s heads off”.

I was surprised by the eagerness in the students retelling: as he was talking he was moving his arms, imitating the movements and incorporating the sound effects. As he was doing this, some of his classmates were nodding. I looked at the teacher and I saw her stunned expression and she quietly whispered, “I never said nothing of that sort.” The

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47 This reference to “mediating as an art” was a recurrent phrase used by the young mediators during our interviews, or during the Monday pedagogic/selfcare sessions they participated in. It is a reflection on how seriously they take their job and the idea that it is a craft not everyone can execute.
children continued talking over each other about this shared story about the armed conflict. Finally, Federico interjects: “well, I am not sure to which town you are referring to, but yes, there’s been many terrible stories just like that in our country. And because of events like those, many people had to come and live here in Medellín, because they were afraid and because of the conflict”.

Children’s detailed response and eagerness seemed to be facilitated by the mediator’s disposition to engage in an open conversation about the armed conflict. Not only were they discussing this subject among their groups of friends, but with an “adult” who invited the children to discuss the war. I noticed that both young children and older students were receptive and motivated to discuss the characteristics of the armed conflict. There was even one occasion when the group was discussing the consequences of the armed conflict for Indigenous and Afro-Colombians, and a student was so moved that she started to cry. She felt embarrassed and began to dry her face with the sleeve of her sweatshirt while saying to the group, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, is just so unfair. So unfair”.

One way in which the mediators validated demonstrations of vulnerability was to share biographical memories like Mateo’s experience with urban displacement. Similarly, mediator Daniela explained the official narrative around the Operación Orión⁴⁸ and then disclosed her own personal experience with the consequences of this siege as a resident of the comuna where these events took place. Mateo and Daniela would explain to the group how, as a result of both experiences, they decided to participate in

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⁴⁸ Operación Orión (October 2002) was a military offensive between the Colombian forces who, with the support of the AUC, fought the guerrilla forces that controlled this dense, marginal neighborhood in Medellín. However, as one of the most densely populated neighborhoods, the inhabitants of the comuna were trapped in the middle of operation which lasted for four days. However, after the ceasefire, the paramilitaries took control of the area, victims are still looking for the disappeared.
communitarian initiatives and to work in the Museo. When these topics of conversation arose, they would also use the opportunity to explain to the visitors how youth have been participating in peace education and peacebuilding in the midst of the conflict in Medellín for at least twenty years.

Another key element of the dialogical pedagogy was to create a learning experience where roles became secondary and everyone felt like they had the agency to collaborate in the process of narration. The mediators described themselves as “someone who does not know it all” as a way to foster horizontality with the children, or as someone who was “excited to discuss what we are going to be experiencing in the museum with all of you” to invite the children to a conversation and not a lesson. This desire for horizontality could be explained by the hiring logic of the museum for the mediation team. In an interview with Jose, he explained that, when hiring new mediators, the museum looks for college students who preferably are gaining a degree in education and pedagogy, or at least enrolled in degrees in the humanities and the social sciences. For him, there seemed to also be a preference for youth enrolled in public universities. Though he did not fully agree with this filtering, since, in his words, it served to “sustain the stereotype that a young person studying engineering would not be interested in collective memory work and peace building”, he did agree that young people in the social sciences and the humanities had better communicative and storytelling skills and therefore were better at conveying the need for the humanization of the conflict (Jose, interview with the author, October 2, 2019).

Another feature of critical peace education that shaped the arte the mediari was the commitment to the idea that everyone had the potential to engage in political and social
change (Bajaj 2015). What the mediation provided then were the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and understandings of the armed conflict so that anyone could become an agent of change and peacebuilder. During our interviews, some of the mediators identified as agents of change in their neighborhoods (Dani and Mateo), their universities (Jose and Violeta), their religious groups (Fede and Juan), or at the city level (Caro and Cata). They would explain to the children visiting the museum that they, too, were agents of change and peacebuilders.

During the visits with Federico, I noticed how he would often stress to the visitors that they had to take the lessons learned on a given day to their own contexts and share them with their parents, siblings, and friends. On another occasion, when the children were discussing the images of children who were victims of the armed conflict, a student explained he felt that “the future of Colombia was being taken away”. Catalina interjected and said: “No, guys. We need to debunk those arguments. You are not the future; you are the present. I might sound silly, but I still have hope. I believe in us [children and youth]”. Thus, the mediators were inviting the children and youth to self-identify as agents of change of their own destinies (Quintar 2018) despite (or perhaps, because of) their age.

However, despite the mediators’ efforts to foster a horizontal learning experience and to empower children and youth to also be peacebuilders, on some occasions some of the students in the visiting group showed unwillingness to collaborate in the pedagogic experience. There was one time when Catalina noticed that the group she was mediating for was refusing to respond to the content and the experience in a way that she would have liked. We were all gathered in Fabiolita wrapping up the school visit when she told
the group that the museum often receives victims of the armed conflict and she told the group the story of a woman who was never certain who her perpetrator was. Catalina asked the group: “What do paramilitaries wear?” “Camouflage”, “And the guerrillas?” “Camouflage”, “And what about the army?” “Camouflage”, “So how do I know who is who when they come to my doorstep?”, to which the group boisterously laughed, much to my and Catalina’s surprise. This dismissal on behalf of the group was reprimanded by Catalina: “I am not telling a joke guys”. She then explained to the group how one illegal armed group would force the victim to provide shelter and feed them for months. After they had left, a second group would come and claim she was a guerrilla supporter and that was how they killed her husband in front of her and threatened her children. The victim explained that she never truly knew who was victimizing her, so she had to flee her home. Catalina tells the group that she is mentioning this particular experience with the armed conflict because, ‘us’, civilians, tend to easily judge what we consider are the facts of the armed conflict. She is creating a new ‘us’ that comprises those who have not experienced the armed conflict, to which she includes the young visitors.

Between guerrillas and paramilitary forces, there have been more than forty illegal armed groups throughout the duration of the conflict. Furthermore, civilians have been targeted (and viciously punished) for being “complicit” with one or several of these groups. The way the mediators explain this complexity is by explaining and grouping this multiplicity of actors under the concept of “the triad”. They would explain: “we have the Government, who is the politicians that create laws and governs; the leftist guerrillas

49 An example of this is San Carlos. During my fieldwork, several of the San Carlitanas I spent my time with explained “One day it was the guerrillos, the next came the paracos and soon after it would be the soldiers. Even to this day, we don’t know who ruined our lives” (Ref). The terror the inhabitants felt was heightened by the fear of not knowing who “the bad guys” were.
like FARC and ELN; and the paramilitaries who are now known as BACRIM." In the center of the triad the mediators would include “us” (civil society) and, particularly, the victims of the armed conflict who under Colombian law are characterized in terms of their vulnerability and the crimes committed against them. But despite these complexities, the mediators saw in the museum’s pedagogy a reflection of the need to unlearn violence and learn peace in Colombia.

Catalina also uses this opportunity to expose how violence and war seek to dehumanize the people involved. She explained that during an army battalion’s recent visit to the museum, one of the soldiers explained that in Granada every single family had a member within the flanks of the guerrillas so “we had to enter with full force”. Catalina explained to the group how that is not only the justification given by the army, but how the guerrillas and the paramilitaries use the same excuse. She asks the group “how can we justify the armed conflict in Colombia when no one takes responsibility for what has happened?” Catalina said, “It becomes excusable to kill someone because they are a guerrillero, a paramilitary or a soldier but we forget we are all human beings. We kill him without knowing his life story. We kill him without understanding the reasons why he is standing in front of me”. This echoes Freire’s (1996) argument when he says that, in order to libertate all people, the end goal has to be the humanization of everyone including the oppressed and the oppressors (39). Catalina explains to the group that the

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50 One of the consequences of the failed demobilization process with the paramilitaries in 2005 was the transition of ex-paramilitaries into a “new” form of organized criminal organizations, that is the Bandas Criminales or BACRIM [criminal bands].

51 Granada is one of the towns located in the eastern part of Antioquia between Medellín and San Carlos. Due to its location all the armed actors were present in this territory but unlike San Carlos, the people from Granada were reluctant to flee the municipality. Nevertheless, all forms of victimization did take place and terror tactics such as forcing family members to carry on their shoulders their dead family members were often used. According to the Center for Historical Memory and the JEP, all the actors carried out this type of strategies and victimizations.
intractable armed conflict in Colombia is due to structural inequalities that are complex but tend to feel alien until “we” are the ones directly victimized. She says “that is why we joke ‘Oh look, that is my uncle’ when we’re in the Memory’s Space, because that is not ‘my’ story. But guess what, he was somebody’s uncle, he was somebody’s husband, somebody’s father”.

This demonstrates that for the mediation exercise to be successful it had to take place in a particular way: children had to be engaged with the devices and methodologies planned by the mediators, and they also had to respond to them in a particular and desired way. Thus, a successful visit for the young mediators was one in which the young visitors decided to engage in a dialogue about the collective memory of the armed conflict and to be willing to connect to the experiences of the victims. The narrative might broaden to include children’s voices and experiences, but it still has to align with the political views of the institution, particularly around the humanization of the conflict and the notion that we are all potential peacebuilders. These political views were ensured by hiring mediators who had either experience with the armed conflict or were being trained in the tenets of critical peace education. Disagreement was not even considered as a plausible response, and not taking the content seriously enough was the greatest form of disrespect.

The goal, then, was to invite the visitors to commit to a rejection of violence that was not reduced to an absolute eradication, but the path of peaceful resistance. This commitment was, in a way, an acknowledgment of violence as inevitable in a context of intractable conflict. As one of the visitors mentioned, “when one is looking around, everything you see, is violence. And that’s, that’s sad. Because, well, one comes from that same violent past, and one doesn’t want to continue seeing all those things. But sadly, one has to keep
seeing that, and just learn. The goal is, like, yeah there is violence, but one doesn’t reproduce that same violence”.

3. **Diálogos de saberes: between conocer and saber**

According to Zembylas (2017), one of the "epistemic weaknesses of peace education" in relation to peace studies’ is its failure to decolonize the meaning of peace. For the author, "peace is not the absence of violence; the idea of peace without violence is premised on the illusion of an original peace" (12). And in order for peace itself to be decolonized, peace educators must see their endeavors as political, therefore politicizing peace itself. Peace education initiatives for contexts that are not of intractable conflict tend to see peace as neutral and impartial. But decolonial and postcolonial epistemologies of peace challenge Eurocentric and modernist ways of conocer and instead, it asks us to saber about peace and peace education.

For the shift from conocer to saber about peace to happen, the study of critical peace education must occur in a multiplicity of locations such as classrooms, museums, public squares, and nature. This broadening allows for a diverse inclusion of who gets to be recognized as a transformative agent. For critical pedagogy, the emphasis is on the learner and not the educator; on the interaction and not the result (Freire 1996); on what is created, voiced, and not what can be tested or commodified (Vasco Uribe 2012). This was demonstrated during one of the school visits when Mateo asked the students what they knew about the armed conflict. The youth gave a clear and thorough explanation of the causes (El Bogotazo), main actors (the triad), and implications for our daily lives of the armed conflict (microtraffic, gangs, and other forms of violence). After several interventions that succinctly explained the latter, jokingly Mateo said: “No, guys, I think it is better if you are the ones that give the museum tour to me” and the group laughed.
This recognition of the youth’s knowledge empowered the students, and the adults accompanying the group were also more eager to explore the museum in a more horizontal way.

However, for the mediators, the purpose of their pedagogy transcends the “teaching” of the facts of the armed conflict. The distinction between traditional and formal education, and the critical peace education that the mediators attempt to mediate, is summarized by Vasco Uribe when he says the former are obsessed with producing conocimiento and the latter’s goal is to produce saberes. Though both words are translated into English to knowledge, the differentiation is key to understanding why the MCM centers their pedagogical endeavors around diálogo de saberes instead of diálogo de conocimientos. As Vasco Uribe (2012) explains, conocimiento stands on ideals of knowledge derived from the modern tradition. That is, it is the knowledge produced from rational and positivistic comprehensions of reality. Saberes, on the other hand, are grounded in intuition, reflexivity, orality, and emotions. This is how critical pedagogists appear to be not only asking questions about know-what or know-how, but also asking about know-where, know-why and know-what-to do-with-it.

For the mediators, factual knowledge about the armed conflict was not as important as a sensory understanding of it. This takes us back to Mateo’s invitation to think about the sound that the chocolatera makes, the smells that accompany it, and the other sounds around it. Mateo asked the 47 students from 10th Grade, ages 15-18 to:

“not only listen, but to also feel. Because the goal is to interiorize the contents from an emotional perspective. Because often when we talk about memory, we think we are talking about memorizing and it’s just shoving content in our brains. Like in a forced manner. For example, when we are studying for a final exam, we have to shove in our brains as much as possible because they will ask us about the things we have to memorize. No. When we are talking about the armed
conflict, about violence, we need to understand that beyond the data, there are life stories behind those numbers. And they are stories that are not alien, but stories that can happen to us. So how do you want to be seen tomorrow? Do you want to be a number, or do you want to be a story that needs to be told? Or don’t our stories count?”.

This binary framing of conocer and saber was not the only dichotomy that the mediators challenged during these school visits. Similarly to the critique presented by Freire around the concept of banking, where traditional education relegates the students to receivers, containers to be filled and to store content (Freire 2011), memorizing was presented as the counterpart to doing collective memory work. Though the mediators recognized the impact that data has, for them at the core of knowledge dialogues (diálogo de saberes) was the reconstruction of the stories of the victims through empathy, solidarity, and the sense of belonging to a shared community. These senses of collective identity varied, and drew from the three forms of memorializing when the mediators discussed with the children the violence in their neighborhoods and comunas, the regional which was present when they discussed Medellin’s past, and the national which was present when the groups discussed the protracted nature of violence as a foundational myth (Pécaut 2000).

The value of these discussions was not describing what had happened but sharing how these memories also impacted them in the present by describing feelings of sorrow, hope or frustration. These dialogical exchanges were sometimes about being a proud paisa, fed up with the government's corruption, or sad about the omnipresence of violence. These conversations were achieved by moving away from conocer, which tends to regard education as a banking process where facts are to be stored, into, saber. Thus, saber was reclaimed as the ideal way to participate in collective memory work, where qualitative stories were co-narrated, and where our own location and roles were
challenged. This distancing from conocer and official data, to saber and embodied learning, was the main way in which the mediators relied on the methods of critical peace education. This take on critical peace education challenged and broadened the possibilities presented by traditional peace education and the historical narrative of the armed conflict that the children and the youth were often presented with. Furthermore, saber was seen as the ideal way to interact with the children visiting the museum as it did not require expert knowledge but the shared experiences of our identities.

4. **Type of content shared and co-constructed between the mediators and the children visiting the museum.**

After my third time accompanying a school visit, I realized that the school visits followed a structure: we would all gather at the entrance of the museum and wait for the children to finish the food they had brought with them and go to the bathroom, while the accompanying teacher registered the group at the front desk. Although each mediator had their own approach to the mediation of the main exhibit, the school visits followed the same structure. The school visitors would be welcomed by the mediators and the visit to the museum would be framed by three questions: what is memory, what is a museum, and what do you understand of the term “armed conflict.” The answers would vary according to the age of the children visiting the museum. Some of the younger visitors\(^52\) would say that a museum is “a time machine” where “memories are kept so people can come and learn from them”. Some children expressed an interest in seeing dinosaurs, things that belonged to Pablo Escobar, and learning about their city when “the races

\(^{52}\) Since the lift of the age restriction in 2018 for children under the age of 14, the school visits had no real age limit. The youngest group to visit the museum during my fieldwork was composed of children between 8 – 10 years and the oldest were students between the ages of 15 – 19. There were some students who also visited the museum not as members of a school but as members of an NGO that works with youth who are at risk of falling into criminality. The latter was composed of children between the ages of 16 – 25.
mixed between the people that lived here and the people that came from other countries” (referring to the Spanish colonizers and Africans brought through the slave trade). Some of the older visitors expected the museum to explain “those moments of our history that we want to ignore, like the Madres de Soacha53” or to learn from “the happy and sad stories of the victims of the armed conflict”.

For the mediators, however, these three questions had clear objectives. By asking what memory is, the mediators explained that we had a shared history, that of the armed conflict, and we would be learning about victims’ experiences and memories of it. By asking what a museum is, the mediators would explain that the MCM is not your “typical museum” where visitors cannot touch or talk, but quite the opposite. By asking what the meaning of the term armed conflict is, the mediators would assess the level of knowledge of the group and based on this would decide what language to use, and what language to introduce in the conversations about the armed conflict.

During this initial conversation, the mediators would always explain that they, “don’t have all the answers or possess the truth about the armed conflict. We are here to have a conversation with you guys and to hear and learn from what you have to say about the armed conflict of our country”. This statement was proposed to create a sense of horizontality between the children and the young people visiting the museum, and the young mediators, especially since they came to the museum as part of a school activity.

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53 Madres de Soacha are a collectivity of mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of the victims of extrajudicial killings, colloquially known as false positives, from 2006 onwards. The name is due to the location from where these, (usually) young men were taken, Soacha an impoverish area at the south border of Bogotá. Since 2008, this organization has sought the judicialization of the militaries involved. So far, more than 30 militaries of different ranks have been found guilty. The Madres de Soacha have also presented a detailed report of these crimes to the JEP (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz – Especial Jurisdiction for Peace) and at the hearing some of the highest ranked officials publicly asked for forgiveness to the organization.
After this initial conversation, the mediators would implement the activities they had previously planned, particularly ludic activities, so that the children interacted with the exhibit and reflected on some key concepts\textsuperscript{54}. Finally, there was a closing session where we would collectively reflect on the children’s experiences during the school visit.

Though the format of each school visit appeared, on the surface at least, to be similar, each mediator had the freedom to approach each school visit from their own profession or pedagogic preferences. Therefore, Lily, who was part of a theater company, and Cata, who wanted to become a literature teacher, preferred to use storytelling, while Mariana, Mateo and Fede, preferred games that made students move throughout the exhibit.

A commonality that the mediators shared was the need to work on peacebuilding strategies. Without exception, not only during our formal interviews, but when we were hanging out in and outside the museum, we would joke about \textit{Locombia}\textsuperscript{55} or refer to our country as \textit{Macondo}, and how regardless of how crazy Colombia sometimes seems or how discouraged one can feel, “well, we’re still here”. This joking around was one of the strategies used by the mediators to deal with the overwhelming feelings that working in the museum entailed. However, when performing their mediator duties, it was particularly important for the young museum workers to explain the specificities of the Colombian context to the children visiting the museum.

\textsuperscript{54} The mediators always received an email from the school telling them why they wanted to go for a school visit. Therefore, before each visit, the accompanying teacher reached out to the museum and explained the learning objectives of the visit. Some schools were implementing institutional projects about peace education, so they wanted the school visit to focus on testimonies of resistance by the victims of the armed conflict. Another school through the arts department wanted to understand how art has been used as a way to reconstruct the social fabric in territories impacted by violence.

\textsuperscript{55} By changing the first two consonants of the word Colombia, the mediators call Colombia, Loco-\textit{mbia}, or Crazy-\textit{mbia}.
Nearing the end of one of the school visits, Jose asked a group of thirteen to sixteen-year old’s, what they thought was the most important thing they had learned today. One of the girls in the group explained: “well, the first thing is that most of us don’t even know the history of our own country. Don’t know the facts and, like, the people, and who is who. I think this space is for us to know that we have a very interesting and complicated history, even more so than any other country. And really, just because, I don’t know, we don’t look further, we don’t realize that all these stories could happen to us. They could represent us”, to which Jose replied, “We feel very removed, right? Because we all know that the conflict hasn’t passed, it persists today. And also, it isn’t something happening far away. We feel victimized even when we turn on the TV and watch the news because they all talk about the same topic”. To this, another young male visitor replied: “I just want to be brief, the lesson is that violence can never be justified”\textsuperscript{56}. The student and the mediator were not only critiquing the formal educational system, where the decision to teach about the armed conflict is still under debate, they were also critiquing violence and our own positionality as young people growing up in Colombia.

For the mediators, one of the key characteristics of the discussions about the armed conflict was the paradox of discussing peace and reconciliation efforts by showcasing some of the worst forms of violence suffered by the victims. For the youth visiting the museum, the paradox was coming to the MCM to finally discuss an armed conflict that seems omnipresent, but only getting to discuss it with adults in official learning settings alongside the Second World War or the battles of independence as an

\textsuperscript{56} Another constant throughout the dialogues was the discussion around the humanization of the armed actors as a way of peacebuilding and a reconciliation effort. This point is further analyzed in chapter 5.
extension of Colombia’s historical memory. Similarly to the experiences of the children involved in peace education strategies in Burundi, eastern DRC (Kasherwa 2020), Northern Ireland or occupied Israel (Kupermintz and Salomon 2005), children seemed to be encouraged to finally be able to talk and be taken seriously when invited to discuss the armed conflict. However, some of the previously described characteristics of the armed conflict complicate the way peace education efforts take place during the diálogos de saberes. For example, the mediators do not want to create the narrative of an “enemy” to antagonize; they want to question the false notion that the armed conflict is something that happens “far away from us”; and they also acknowledged how the armed conflict in urban settings takes other forms and the criminal networks operate differently than the ones in rural areas. As Catalina reminds us, in the Colombian armed conflict there is an unclear idea of the Other. During the school visits, the mediators stressed to the children and the youth visiting the museum the need to question the shallow idea that the armed conflict and the peace building and reconciliation efforts matter to “everyone”. Instead, they asked how each of us is contributing either to the cycle of violence or the construction of peace. They sought to question the pervasive idea that the war either is a matter of the state or the government or it occurs to campesinos in remote areas. In a way, the mediators were not only trying to encourage empathy but to subvert the perceived apathy. This apathy towards the war was more salient to the mediators when they were interacting with youth. In several interviews, the mediators praised young children’s interest during the school visits and their “willingness to learn”. In contrast, visiting youth were described as apathetic or discontent. These descriptions might disclose a reproduction of the idea that young people are apolitical, indifferent, and apathetic.
Though for the educational institutions the goal was to demonstrate peace as the absolute absence of violence (as a consequence of the Peace Chair within the Peace Education pedagogical frameworks), this objective felt too utopic and even naïve for the children and the young people involved in the school visits. Instead, during the conversations between the youth workers and the children visiting the museum, the absence of violence seemed to be seen as an impossibility. Instead, the dialogues focused on how victims have historically peacefully and valiantly resisted the conflict. After discussing the sound of the *chocolatera*, and the violence he has survived, Mateo explained that one of the reasons why the museum was created was: “because of the context we live in. The Colombian context has been, should we say, extremely violent. And although our memories do come from that conflict and that violence, they are also the starting point to multiple resilience and resistance endeavors to that conflict. Because, if we hadn’t resisted in the face of these events, would we have a society? Would we have a civil society at this moment of time?” For the mediators then, the two most important arguments in each of the visits was to let the visitors know that on one hand, we were discussing peace in the midst of an ongoing, intractable, conflict, and on the other, regardless of their age, their voices, questions, and opinions in the matter were as important as that of adults. Their participation was not validated on their factual knowledge about the conflict, but on the everydayness of their own personal experiences with violence in their immediate contexts.

5. Conclusions

This chapter explained how the pedagogy of the mediators presents new possibilities for peace education when applied to the Colombian context and, in particular, to the Museo Casa de la Memoria. Considering the specificities that
differentiate contexts of intractable conflict, our understanding of what is peace and how to educate for peace must be broadened. Contexts of intractable conflict especially pose a challenge to peace education, and particularly to its ultimate goal of educating to eliminate every form of violence. The mediation, and subsequent collective memory construction that transpires in the museum, invites us to reconsider the pedagogic methodologies possible within critical peace education. It invites us to acknowledge everyone’s experiences and knowledge of the armed conflict, regardless of one’s social location. It is through this mutual recognition and acknowledgement that the young mediators invite the children and youth visiting the museum to resist and oppose the pervasive and complex violences that characterize the armed conflict.

This is possible due to the mediators training and the application of critical pedagogies when engaging in mnemonic dialogues with children visiting the museum. By drawing from collective and shared everyday experiences, as well as particular instances of suffering from the victims of the armed conflict, the mediators shaped the learning experiences of children and youth visiting the museum. Though originally the young mediators were presented as the experts and teachers, and the children visiting the museum’s as the learners, the combination of the two content lessons allowed for an inclusive learning experience of the armed conflict based on the diálogo de saberes. This form of co-constructing the narrative allowed for the children and the youth to share their perspectives, opinions, and experiences of the armed conflict. Issues such as Colombia’s past as inherently violent were questioned, and education became one of the possible routes to heal and prevent it. Thus, by claiming peace education under the pedagogic
paradigms that characterize radical education in Latin America, peace education has been tailored to fit the educational needs of our context.

Though peace education stands on the promotion of autonomy and personal affirmation, in which the subject is seen as a creator of a possible peaceful reality, in the particular context of the Museo, peace education comprises more than the transfer of information. It implies subverting the structures the learning experience for the participants and opening oneself to learn about the war both through rational and factual knowledge to emotional and embodied experiencing. It also considers violence in the three dimensions presented by Galtung and other peace education theorists. We see how this focus on the individual seems to suggest that all children will respond in the same way to peace education, ignoring children’s own experiences with violence. In addition to the mediators view of young visitors as indifferent, we see how the mediators navigate the paradox of discussing the armed conflict in an open and honest way, with their own normative assumptions around childhood and youth.

Despite these assumptions, children’s and youth’s own experiences with violence, and their willingness to share them, were significant moments of comprehension of the complexities of the armed conflict. Furthermore, children’s and youth’s participation in peacebuilding and collective memory work is possible thanks to embodied pedagogic practices such as the ones included within the diálogos de saberes. Like some of the instances that I have described in the museo show, the issue is not whether children and youth want to be involved in the construction of the narrative around the armed conflict. The real issue is that the adults in charge of the peace education initiatives must see children and youth as equals and take them seriously (Kasherwa 2020). By adding the
teachings and methods of critical pedagogy, the mediators and the children show how learning about the armed conflict is a promise and a duty that includes all of us who support peacebuilding regardless of one’s age.

One of the obstacles that the museum still needs to surpass is the lack of attention to children’s historical resistances to the violence that have occurred in their communities. This omission by the museum occurs on two assumptions. First, that children have had a secondary role as witnesses, and it is only via peace education efforts that they are brought into the post-conflict/peacebuilding arena. Second, that children are reduced to victims of the armed conflict and therefore the museum only highlights their stories of suffering. These two assumptions create peace education as a child-friendly pedagogy, that still upholds children as pre-political beings. Furthermore, despite the museum’s continuous efforts to showcase the historical peaceful resistance by social leaders and human rights defenders, children and youth are excluded from this narrative. It is through this erasure that the young mediators and the children and youth visiting the museum continue to reproduce normative ideas about childhood. To further disclose the issues around victimhood, the next two chapters will focus on the construction of the victim as a rhetorical referent in the museum.
Chapter 5. “Todos somos víctimas”
Deconstructing victimhood, and the politization of childhood within collective memory processes

In one of the school visits, with students between the ages of ten and twelve, Lily spent almost the entirety of the introduction of the visit explaining the historical circumstances\(^{57}\) of the Colombian armed conflict. At one point I noticed that the children had begun to feel restless. It had been thirty minutes since they had arrived in the museum and so far, they had been taken into Fabiolita, asked to sit on the floor, and listen to the mediators, Lily and Dani. A few of them began to talk amongst themselves in quiet voices, others were no longer sitting but laying on the floor, looking bored. Then, Lily explained that in Colombia there is a special group of people who always say no to violence, who denounce it, and they are our social leaders and human rights defenders. While she explained what she meant in a strong voice that attempted to catch the attention of the small group, who were still chatting amongst themselves, a young boy added “yes, and they are killed because they fight for the common good”. Jumping off from this intervention, Lily did not waste time and turned to the small group and said, “listen to what el compañero just said. It’s true, they are killed for fighting for the common good. Human rights defenders, social leaders, communitarian leaders, what are

\(^{57}\) However, as noted in the previous chapter, these historization of the armed conflict failed to include a structural analysis of the multiple causes and consequences of the war. Instead, these explanations focused more on a broad outlook of when it started (with the birth of FARC), how it deformed from a conflict scripted withing the logics of the cold war to a narco-terrorism period, to the current fragile post-accord period.
their shared characteristics?” Considering the museum’s origin\textsuperscript{58}, I wondered if what Lily meant was that one of the shared characteristics of social leaders in Colombia was the inevitability of becoming a victim. If so, what were the children and youth’s perspectives on victimhood in Colombia?

Questions around victimhood, present in many of the school visits, sit at the core of all transitional justice processes (De Waardt 2016). One of the characteristics of the novel criminal justice policies and humanitarian law set in place shortly after the end of the Second World War was that the victims of these horrific crimes were largely absent (Goodey 2005). However, in the aftermath of the Second World War, scholars, practitioners, and advocates have increased efforts to consider the views of victims, in terms of both their experience of victimhood and their place in the criminal justice system (McEvoy and McConnachie 2012). This interrogation of victimhood compels us to not only ask who a victim is, but also, who gets to decide this, how does this recognition take place, and what does it accomplish. Victims played a key role in the construction of the narratives around the armed conflict in the Museo. However, the ways in which the category of victims was mobilized depended on the pedagogical purpose the mediators wanted to stress. In some instances, children and mediators referred to victims as ours, as if victims were part of Colombia’s patrimony that we needed to protect. And that us included those who were attending the school visit, as well as anyone willing to learn from victimhood stories. At the same time, victims were assumed to have a greater moral

\textsuperscript{58} As mentioned in the introduction, the museum Casa de la Memoria was part of the symbolic reparations that the Antioquia government procured for victims after the demobilization process of the AUCs in 2005. The victims’ presence was also stronger the first couple of years after the museum’s opening. The design of the museography was created in collaboration between victims of the armed conflict and academics. In its beginnings, the mediators were mostly adult victims and not youth, but this changed around 2016 due to the appointment of a new director.
authority that guided the conversations in the museum. This made *victims* the legitimate voice to construct memory in the museum, serving as a reference to measure our own constructions and understandings around the continuation (or disruption) of the cycle of violence.

In previous chapters of this dissertation, I have explained some of the characteristics of the Colombian armed conflict and how they get discussed during the school visits to the museum. A salient feature that is frequently brought up is around the participation of numerous armed actors, the fluctuating intensity of the violence and the protracted nature of the conflict. However, in its most simplistic terms, the armed conflict was always reduced to the victimizations suffered by Colombians at the hands of the “triad”\(^59\). While the mediators always began their introduction to the museum with an explanation of the purposes of memory and the historical explanations of the armed conflict, the end goal was to show that “not everything is darkness, not everything is sadness, for there is hope”. For the mediators it was important to “balance” their explanation of the violence of the armed conflict by including narratives of hope and non-violent resistance. This was done by presenting the figure of *the victim* as the counterpart to *the triad*.

In this chapter I analyze how the identity and the roles of the victims of the Colombian armed conflict are (re)constructed in the museum. To do so I ask, who were characterized as victims during the school visits? Where all victims equally legitimate in the eyes of the children and the museum? How does this (re)construction of victimhood relate with constructions around childhood? Both children and victims tend to be

\(^{59}\) On the use of the triad, see Chapter 2.
characterized as innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection. My argument is that including children’s and youth’s understandings of the roles victim’s play in the Colombian context as curated by the museum, might help expand traditional characterizations of the child and the victim. Furthermore, by including children’s and youth’s voices, I am also making a case for the inclusion of children within the political reworking of the category victim.

Though the increasing recognition of ‘victim’ as an agentic identity has gone through significant shifts that have moved it far from its traditional characterization, these newly recognized political capabilities continue to be denied to children and youth. The politization of victimhood has not allowed for a politization of childhood. I argue that when children and youth stand in solidarity and claim to also be victims, they do so as a way of reclaiming a political identity that has been historically denied. They are not only claiming the horrors of the past as central to their own construction of a “national self”, but they are inserting themselves as active participants into one of the most important political debates in contemporary Colombia, that is, the rights of the victims to truth, justice, and reparation. However, this reclaiming does not come without a price. One of these is what I refer to as the humanization of the conflict paradox in which, due to the museum’s main objective to “humanize the conflict”, the curation of certain hierarchies of victimhood by the museum, paired with the idea that “we are all victims”, further silences and denies the child-victim their political subjectivity despite the young mediators’ efforts to test the limits of the museum’s reading of the todos somos víctimas narrative.
The increasing interest in transitional justice co-existed with the emergence and rise in the study of victims and victimhood from multiple and intercepting disciplines and methods. However, most of these endeavors have centered adult voices. Though this chapter will showcase some of these key debates, more importantly it will present the ways in which those who were part of my research, (de)construct what it means to be a victim of the Colombian armed conflict. I attempt to amplify the ways in which children and youth used, understood, and redefined victims both as an identity and a way of politically existing. Considering the fragility of the post accord context, I agree with Rettberg's (2013) argument that the discussions around the roles’ victims are playing and how Colombian society is responding to their needs, is central for the success of the peace accord. I strive to focus on children's and youth's responses to victims' roles, to shed light on how the "post-accord generation" both supports and refuse, transitional justice endeavors in Colombia. To do so, first I want to briefly delineate what researchers refer to as hierarchies of victimhood.

**Victims and the hierarchies of victimhood**

Thanks to robust scholarly work on victimhood —in Colombia and around the world— we understand that victims are not only political actors, but discursive figures who influence the rhetoric that society relies on during times of transition. Therefore, understanding the figure of the victim serves multiple purposes. For one, the way in which victims are "created" is key to understand the power imbalances between "those who had to remember, those who listened, and those who managed the interpretation of that memory" (Yezer 2008, 281). Understanding the profile of the victim also allows us to
determine how structural inequalities influence its configuration as an identity category.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, by understanding the different uses of the notion of victimhood, we can comprehend how victims access economic, legal, political, and social recognition (De Waardt 2016, 435). This understanding also allows us to grasp that victims cannot be understood as a monolithic group (Krystalli 2019; De Waardt 2016) but rather, victimhood seems to always be altered by an adjective. As Roxani Krystalli (2019) explains, the adjectives “contain, reflect, and create hierarchies simultaneously setting and fracturing the boundaries of solidarity” (5).

Therefore, the ways in which victimhood is described creates hierarchies within victims’ collectives and affects the ways in which society interacts, acknowledges, and legitimizes victims’ endeavors in transitional contexts. This also creates competing claims to victimhood which can be utilized to support, further, and legitimize violence (Breen-Smyth 2018, 222) as well as to simultaneously set and fracture boundaries of solidarity between victims collectives, and victims collectives and society (Krystalli 2019). Based on her fifteen months of anthropological fieldwork with several stakeholders, NGO’s, and victims’ organizations in Colombia, Krystalli (2019) concludes that one is not simply a victim, but victimhood also requires different degrees of performance, transforming discourses around victimhood into moral and political currency. The latter reinforces the view that hierarchies "delimit not only the violence that matters, but also the terms of political claim-making, understandings of citizenship, and boundaries of solidarity during transitions from violence” (23). By not looking

\textsuperscript{60} An example being Peru, where 70% of the victims of the Peruvian armed conflict were Indigenous Quechua speakers. Due to the historical racism towards Indigenous folks, victims-survivors dealt with stigmatization from Peruvians who had not been directly impacted by the war. (De Waardt 2016).
critically at the configuration of *the victim* as a rhetorical figure, we are denying its political and discursive importance, relegating it to a group of individuals who tend to be reduced to being innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection. The museum is then, a productive space to see how hierarchies of victimhood play out and how it complicates the idea that “*todos somos víctimas*” of the Colombian armed conflict. Furthermore, drawing from the concept of hierarchies of victimhood as discussed by Krystalli (2019), I attempt to understand the location prescribed to the child-victim within existing hierarchies of victimhood curated by the museum. If hierarchies of victimhood depend on how different victim’s collectives perform their suffering, and societies perceptions of these performances, children’s repertoire to perform victimhood will be directly impacted by their understandings of who is a victim.

**Childhood, Victimhood, and the child victim conundrum**

When comparing the development of the scholarly interest in childhood and victimhood, some crucial similarities arise. The interest in both concepts has rapidly evolved since the second half of the twentieth century and stems from a critique of top down definitions grounded in Human Rights discourses.

In the case of childhood, towards the end of the 1970s, a gradual emergence and combination of multidisciplinary academic research regarding children and childhood

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61 By no means am I attempting to stratify victims claims or their suffering experiences with the armed conflict. Echoing anthropologist Elissa Helms and Roxani Krystalli, I propose that a critical look to the way in which society constructs this hierarchies, will allow us to better understand and serve the victims of the armed conflict. Particularly children victims of the armed conflict whose political status is so often questioned.

62 In this section I am delineating some interesting similarities that I have found in the conceptual constructions between the child-childhood dichotomy in childhood studies and, the victim-victimhood dichotomy in transitional justice studies and international law. However, a historical, in depth, analysis of the two would require a research project that surpasses the constraints of the present dissertation. Therefore, this is an initial effort for a future project that I hope to soon develop.
started to appear in the Global North, particularly in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. An amalgam of theorizations came from different disciplines such as history, psychology, anthropology, and sociology, to name a few, creating the discipline of Childhood Studies. The main intention was — and still is — to problematize the assumptions about children and childhood grounded in traditional developmental psychology (Burman 2008), critically interrogate the connotations of childhood as a universal experience through the image of the child (Thorne 2009) and last but certainly not least, understand children’s lived experiences from their own perspectives thus methodologically focusing on incorporating children’s voices (James, Understanding Childhood from an Interdisciplinary Perspective 2004).

The UNCRC, the most widely ratified treaty in the history of international law (Huynh, D’Costa and Lee-Koo 2015; UNICEF), might be considered the international instrument that “governs” childhood, delimiting contemporary notions of a “good childhood” (Wells, The politics of Life: Governing Childhood 2011). The convention is based on the principles that childhood requires special protection and provisions and defines children as those who are under the age of eighteen. Research on children’s rights tend to focus on understanding if children having rights grants them a political status vis a vis human rights (Wall 2016); how these rights are being implemented; and child-centered research that seeks to foreground children’s rights as the work of governmentality (Balagopalan 2014). As a consequence of the creation of the UNCRC, there was a shift in the “attention to children as participants in society and actors in the present” (Thorne 2009) which helped to facilitate the new social studies of childhood. These shifts entailed depicting children as agents of their communities while attending to
their needs and protection (Wells, Burman, et al. 2014). Moreover, due to the field’s commitment to stress the existence of multiple childhood(s), defining childhood would contradict the essence of Childhood Studies as an interdisciplinary endeavor and doing so without children’s participation, would contradict the purpose of the field. It is therefore conceptually comparable to concepts such as victimhood in the sense that its main subjects of study should be situated as active participants in methodological endeavors while always taking into consideration the sociocultural frameworks of each context.

And if who is a child was defined by the UNCRC, who is a victim was defined in 1985 by the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. This treaty defines victims as those "persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that do not yet constitute violations of national criminal laws but of internationally recognized norms relating to human rights" (United Nations 1985). Like the child, the victim of armed conflict has been a multi and interdisciplinary subject of research which began as a top-down framework, but whose field of inquiry, that of transitional justice and international law, has expanded because of the inclusion of victims as research subjects within these fields. Now, scholars agree that experiencing adversity is necessary but insufficient for being characterized as a victim (Krystally 2019; de Waardt, 2016; Jacoby 2015). Being a victim also incorporates their social role as an affected person with fundamental rights, that is, a victim as a rights-bearing subject (Riaño Alcalá 2014).
Like being a child\textsuperscript{63}, being a victim is sometimes a site of contention between the individual’s identity and social recognition. This tension and negotiation of an individual’s identification as either a child or a victim can happen in one of two ways: either to renounce or deny the qualification, or to reaffirm it. In both cases, childhood and youth, and victimhood can be understood as an exercise and a negotiation of power and at the same time, as an identity (Jacoby 2015). A distinction one might argue is the level of performativity that being a child and being a victim entails, to achieve social recognition. In reference to victims of armed conflict, “when the suffering is interpreted by the social and political network surrounding the sufferer the sufferer becomes—or fails to become—admitted to victim identity. It is in the social, economic and political context that victims are created; suffering in itself is not sufficient” (Breen-Smyth 2018, 216). Therefore, different groups of victims deliberately reinforce their victimhood status for different purposes in different degrees. In contrast, it is the children whose childhood status gets questioned that are the ones who have to perform their childhood status. As Bernstein (2013) explains “it is through performance that children and childhood coemerge and co-constitute each other” (211).

Just like the experience of being a child is not the same across contexts (Wells, Burman, et al. 2014), being a victim is contextually determined (Jacoby 2015). Both efforts are strengthened by the need to question the ideas that children and victims, due to their vulnerability, are passive and apolitical. As a consequence, victimhood and

\textsuperscript{63} In the words of Erica Meiners (2016) “childhood has never been available to all” (32). In her book about the incarceration of black and brown children in the United States, we see a prime example of how brown and black children are treated as non-children by white supremacist USA. These tensions are the ones I am referring to when I mention that in some cases the identity of some children is denied by larger structures.
childhood have traditionally been understood as stages of vulnerability and innocence where children's and victim's agency are questioned and therefore these segments of society "implicitly demand intervention and assistance" (Seymour 2014, 373). But as researchers of childhood, victimhood, and children victims of armed conflict have noted, these interventions are often disconnected from the lived realities of these individuals and their communities and done from a top-down approach in the name of the best-interest of either the child or the victim.

When one considers children harmed as a consequence of armed conflict, they are easily recognized as victims and their images are often used to represent the horrors of war (Berents 2020; Brocklehurst 2006). Furthermore, there is a tendency to represent children as victims and youth as perpetrators of violence (McEvoy-Levy 2006, 4). The development of the fields of transitional justice, alongside the recognition of the childhood and youth as key participants of society, have permitted children to not only represent victims’ suffering, but to slowly participate in peacebuilding. This not only questions traditional imaginaries of the child-victim and the youth-perpetrator as separate dichotomies, but instead, understands that these categories often overlap.

The most salient example of the latter is children’s participation in truth commissions. Since the 1980s up to the second half of 1990s, the truth commissions of Chile, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala, and South Africa, documented and investigated violations against children and adolescents. In 2001, Peru’s and Timor-Leste’s truth commission, included chapters focused on childhood. It was not until Sierra Leone’s first commission in 2002, that children were explicitly mentioned in its mandate and Liberia went even further by systematically including children in its activities in 2005 (O’Kane,
Feinstein and Giertsen 2013). At the moment of this writing, the Colombian truth commission has included children, youth, and adults who were victimized as children, as participants in different spaces to tell their own experiences with the armed conflict. The degree of participation, however, has been demarcated by age. The degree of participation for these three distinct groups has been granted on notions of vulnerability of the participants (García-Gómez In Press). The older the child, the less vulnerable they are perceived and therefore, the more political they are allowed to be, permitting their participation as victims.

But despite children’s participation in truth commissions, which is only one of the instances that compose transitional justice (Turner 2013), they are also one of the few collectives whose political participation has no structural implications. It could be argued that normative views on childhood overpower the political implications of being a victim. Therefore, while it is becoming commonplace in international peacebuilding discourse to refer to oppressed groups like women or minorities as active agents of change, children and youth are often muted or relegated to traditional conditions of victimhood where they are seen as paralyzed by grief (De Waardt 2016) and therefore their political agency is very limited (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013, 15). In other words, if one wants to combine notions of Childhood Studies and Transitional Justice, one of the challenges is to politicize childhood.

One final similarity lies in understanding how the consideration of childhood and victimhood as liminal stages, permits Childhood Studies and Transitional Justice to be more critical. In the case of Childhood Studies, seeing childhood as liminal allows us to simultaneously recognize children’s vulnerability (Wells, Making Young Subjects:}
Liminality and Violence 2017) and still advocate for their social and political recognition. Victims on the other hand, are sometimes required to overcome their suffering to be legitimate participants in post-conflict processes (De Waardt 2016). But as liminal identities, we can recognize their suffering as the responsibility not of the individual but of the collective. Both seem to entail the creation of a political consciousness prevented by the passiveness and vulnerability already mentioned. However, being a child and being a victim cannot be reduced to that which one must become—be it “fully human” in the case of children or “free of suffering” in the case of victims. Furthermore, as child soldiers show, being a child, being a victim, and being a perpetrator, are all categories that can overlap and force us to question what these identities actually mean. Defining these complex categories in terms of simplistic dichotomies like child-adult or victim-perpetrator, is not only insensitive to the lived experiences of those who we study but prevent us from working with their lived realities. Furthermore, this oversimplification obscures the multiple structures of violence in which children and young people continue to live.

Child-victims of armed conflict, therefore, inhabit a complicated space. To be “successful” victims, children and youth require to perform their victimhood in a socially accepted way. For adult-victims, this performance includes efforts to mobilize so their demands and expectations are met by their community, from the perpetrator, and sometimes, society at large. This might include the acknowledgement of their suffering, the punishment of the perpetrator, compensation for the damage done, a public apology, in some cases revenge, services and support for the needs that have arisen as a result of their victimization and restitution of losses (Druliolle and Brett 2018). But for children-
victims, access to the restitution of all their rights is limited by their construction as dependents. As Appell (2013) explains, “the privatized dependency of childhood promotes the autonomy of adults, leaving them free to employ their values through child rearing and in training their own children to become morally autonomous democratic citizens upon adulthood” (20). Children’s political status is measured in their futurity as liberal citizen’s in the making which places the liberal child as “both the precursor to and the opposite of the liberal subject (adult)” (Appell 2013, 31). Therefore, when identifying as victims, the rights these children have has victims appears to stall at juncture that continues to deny their political subjectivities. They are seen as victims, but the act of victimhood is limited. It is then not sufficient for children to identify as victims, but the society and the legal framework that governs victimhood must also recognize all victims’ victimhood. Before we understand how children and youth are constructing this recognition, I will address how the Colombian government and Colombian society at large, have created the victim and how these constructions affect the post-accord context.

1. **Colombian legal frameworks and the top-down construction of the victim**

   On many occasions I have mentioned the longevity of the Colombian armed conflict. But this longevity also entails the vast experience Colombia has had with peace processes. Since the peace process between President Virgilio Barco (1986 - 1990) and the Movimiento 19 de Abril – M19 guerrilla in 1990, Colombia has over 30 years of experience in trying to end the conflict. However, the lack of institutional continuation and commitment to the peace process between successive regimes, and the competition for the control of resources among illegal groups after each demobilization process, might explain why we have yet to succeed (Pizarro 2017).
Despite the extensive history of the peace processes that has characterized the Colombian armed conflict, discussions around the country’s model of transitional justice and how victims would be included only began in 2003. After the failed peace negotiations between former president Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) and FARC-EP, in November of 2002 the Autodefensas Unidad de Colombia - AUC64 (an alliance of extreme right paramilitaries) announced a unilateral ceasefire in order to begin their demobilization. For this purpose, the Proyecto de Ley de Alternatividad Penal [Law project for Alternative Criminal Procedures] was presented to congress (Rettberg 2013). However, the law did not pass due to objections regarding its content and procedures. The government then presented its new attempt, the Justice and Peace law.

The Justice and Peace law: a misguided first step in the recognition of the victims of the armed conflict

In 2005, then president (and now senator) Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2006; 2006-2010), presented to congress the 975 law, known as the Justice and Peace Law. The general objective of the law was to "facilitate peace processes and the reincorporation - individual or collective- into civil life of members of illegal armed groups, therefore guaranteeing the rights of the victims to truth, justice and reparation" (C. d. Colombia 2005, article 1. Translation my own). The law circumscribed both peace and victims’ rights solely to the demobilization process of former members of the AUC. To do so, the Justice and Peace law created the Unidad de Justicia y Paz [Justice and Peace Unit] as part of the Attorney General’s office so that demobilized combatants could tell their versions of their involvement and responsibility in crimes during what was known as

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64 For more on the AUC’s see Dugas, John C (2012); Judice, Douglas C (2007); Cárdenas Echeverry, Paula Andrea, Montoya Ruíz, Ana Milena, and Gutiérrez, Olga Cristina (2018).
"versiones libres" [free versions]. Their demobilization and participation in the process allowed for a reduced sentence of up to eight years. In addition, the law created the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación [National commission for Reparation and Reconciliation] to manage the funds destined for the reparation of victims. Within the CNRR, the Group for Historical Memory was also created, in charge of investigating and producing reports on the most "emblematic" cases of human rights violations in the country. The latter was the only mechanism given to victims to access truth and participate in the process.

The law was the first time the Colombian government explicitly regulated who would be considered a victim of the armed conflict and established their rights. Following the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, the 975 law defined a victim as “the person who individually or collectively has suffered direct harm such as temporary or permanent injuries that cause some kind of physical, psychological and or sensorial (visual and/or aural) disability, emotional suffering, financial loss or impairment of their fundamental rights. The damages must be a consequence of the actions that have transgressed the penal code, perpetrated by organized illegal armed groups” (C. d. Colombia 2005, Art. 5. Translation, my own). This article also included sentimental partners, nuclear family members, members of the armed forces who had suffered similar forms of victimizations, and family members of state actors killed in combat. Many scholars consider that with the Justice and Peace law, the field of transitional justice was born in Colombia with the particularity that this

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65 Since 2008 when the first report around the Trujillo Massacre was published, around one hundred reports have been published. This free-access repository might be the most robust archive regarding the Colombian armed conflict. According to the center itself, the reports have always been created for and with the victims of each of these places (e.g., El Salado, San Carlos, Trujillo and Bojayá to name a few).
system was created during an ongoing conflict (Pizarro 2017; García-Godos and O Lid 2010; Delgado Barón 2011; Rengifo Lozano 2006).

With the Justice and Peace law, the Colombian government sought to legally substantiate the demobilization process with the AUC’s, by presenting the dismantling of the illegal armed groups as a key element for reconciliation and peace (Delgado Barón 2011, 182). However, the Justice and Peace law only gave legal recognition as victims to those whose harm had been caused by illegal armed groups. This definition of who got to be a victim was highly problematic since it left out a key segment of the victims’ population in Colombia, victims of the State (Krystalli 2019; Delgado Barón 2011). Therefore, the Justice and Peace law instrumentalized the victims by only recognizing as victimizers the illegal armed groups, in an attempt to exonerate the state. By definition, if you had suffered any form of violation by the state, you were something other than a victim and therefore, could not access the benefits provided by the law. As a consequence, victims’ and human rights organizations heavily opposed and protested the 975 law.

Furthermore, I agree with Delgado Barón (2011) when she explains that the Justice and Peace law created and reproduced logics and dynamics of exclusion, subordination, and domination in which the victims and the restitution of their rights was secondary to the reincorporation and demobilization of the perpetrators (186). It was at this time in which victims’ organizations, particularly those directly affected by the State,66 amplified their organizational and participatory endeavors, gaining and increasing their symbolic capital in the public sphere (Delgado Barón 2011, 187).

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66 For more on the collective action by victims of the State see Tapia Navarro, Nadia (2019) The category of victim “from below”: the case of the movement of victims of state crimes (MOVICE) in Colombia;
However, victims of the state were not the only segment ignored by the Justice and Peace law. In the particular case of children and youth, the Justice and Peace law included them when referring to the protection of the “most vulnerable” and specifically characterized them as either victims or witnesses (C. d. Colombia 2005; articles 38, 39 and 41). In these articles’ children were named as a segment of the most vulnerable alongside women and the elderly. The articles also explained that if during a judicial procedure the prosecuted was to mention crimes against those who were most vulnerable, the victim’s identity was to remain anonymous and the prosecutors were to gain special training, so they knew how to manage these cases.

The only article in the entire law that was specifically “about children” was article 64 themed “child return”67 and explained that “the return of minors by members of illegal armed groups shall not cause the loss of benefits under this law” (C. d. Colombia 2005; translation my own). Hence, the only article about children was in reality about the perpetrators. The lack of a differential approach in the Justice and Peace law did not consider the multiple ways in which children were involved in the conflict and the different degree of violence children and youth were subjected to: demobilized combatants who were minors; children who were direct victims of the armed conflict and might be the only survivor in their family unit68; children asked to store weapons and


67 In the original text, the lawmakers used Entrega de menores to address the return, or the delivery if one were to directly translate, of minors by the illegal armed groups. The original text reads: "Entrega de menores. La entrega de menores por parte de miembros de Grupos armados al margen de la ley no serán causal de la pérdida de los beneficios a que se refieren la presente ley y la Ley 782 de 2002" (C. d. Colombia 2005). I preferred to use the word return and not delivery, to keep the intention of the article.

68 These segment of children and youth are often left out denying them a due process to access the rights of justice, truth, and reparation.
materials used for the production of illicit drugs; children working different jobs in the production of illicit drugs; children, particularly girls, forced into gendered labor within the ranks of illegal armed groups; and, how to prosecute members of illegal armed groups who had been recruited as minors (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017). These erasures of children’s and youth’s involvement in the armed conflict complicates their access to the benefits given by victimhood both as a legal identity and as a praxis, furthering their de-politization as well as the denial of the multiple and complex ways in which they have been part and victimized by the conflict.

As it has been mentioned on many occasions throughout this project, the complexity of the Colombian armed conflict is reflected in the multiplicity of actors involved. This also stems into a complex and "diverse universe of victims, and their multiple venues for becoming political and social subjects" (Delgado Barón 2011, 189). This entails that one’s location in the hierarchy within the universe of victims, determines the possibility to politically participate. Therefore, if the law does not even recognize a particular group as victims, it not only erases it from the construction of the hierarchies of victimhood, but it prevents these groups from negotiating and acquiring full political status. This is the case not only with the victims of the state (Krystally 2019; Delgado Baron 2011; Sarmiento 2008), but most importantly for this project, with children. The Justice and Peace law not only denied children access to the rights of truth, justice, and reparation, they were also denied the possibility of participating in processes of historical reconstruction and peacebuilding, and the specific forms of victimization that children had suffered due to the Colombian armed conflict, were not recognized. This is a consequence of a de-politization of childhood that keeps children away from the political
space, relegating them to the (mostly domestic) spaces traditionally associated with childhood such as the home or the school.

Despite the absence of these two groups of victims in the legal texts, the collectives of victims of the state continued with their fight to be recognized. Furthermore, they denounced the Colombian government’s attempt to obstruct certain groups to be part of societal structures of power. This recognition was central considering one of the ways in which Colombian society was creating an image and conception of victimhood at the time, was heavily influenced by the demobilizing process of 2005. One of the instruments used by the government to explain to Colombian society who is and is not a victim was the rhetoric of the Justice and Peace law 69.

As a consequence, the conceptualization and role given to victims in the Justice and Peace law did not meet the international standards proposed by the United Nations Human Rights Commission (Rengifo Lozano 2006, 103). While the Colombian government has ratified every treaty concerning human rights and international humanitarian law, the ratification of these treaties has been meaningless in the national context. However, the conceptualization of victim in the Justice and Peace law was an attempt on behalf of the government at that time, to diminish and overshadow the

69 This is crucial when one considers that at the time former president Uribe instructed his cabinet to use terms such as civil war, social conflict, or simply conflict (Rettberg 2013). Furthermore, in interview with the BBC in 2004, while campaigning for the change in the constitution that allowed his reelection, Uribe Velez stated that “there is no armed conflict” but instead, Colombians were just living in a country “threatened by guerrillas” and “defended by paramilitaries” (BBC 2004). Taking advantage of the international discourse consequence of 9/11, he explained that Colombia was facing a domestic terrorist threat. Uribe then not only legitimized the “peace process” with the paramilitaries, but he also created a false qualification of the perpetrators in which the guerrillas were the bad guys, the goal of the paramilitaries justified their mains, and the armed forces were the good guys. Ultimately, he devoid the guerrillas from any political status and reduced them to terrorists. These narratives were at the core of the opposition to the 2016 peace treaty. At the moment of this writing, Uribe Velez is a senator furthering these narratives and heightening the polarization that surrounds the peace process.
severity of the human rights violations inflicted on civilians by all the actors involved in the armed conflict, especially the state (Delgado Barón 2011; Rengifo Lozano 2006). Furthermore, the 975 law presented a simplistic view of the universe of victims. If you were a victim, you were either an innocent civilian or a member of the armed forces who had been victimized by the illegal armed groups.

Because of the blatant efforts to manipulate and instrumentalize victims in the Justice and Peace law, organizations like MOVICE (Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado) increased their social and political capital. This paved the way for the consolidation of a law that focused solely on the victims, considering them not a monolith group, but a complex and diverse collective. It was not until the 2011 Victims' Law that the Colombian government officially recognized the existence of an internal armed conflict.

The “most ambitious law”: The Victims Law and the inclusion of children in the transitional justice framework

After being elected, former president Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014; 2014-2018) created a commission to study the lessons of the sixteen previous peace negotiations with guerrillas and paramilitary groups between 1984 and 2016 (Pizarro 2017). One of the key lessons was the historical exclusion and discrimination of victims’ organizations (as we saw in the previous section). The 1448 law, commonly known as the Victims’ Law, was proposed by senator Juan Fernando Cristo, himself a victim of the \textit{Ejército de Liberación Nacional -ELN} [National Liberation Army] and was supported by

\footnote{Here being innocent meant having no type of relationship with members of illegal armed groups. Often entire areas were branded as “\textit{guerrillera}” or “\textit{paraca}”. Furthermore, this is a highly problematic conception of victimhood considering that victims and perpetrators came sometimes from the same locations. One family could have had ties to all armed actors (Rettberg 2013).}
then president, Juan Manuel Santos. According to Cristo, the 975 law had been created for the needs of the perpetrators, while the 1448 law was designed to protect the needs of victims (Rettberg 2013, 7).

Characterized as “the most ambitious” Colombian transitional framework (de Waardt and Weber 2019; Summers 2012), the Victims Law defines victims as those “people who individually or collectively suffered harm caused by acts occurred after January 1st, 198571, as a consequence of the violation to the International Humanitarian Law or serious and manifested violations of Human Rights norms, within the contexts of the internal armed conflict” (C. d. Colombia 2011, Article 3). Similarly to the Justice and Peace law, family members were considered victims, but this time permanent partners and same-sex partners were included. However, the 1448 law also included those who had suffered forced disappearance, or people who had been victimized while assisting victims. Members of the armed forces were also recognized as victims, but their compensation was no longer managed by the Victims Unit, but by their respective armed forces.

Like its predecessor, the Victims Law sought to provide reparations to victims via the re-establishment of the three main transitional justice rights: truth (article 23), justice (article 24) and integral reparation (article 25) (C. d. Colombia 2011). These rights were to be restored through Colombia’s Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition (hereafter SIVJRNR for its acronym in Spanish) composed by three

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71 This date was chosen after multiple debates and changes in the Senate. According to Juan Fernando Cristo, January 1, 1985 was chosen as the date that determines the eligibility to victim status, because it allowed the inclusion of particular emblematic cases like the Unión Patriótica genocide, the magnicides of presidential candidates Jaime Pardo Leal (1941-1987), Luis Carlos Galán (1943-1989), Carlos Pizarro Leongómez (1951-1990) and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa (1956-1990), and all the massacres and crimes committed by the paramilitaries and FARC in the second half of the 1980s.
governmental agencies: The Missing Persons Search Unit, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (which is the judicial branch of the SIVJRN), and the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Recurrence (hereafter the Truth Commission). Article 13 clarified that the Victims' law would have a differential approach by acknowledging that there are some populations with particular characteristics due to their age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. This characterization expanded the understanding of who could be considered most vulnerable by also including the disabled, campesinos, social leaders, union leaders, human rights defenders, and displaced victims, in addition to girls, boys, youth, women and the elderly included in the 975 law. These reparation endeavors and the reconstruction of the truth ought to also include children and youth (Colombia 2011, article 193).

There were, however, some key differences regarding children and youth when one compares the 975 and the 1448 laws. The Victims law dedicated title VII to the integral protection of victims who were boys, girls, and adolescents. It specified that children considered victims were not only those who had been harmed, but those who had been born as a consequence of sexual abuse, within the framework of the armed conflict. To procure adequate attention, the SIVJRN was to be supported by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar [Colombian Institute of Family Welfare] and following the Colombian Childhood and Adolescence Legal Code. Articles 184 and 185 explained children's and youth's right to get an economic reparation; however, it was to be demanded by a legal guardian and the financial compensation would only be given to the minor when she or he became of age. This section also included what was deemed as harms caused mainly to children within the armed conflict: becoming an orphan (article
188), being a victim of landmines (article 189) and forced recruitment (article 190). If a child who had joined an illegal armed group demobilized as an adult, all reparation rights would be revoked (article 184) and this person was to be part of the SIVJRNR system as a perpetrator.

After its approval on June 2011, on September 4, 2012, President Juan Manuel Santos formally announced the beginning of peace talks between his government and FARC-EP. Due to the pressure of Colombian civil society and particularly, diverse victims' organizations, the peace talks were to include and center the participation of civil society in the negotiating table. Santos’ goal was then to create a transitional justice model that took a victim-centered approach. To do so, the peace negotiators invited victims to discuss with them the peace agreement. Sixty victims were invited by the Colombian government and FARC-EP to present their testimonies. The United Nations, the Universidad Nacional and the Catholic Church served as organizers of the meetings. The peace talks addressed five specific points: integral agrarian development, political participation, illicit drugs, victims, and the termination of the conflict. The talks centered around the recognition of victims, the recognition of the responsibility of the perpetrators, the satisfaction of the rights of victims, the participation of victims, the establishment of truth, the reparation of victims, the guarantees of protection, security and non-repetition, the principle of reconciliation, and the human rights-based approach (Brett 2018).

As Rettberg (2013) mentions, Colombia’s experiences with transitional justice pedagogy “has paid off in the country” (3). She considers that one of the Victims law achievements was to raise the awareness about the plight of victims and the positive ways in which Colombian society regards their struggles. This solidifies the legitimacy of
victims in their strive for justice, truth, and reparations, and ideally would pressure the
government into following through with the peace accords. Based on a national survey to
315 victims and 1528 non-victimized people, where people were asked "who is
responsible for the violence that occurred in the country", the second highest response
was "all of us Colombians"\(^{72}\) (Rettberg 2013, 24). This suggests a sense of shared
responsibility not only for Colombia’s violent past, but for what will happen in the future.

This increase of the victims’ organizations symbolic and cultural capital has not
come without its own obstacles and challenges. The agency that victims rely on has
become more profitable and created unforeseen consequences since "the strategic value
of depicting oneself as a victim has increased in contrast with previous periods in
Colombian history" (Rettberg 2013, 33). Victimhood as an identity has been claimed by
some perpetrators to justify their actions while false victims\(^{73}\) have occasionally hired
lawyers to unlawfully access the benefits procured by the 975 law. While these situations
are not the norm but the exception, they have been visible enough to feed into people's
fear and distrust of victims cheating and stealing the system (Rettberg 2013).

\(^{72}\) Only to be surpassed by FARC-EP.
\(^{73}\) The scandal of the false victims in Mapiripán – Meta, refers to a group of individuals who gave false
testimony to receive financial reparations after the Inter-American Court found the Colombian State
responsible for the events held on July of 1997. On July 12th of 1997, approximately one hundred
members of the AUC’s were taken by the Colombian army and brought them to Mapiripán where after
days of terror, an unknown number of people were selectively murdered for supposedly helping the
guerrillas. As a consequence, several of the families of the victims received a large sum of economic
compensation. However, in 2011, investigators of the Justice and Peace Unit concluded that sixteen of the
twenty-six victims recognized by the Inter-American Court could not have been killed in the massacre or
might still be alive. According to the concluding research performed by the Inter-American Commission of
Human Rights, this fraud cost approximately three million dollars to the Colombian state (Uribe Sanabria
and Restrepo Ortiz 2013).
The construction of the victim in Colombian legal frameworks is key to understand the legal benefits all victims have in terms of their participation and benefits. In addition, these frameworks have been central to construct the discourses that Colombian society has around the victims of the armed conflict. Furthermore, the lessons learned by the country’s multiple efforts to strive for peace, allowed a more critical inclusion of children’s victimhood experiences in the legal frameworks that govern victims in Colombia. This not only aids in the recognition of the multiple ways the armed conflict has harmed —and continues to harm— children, but it could potentially lend itself for an expansion of children’s political inclusion as agentic victims and not only in terms of harms suffered.

Defining victims in terms of specific violations is not new. The Justice and Peace law only acknowledged victims’ rights for victims harmed by the paramilitaries and guerrilla groups, but not for victims of the Colombian armed forces, the implication being that such victims did not exist. After much pressure from victim groups and civil society, this was addressed by the Victims’ Law, where the state recognized the rights to reparation for the universe of victims of the armed conflict, independent of their victimizers and by taking a differential approach. This allowed for a reappropriation of the term “victim” by the victims’ movement (Riaño Alcalá 2014, 18). While in other contexts, victims dislike the term and prefer to refer to themselves as survivors (De Waardt 2016), even though they might continue to access governmental benefits, in Colombia they prefer to refer to themselves as victims in relation to the state and also in relation to each other. Victim’s organizations have become a key political actor within the Colombian public sphere. In the next section I will take a closer look to the ways in
which children and youth understand what it means to be a victim in the MCM and how this construction of victimhood relates to our understandings of childhood.

2. De-constructing the victims’ universe in a collective memory Museum

As explained in chapter two, according to the mediators, one of the most important achievements of the museum relies on the “humanization of the conflict” by giving accounts of the armed conflict beyond aggregated data. This was crucial to, “bring the conflict closer” and, “make it feel more real”. Question’s like “who are the victims”, or “what characterizes a victim” like Lily asked at the beginning of this chapter, was not only the starting point to assess the visiting groups knowledge, but it also gives us clues to the ways in which children and youth, as a distinct group, are constructing the idea of the victims, and the roles victims play in contemporary Colombian society.

In one of the school visits, after Fede asked “what is a victim”, the students, who were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen explained that victims are “what results after a conflict”, “a friend or family member that survives”, “the affected persons”. In these responses, victims were defined as the remnants of war. Salient forms of victimization typical of the Colombian armed conflict, that of forced displacement74, forced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings75, were also used to characterize victims’ collectives using terms such as los desplazados, los desaparecidos or las madres de Soacha. These broad characterizations, however, precluded a more critical discussion of

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74 According to the report published by the Victims Unit on the 31st of December 2020, at least eight million people had been victims of forced displacement and over 150 thousand of forced disappearance (Victimas 2020).

75 In February of 2021, the JEP officially announced that at least 6,402 civilians had been falsely presented as combat casualties. This number only corresponds to the victims between 2002 – 2008 under the government of former President, Alvaro Uribe. However, according to the archive of the Madres de Soacha, the number is much higher (JEP 2021).
who was more likely to suffer which type of violence or what it meant to be a victim of specific types of violence.

In some conversations with the mediators, I noticed how they also deployed the category of the victims as an all-comprising and abstract collective. Mediators oscillated between recognizing victims as a broader discursive category that includes “all” Colombians, and at the same time, they felt profound solidarity with the lived realities of victims. They were aware of how an individual’s identity plays a crucial role in the probability of being victimized by the armed conflict. Therefore, their pedagogy with the children visiting the museum combined the need to sympathize with the victim, while at the same time they did not want to promote stereotypes that surround victims as a discursive category.

Some of the mediators, especially those who had not been victims of the armed conflict, also felt this was one of the most important lessons they had gained from the museum. For Isabella, before she started working in the museum, she had always heard that members of “civil society” suffer most in the conflict: they are killed, they are forcibly displaced, or disappeared. She explained how she had heard this for a very long time and from multiple sources including her university teachers, the media, and grassroots organizations she volunteers with; that it is “the innocent people” who are left to suffer. But these innocent victims were a faceless collective. She explained how she now understood she had always felt more an “automatic solidarity and empathy” with the victims’ claims, and that was why she always participated in marches in support of the victims. But she always saw all these forms of victimization as something that just happened. It was not until she started working in the museum that she realized that
victims are a collective deeply impacted by one social positionality. As a female social worker, she felt particularly moved by the childless mothers she closely works with in the museum and their roles within the hierarchies of victimhood. She now realizes that:

“here I began to see they are names, here I began to work with the ladies76, my colleague Monica77 whose son was disappeared, they made him look like a dead guerrillero, a false positive, but there are, in her, a bunch of very strong emotions. It is then, when you are juntico [side by side] the victims of this conflict, it stops being things that just happen, and more like yes there is a lot of pain, and I begin to also feel it” (Isabella, interview with the author, August 30, 2019).

Isabella’s opportunity to engage with victims in everyday spaces, and from a horizontal relationship, exemplifies one of the elements that compose what the museum refers to as “the humanization of the armed conflict”. Her description of how she processes victims’ emotions, particularly pain, shows that she sees that reconciliation also relies on sharing the victims’ pain as if it were her own. For her, being very close to victims on a daily basis, changed the idea of pain as a paralyzing emotion, to an emotion that brings the community together.

The changes in the ways in which the mediators get closer to the victims could be read in a paradoxical way: on the one hand, the humanization of the war occurs when the victim’s and their experiences, inhabit our everyday lives, transforming our sense of self;

76 Isabella’s role had two main objectives. One was to be a mediator like her other colleagues, and thanks to her studies as a social worker, she also helped with the Costurero Abierto, Tejedoras de Memoria (directly translates to the Open Sewing Box, Weavers of Memory) workshop in which women victims of the armed conflict got together twice a week and used different techniques to reconcile with their own experiences with the armed conflict. Isabella was in charge of systematizing these encounters since the museum wanted to create an exhibition with the products that resulted from these encounters.
77 Monica was one of the three adult mediators, alongside Juliana and Don Horacio, all victims of the armed conflict. As Isabella explained, Monica’s son had been assassinated by the State and presented as a dead insurgent. Juliana had been forcibly displaced from a rural area to Medellin, and then a second time within the city. Don Horacio had been a union leader for over 40 years and although he did not disclose this to me, the other mediators told me he had been kidnapped and tortured by the state and that was why he was a little grumpy, but they all respected him.
on the other, one could also begin to normalize violences as that which although it causes pain, it also, “just happens”. Nonetheless, this transformation of an automatic solidarity to a more critical reading of the war, was according to Isabella, only possible because of her recent, more complex, and nuanced understanding of the armed conflict. Of course, the museum did not represent her first learning encounter of the armed conflict. It was however, the first time she heard about it from the voices of victims directly affected by it. The process of “humanizing the armed conflict” requires the voices of the victims, allowing them to become the legitimate voice to memorialize the conflict. But as previously explained, within the victims’ universe, there are crucial hierarchies that impact their legitimacy. The museum space was no exception to this. As the next subsection demonstrates, victims’ voices were constellated in the following three ways: individual experiences of victimization, historically victimized collectives, and other(ed) voices, whose voice as victims were sometimes questioned. Some victims became a sort of icon within the museum, and were recurrently featured in the school visits, while other were always discussed as collectives. In the next section I will describe these victims’ constellations and the ways in which their voices were featured during the school visits.
Constellations within the victims’ universe: listening to individual, collective, and other(ed) voices
Individual experiences of victimization

There were two methodologies often used during the school visits so that students could “meet” victims. In both, the visiting group was divided into smaller groups of four to six students, and they were asked to go around the main exhibit and “retrieve” the voices of particular victims. Once they were finished, we would all gather, and the students would share their findings. One of the methodologies required students to see the testimonies in “Present Stories” (Figure 10) and write in a booklet who the victim was, what happened to them, and what did this person do after becoming a victim, (Figure 11). The activity was implemented to achieve two goals: on one hand, the children and young visitors would learn about different forms of victimization and how it affects “normal people”. On the other hand, in an attempt to not reduce victims to their experiences of harm, i.e., this last question, proposed by the mediators, aimed to make the young visitors realize that being a victim was not synonym with inaction. Instead, the curated testimonies showed victims as active members of Colombian society.
The most recurrent individual testimonies presented in this methodology were those of Fabiola, who won the first lawsuit against the Colombian government for the extrajudicial killing of her son Luis Fernando.

The young visitors would often mention how Fabiola spent 4,428 days looking for her son in what she named “The Siriri Operation,” and how during her investigations, she was framed by the police and sent to jail under false charges of illegal drugs possession. After 22 years, a small box containing only 69 bones of her son’s body, were returned to her. Another individual testimony was that of Pastora, a social leader and a victim of forced disappearance and forced displacement in San Carlos. Because of the multiple victimizations she suffered, she alongside other San Carlitans created a search unit which successfully returned over thirty-five bodies to local families. This granted her the visibility and political influence to be part of the victims invited to the negotiation of the 1448 law. The third individual victim that was showcased was Yolanda, an Afro-Colombian leader who became pregnant as a result of a sexual crime when she was twelve years old. Since she refused to leave her family home to go with her victimizer, her mother was killed in front of her, which also resulted in a miscarriage. She finally fled her victimizer and settled in Medellín. In her public appearances she has never disclosed the armed group her victimizer belonged to since “violence is violence, no

78 Siriri, known as the Tropical Kingbird in English, is a bird that when its nestlings are taken by a larger bird, the mother creates a loud raucous, often forcing for the return of its nestlings.
matter the source”. And lastly, Camilo, who in June of 1990, was victim of what is today known as the Oporto massacre. One night, while he was in a club in an affluent area of Medellín, a group of armed men raided the bar, separated the men, and took them to the parking lot and shot them. He explains that after surviving the shooting he realized violence can affect anyone, so it is important to live life to the fullest. His testimony represents the victims of the narco-terror era and what it was like to grow up in Medellín during the Escobar period⁷⁹.

Despite the mediators’ efforts to curate these particular understandings of survivors in which the horrors of war were to be balanced with the hope brought to communities by these individuals’ political activism, they always found frustrating that what the young visitors often wanted to discuss were the crude forms of violence. This focus on the part of children was aided by the fact that the exhibit contained little information on the collective action efforts or the non-violent resistance that the iconic victims continue to develop in their communities. This is not to deny the horrific instances of human rights violations that have severely impacted not only local but national understandings of the conflict. But the mediators did not believe that discussing these emblematic cases was fruitful since there was a clear intention to curate the mediation exercise around the victims to promote a sense of hopefulness. They would often stress that discussing collective victimization cases like the massacres in Bojayá, El Salado, or La Rochela, was insufficient because it only dwelled on the gory details and

⁷⁹ Drawing from my fieldwork journal and my participant observation, I collected the most salient biographical information shared by the young visitors at the end of this activity. Therefore, these short biographies are a reconstruction of what the children and youth brought up; a reflection of what the students would converse and share among each other, after collecting the available information in the MCM at the end of this particular activity.
the consequences of the armed conflict. As Jose once told me, for that purpose they could recommend the young visitors to read the “Basta Ya!" (2013) or to watch “No hubo tiempo para la tristeza" on YouTube. Instead, the aim had to be to explain why certain communities in Colombia had been systematically targeted with systemic and political violence. Nonetheless, too often children and young visitors would dwell on the horrors of the conflict, and not the hope of non-violent resistance.

In my interview with Juan, he particularly remembered a visit with a group of college students who came from Popayán. Throughout the visit he felt really excited since the group had a “great consciousness around the armed conflict, of what peace building entails”. But to his surprise, when they met in Fabiolita to discuss the main exhibit, one of the young women in the group mentioned: “Right now I feel the taste of death, because nothing has flavor anymore. Is that what death is? […] I feel that in this country, it’s over, we will never be saved” (Juan, interview with the author, November 8, 2019). After her emotional intervention, Juan told me the entire group got “contaminated” with an overall feeling of despair.

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80 “BASTA YA! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad” (2013) [BASTA YA! Colombia: memories of war and dignity] is a report created by the Center of Historical Memory which collects the testimonies of victims and perpetrators as well as an analysis of the Colombian armed conflict.

81 “No hubo tiempo para la tristeza” [There was no time for sadness], is a documentary created as an audiovisual representation of the findings presented in BASTA YA!

82 Popayán is the capital of Cauca in south-west Colombia. It has a high indigenous population, and it has been heavily impacted by the armed conflict due to its strategic location that gives easy access to the Pacific.

83 The original text reads: “Meli y yo cogimos el recorrido, unos pelados con una conciencia de lo que era el conflicto armado, de lo que era la construcción de paz, daban sus opiniones. Y estos pelados bueno, una conciencia y llegamos a un último espacio aquí a la sala Fabiolita, y los pelados, empieza una pelada a decir como, fue un poema lo que recito literalmente, pero que le salió como del corazón, y dijo: ‘En este momento yo siento el sabor a muerte porque es que no me sabe a nada. ¿Será eso la muerte?’ Pues empezó con un discurso así, y dijo, y dijo algo así ‘Yo siento que en este país, ya, como que ya no vamos a ser nunca salvados’ y todo el grupo se empezó a contaminar”.
In the mediators’ attempts to include a multiplicity of victims’ voices, however, students concluded that in Colombia, violence affects not only the victims, but everyone. This resonates with the findings of the national surveys carried out in 2013 referenced above. The students whether they initially believed it or not, often left thinking that in Colombia anyone is an actual, or at least potential, victim of the armed conflict.

Furthermore, the mediators highlighted the victim’s struggles in an attempt to “wake up” their audience. Often the conversations revolved around the pain and the suffering of the victims and not the ways in which they had organized and performed collective actions that defied the Colombian government.

However, not all the mediators agreed with this particular way of showcasing victims’ stories. During one of the school visits, Mateo and Catalina were in charge of a school visit with students between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. We all listened attentively while Catalina explained Fabiola’s story. This was my sixth school visit, and I already knew that for Catalina, the story of Fabiola was meaningful and impactful. But Mateo, who at the time had only been working in the museum for three months, without interrupting Catalina who was his “senior”, quietly explained to me that he felt that when victims became too visible, it was almost impossible to “stop wearing” the victim hat.

He told me how the last couple of times he had seen Fabiola in public spaces, he had seen her cansadita, and he felt she was trapped in playing the victim role. For him when victims become too visible, they are used and exploited by organizations and processes.

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84 In the school visits the mediators would often say to the older visitors, that as young Colombians they needed to “despertarnos” (wake up) and “ponernos las pilas” (be attentive to what was happening).
85 In her dissertation, Krystalli mentions how when being a victim was often compared to wearing clothes. Expressions similar to the one used by Mateo, are a common way to refer to the fluidity of being and doing victimhood.
Thus, Mateo effectively problematized the way the mediators and the museum showcased victims’ individual voices as that which could have a paradoxical effect of trapping victims in their victimhood.

Individual testimonies, however, were not necessarily only confined to experiences of living memory. The second methodology that included individual testimonies featured two magnicide cases, Jaime Garzón\(^{86}\) and Héctor Abad Gómez\(^{87}\). This activity resembled a scavenger hunt where the groups were given a photograph, a sheet of paper that included a paragraph in which the victim introduced him/herself to the reader, and a second paragraph in passive voice instructing the students to search the room for the memory technology that best represented the collective the victim represented. They were also given a booklet where they had to write about what they had learned. In the case of individual testimonies, where the figures were well known cultural icons, the effort of the museum was to shift the gaze from the individual to the collective that the victim represented. In the excerpt about Jaime Garzón (Figure 12.a), the children express their solidarity with journalists who had been killed for “thinking differently” and “for exposing” all the wrongdoings of the actors involved in the war. They conclude that the silencing of the voices of journalists has been critical for the continuation of the armed conflict. The note that accompanied the photograph of Héctor Abad (Figure 12.b) speaks about social leaders more broadly. It explains that since 1987 (the year in which

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86 Jaime Garzón (1960-1999) was a Colombian humorist, journalist, and politician murdered by the paramilitaries. His death is still under investigation since the role the Colombian military played is unclear.

87 Héctor Abad Gómez (1921-1987) was a medic and the head of the human rights committee in Medellin. His assassination has been declared a crime against humanity since it is one of the hundreds of assassinations of what is known as the only political genocide in history, that of the Unión Patriótica [Patriotic Union Party].
HAG was assassinated) terror has been used in Colombia as a weapon. In their words they explain that “when a social leader is murdered, her struggle shatters and disappears in a society that harms itself because of its own silence. Silence, as a weapon, has always been used as a method to minimize the voices of the vulnerable, especially those who can see our reality from a clear and wide perspective, because it will always be easier to control a country whose religion is ignorance, and it’s language is silence”. After sharing the groups responses, the mediators were often pleased when they heard these demonstrations of solidarity and indignation. Indignation was often a common and shared emotion when victims were discussed. And despite the initial objective of forging an image of the victims as agents of change, often the sentiments of indignation lead to a sentiment of defeat.

Both activities failed to highlight the non-violent resistance and collective action that characterizes victims’ organizations in Colombia. Nonetheless, the individualization of different types of violences and the representation of collectivities in well known cases, allowed for the identity of the sufferer to be a key factor in how the construction of
individual victimhood occurred between the mediators and the visitors (Breen-Smyth 2018). Furthermore, the identification of victims in relation to specific forms of human rights violations, reflects standardized forms of symbolic reparation (García-Godos 2018). However, the individualization of victimhood was also determined by the personal investments of the mediators, which highlighted the same voices repeatedly, during my time in the museum. When particular voices are repeatedly showcased and given a higher status within the victims’ universe, there is the risk of this silencing other stories of those who were able to resist and recover from similar violent experiences. Furthermore, the risk with narratives that privilege individualized histories, is that it privatizes harm since the violence caused by the armed conflict must be understood in relation to the context in which it was generated (Riaño Alcalá 2014).

It is worth mentioning, that many of the children and young people visiting the museum were listening to specific victims for the very first time. Names such as Fabiola Lalinde and Pastora Mira are not part of public knowledge. Therefore, the objective to “give a face” and “give a voice” to the victims’ universe was successful. Nonetheless, the mediators’ methodologies tried to combine individual testimonies with collective violence, but these explanations and exercises fell short in terms of offering specific explanations around why these populations were victimized and instead offered generalized statements like “to keep them quiet” or “for fighting for the common good”. This is not to say that these were not accurate responses, but they failed to convey the implications of structural and political violence in these individual struggles.
**Historically victimized collectives**

One of the possible ways in which the mediators could explain how structural violence was central for the understanding of the armed conflict was by discussing victims as a collective. Protracted violence means that it has not only affected certain people, but in contexts of intractable conflict, violence leaves an imprint on the lives of entire communities.

There were two communities that systematically were mentioned when the children were asked who the victims of the armed conflict were. Every time, either social leaders or campesinos were mentioned interchangeably. Lily’s question about the characteristics of the victims, in this case of the social leaders, shoes how as a collective, social leaders are a diverse collective. The older students between the ages of fourteen to eighteen, saw social leaders as those who “fight for the people and are changing our realities, even more so than the government”, and therefore are disappeared or killed due to “the views and opinions of those in power”. Younger children between the ages of nine to thirteen, described social leaders as fighters of justice, respect, and tolerance, who fought for what they believe in, and when asked to write them a letter or a poem, social leaders were drawn with swords, shields or screaming STOP! from the top of a mountain (Figure 13).

![Figure 13. Examples of some of the letters and drawings for and about victims.](image-url)
The relationship that was constructed around victims and social leaders was often linear. Social leaders were former victims who had overcome their suffering and transformed their victimhood experiences into political mobilization. Implicit was the development of a political consciousness, often referenced by victimhood scholars (García-Godos 2018; De Waardt 2016), which lead to the collective action elicited by social leaders. Therefore, though victimized, social leaders had overcome their suffering and grief, and transformed it into political action, expressing agency. This description of resilient and agentic victimhood however was not extended to campesinos when they were discussed by young mediators with the children and youth visiting the museum.

As a collective, campesinos were often framed solely within a narrative of victimization, particularly forced displacement, and land dispossession. This was not unusual considering that the most prominent form of forced migration was from rural to urban areas, and land dispossession and restitution was —and still is— one of the most contentious elements of the post-accord context. Campesinos were described in relation to their intrinsic relation to the land, as hard workers and children often thanked them for the food they helped provide through their labor (Figure 14). In one of the school visits students explained that campesinos “have their own economic systems, which is based in agriculture or cattle. And the guerrilla and the paramilitaries, killed them to take away their lands. They were also displaced and are forced to come to the city where they cannot find jobs”. This accurate description of the victims of forced displacement did not however
necessarily acknowledge the same level of agentic victimhood given to social leaders. According to a male student, campesinos “well, many times, folks in rural villages, well folks who have more power, well they take advantage of them, because they don’t have a lot of economic resources, they embolatarlo⁸⁸, and even swindle them”. These characterizations of campesinos as selfless, generous, and naïve, reinforced their innocence and positioned campesinos as passive victims that are still suffering and are yet to “overcome” their victimhood. Therefore, while social leaders represented the brave, active victims who developed a political consciousness, campesinos represented the innocent, dispossessed, powerless, victims whose agentic capacity was not recognized.

One collective that was regularly mentioned was “us Colombians”: “Literally, I think that we are all victims, one way or another. Because we are being used, and we don’t even know it” was the concluding thought of a fourteen-year-old girl once her group finished the exploration of the main exhibit. This sentiment that Colombians are being tricked, was echoed by Lily when during our interview she mentioned how us Colombians are being misinformed and lied to by the government, especially concerning information relating to the victims of the armed conflict: “the position we should have towards victims is often defined by the media. I mean, people don’t really get this information by themselves, and don’t make their own critical opinions on these matters. So, the victimhood of many people in Colombia is very manipulated. Manipulated, how? Saying who the guerrillas are, distorting who the armed actors are, distorting situations”⁸⁹

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⁸⁸ Expression that alludes to being trick as a result of being naïve.
⁸⁹ For reference, the original text reads: “La posición que se debe tener frente a esa victimización muchas veces la definen los medios. O sea, las personas no se enteran por sí mismas de sí eso, de eso y no forman por sí mismas una opinión crítica frente a eso. Entonces, la victimización de muchas personas en Colombia
(Lily, interview with the author, September 17, 2019). For her, if Colombian society were not able to understand the multiple experiences of victimhood, we would continue to fail victims. Hence, both Lily and the student are testing the limits of the idea that we are all victims, when the government has manipulated who gets to be a victim in the first place. This showcases how victimhood is also a site for governmentality and necropolitics by defining who belongs to the universe of victimhood both in life and in death,

Caro had a different view regarding the idea that we are all victims. She explained that “Ok, fine, we are not, we have not been direct victims of the conflict, but we all have a tone of heritage and vestiges of the war, right. And being part of collective memory processes, it allows us to say ‘pucha, I am not an isolated individual of Medellín, of Bogotá, of Colombia. I am from this country, a country that has all these difficulties, that thankfully have not happened to me, but they still are my responsibility”\(^\text{90}\) (Caro, interview with the author, November 29, 2019). For Caro, the limit of the idea that we are all victims does not reside on the victims’ positionality, but on herself and her position as a white mestiza, middle class, urban, young woman. She recognizes that it is her positionality in the Colombian societal structure that both protects and compels her to find solidarity in and support the collective memory work and the inclusion of all Colombians in the post-accord context.

\(^{90}\) For reference, the original text reads: “Y bueno, listo, no somos, no hemos sido víctimas directas del conflicto, pero tenemos un montón de herencias y de vestigios de la guerra, cierto. Y hacer memoria colectiva o hacer parte de procesos de memoria colectiva nos permite darnos cuenta de eso. nos permite decir, ‘pucha, es que yo no soy un sujeto aislado del Medellín, de Bogotá, de Colombia. Yo soy una persona que nací en este país y que nací en un país con todas estas dificultades, que afortunadamente no me ocurrieron a mí, pero tengo una responsabilidad’”.

This sense of shared responsibility also elucidates what it means to be Colombian for these children and youth. Their sense of national identity goes hand in hand with sentiments of solidarity and responsibility with the victims of the armed conflict. As Lily mentioned, they are “our victims”. Furthermore, as discussed earlier the limited political agency children and youth have, mirrors the positionality victims have historically had as innocent, vulnerable, and passive. In a way, it could be argued that the perception of always being wronged, tricked, or taken advantage, is what might elicit children’s and youth’s identification with victimhood.  

3. Other(ed) voices?  
We are all victims, even perpetrators  
A critical point of the statement “we are all victims” relates to the grey area in victimhood research that relates to perpetrators. A key question to ask is if everyone is a victim then who is the perpetrator? In this section I will address the ways in which the humanization of the conflict affected the ways in which children, youth, and the young mediators discussed the perpetrators during the school visits. This matter is not only important for victims, but for a society that is trying to transition to the resolution of an armed conflict. It is crucial then to inquire how we are defining victimhood in relation to perpetrators. The following section focuses on the ways in which age played a role in this construction.

In chapter two I mentioned that a key aspect of the pedagogic methodology in the museum stands on the idea of “humanizing the armed conflict”. This notion stresses that

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91 It is worth mentioning that this way of thinking is determined by the political views of the mediators. During my time in the museum, most of the children and youth visiting, mostly agreed with the ideological position inhabited by the museum. However, similarly to other contexts, the political context of Colombia at the moment of these research was highly polarized, and one of the most divisive issues was the peace-accord and therefore, victims.
“it is not about distinguishing between a victim and a victimizer, but instead, there were some humans that made some decisions due to certain needs” (Camilo, interview with the author, December 10, 2019). For the museum, reconciliation is possible if we remove the blaming of others—and therefore the possibility to seek revenge—from the equation, and this is achieved when we realize that “we are all victims”, even perpetrators.

During one of the school visits with younger students (between the ages of nine to eleven), the mediators asked the group to write a paragraph on what had impacted them the most during their visit to the museum. One of the groups chose to write a letter to a seven-year-old child who had illustrated the victimization he and his community suffered at the hands of the paramilitaries in conjunction with the army in San José de Apartadó. This illustration is one of the three images under the “Children Witnesses” triptic in the “Multiple Faces of Violence” memory technology, which forms part of the main exhibit. The accompanying letter, written by the students reads: “Imagination can change reality, everything shall pass, everything will be alright. [We] also must understand that those persons also have a harsh reality, which perhaps, has forced them to kill, for their family, for their wellbeing, and because they have not had an example of a society outside of violence” (Figure 15).

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92 In 1997, the community of José de Apartadó declared the municipality was neutral in the armed conflict and it was a Peace Community. However, the violence against the community has not stopped. The drawing by “Yeison”, depicts the assassination of 5 campesinos that elicited the displacement of at least 2400 people (Montoya 2016). Since at least 1998, the community continues to be a target of all armed actors.
This example offers a glimpse of the limits that mark the museum’s construction of the child-victim in two different ways. The first concerns the characterization the child victim as witness. It is as if, their cognitive and biological immaturity, meant that they were not able to be witness and therefore articulate what had happened to them, preventing them from acquiring the status of agentic victim. This ties back to the notion that victimhood entails a political status, contrary to the normative idea of childhood that underlies this pedagogic experience. Furthermore, the letter written to the child by children of a similar age, is a second erasure of this child’s victim status, making him someone who needs to be taught about the conflict and not a legitimate voice in the reconstruction of the armed conflict and participant in collective memory work. Instead, due to the premise that “we are all victims”, and the curation by the mediators that places the focus not on the experiences of the three million children who are legally recognized victims of the conflict (Víctimas 2020), children feel empowered to explain to the child-victim than his perpetrators are the victims in this scenario.

Another instance in which who gets to be a victim arose was in my interview with Camilo. Similarly to Jose, he has mediated for what the museum qualifies as “complex audiences”\(^\text{93}\). One time he mediated the main exhibit to former paramilitaries, and that

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\(^{93}\) Complex audiences encompass former combatants, politicians, or children and youth at risk or in the juvenile system.
day he realized that “the autodefensas have always had a narrative based on horror, always. But when you get closer, one sees that fuck, this man is not a monster, right? This man, has gone through some stuff, and he is here because life, or situations, and many other things took him here, not because he loves killing and chopping people”94 (Camilo, interview with the author, December 10, 2019). In my interview with Camilo, he told me that a central aspect of his mediation with youth in the Criminal Justice System for Adolescents95 was to make them understand that they are victimizers, as well as victims of an unjust system. When he mediated for these young men, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, the conversations were around the armed conflict, and how children have been involved with the war since the early stages of the formation of Colombia96. He also invited them to participate in collective memory work by asking about each of the youth’s biographical memory. Some would recall how their parent(s), and even grandparents, had been forced out of their homes and arrived at Medellín as a consequence of (generational) forced displacement. He would tell them that this fact of forced displacement made them victims of the armed conflict. What was more shocking to him was the fact that this youth would acknowledge themselves as victims but in

94 For reference, the original text reads: “Y que pues las autodefensas han tenido la narrativa desde el horror siempre, siempre. Pero cuando uno entra, uno ve que jueputa, es que este man no es un monstruo, cierto? A este man le han pasado cosas y está aquí porque la vida, las condiciones y muchas cosas lo han llevado a estar aquí, no porque le encante matar y picar gente”.

95 The Sistema de Responsabilidad Penal para Adolescentes – SRPA [Criminal Justice System for Adolescents] is the system of norms, judicial authorities and organizations that process and penalize youth-offenders between the ages of fourteen to eighteen in Colombia. The system is composed by seven organizations such as the formerly mentioned ICBF, the childhood and youth police, and the Office of the General Attorney.

96 The MCM had an itinerancy exhibit titled “Niñez: entre el conflicto y la esperanza” [Childhood: between conflict and hope] which was presented in different institutions around the city. One of these places was presented was the Criminal Justice System for Adolescents, referred by the mediators as the system. The exhibit revolved around Memo, a time-traveling, thirteen-year-old boy, who spoke with children from different historical moments of Colombia. The first child he met was a child-soldier during the Guerra de los mil días [Thousand days' war] which took place from October 1899 to November 1902.
relation to being ratted out to the police by a gang member. For Camilo, the predicament lay in making this youth understand that they were at the same time victimizers and victims. To him and in his conversations with the young men in the judicial system, “a victim is not only the person who gets shot, or stabbed, or robbed. A victim is a person who doesn’t have enough to eat, or where to go to school, or where to live. That will never excuse your behavior, but it helps you understand that there are some people that have more privileges than others.” (Camilo, interview with the author, December 10, 2019). This crucial recognition that victims and perpetrators often overlap, is of key importance for transitional contexts. It also allows us to question the role of innocence in the construction of victim’s (McEvoy and McConnachie 2012, 531) and children’s identities. Unlike the first example, here the “humanization of the conflict” entailed a reconstruction of victimhood with youth whose everyday lives were intrinsically linked to the dynamics of the armed conflict. Furthermore, the fact that these conversations occurred outside of the space of the museum might have, perhaps, influenced Camilo’s ability to speak more freely.

The museum then served as a constraining space that influenced the ways in which the young mediators questioned or supported the humanization of the conflict objective. During the Mediation Encounter on September 2nd, the workshop was about

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97 For reference, the original text reads: “Y después, ya cuando ellos eran conscientes de que habían sido victimarios, era también, venga, entendamos ese contexto nacional que es la víctima no es solamente la persona a la que le dan un tiro, a la que le dan una puñalada o a la que roban. Víctima es también la persona que no tiene dónde comer, la que no tiene dónde estudiar, la que no tiene dónde vivir. Esas también son víctimas “¿Ay prof, entonces yo también he sido víctima?” “Claro que sí, ha sido víctima. Que digamos que eso no justifica tu actuación, no lo justifica en lo absoluto. Pero también te da luces a entender por qué digamos hay unas personas con unos privilegios mayores y otras que no”.

98 The Encuentros para la Mediación [Mediation Encounters] were the weekly workshops the mediators had every Monday since the museum was closed. The mediators were trained in different topics like that of peace, transitional justice, urban gardening, sign language, and pedagogy. Some of these sessions were also used to bond the mediators and have sessions of selfcare and individual and collective meditation.
how to talk about peace with the publics visiting the museum, but with a special focus on children and youth. It was the Monday after the announcement made by FARC members “Iván Márquez”, “Santrich” and “El Paisa”, that they were breaking the peace accord and going back to arms. Though the general spirit among the mediators was not as sad as the actual day when the announcement was made, there was still a general fear about what the announcement would entail for the continuation of the peace process. After we had defined what peace meant for each of us, Catalina raised her hand and said that although she has to speak about reconciliation and peace all the time, she often feels a lot of anger and is aware she has not reconciled with violent events of her personal life and felt even worst now that some FARC leaders had broken the agreement. Lilly seconded the sentiment and expressed that she also often feels hypocritical when she has to speak about forgiveness and reconciliation all the time. For Jose, the issue is around being coherent and balancing his personal views with the frameworks imposed by the museum. For him, the key to an “honest” mediation relies on mediating from the emotions, and not the conocer. Finally, Lisa, the director of the pedagogy area in the museum, and the mediators’ supervisor, mentioned how “sadly, the museum forces us to lose our own humanity and take an academic approach”.

Despite the mediators’ reservations about “the humanization of the conflict”, during my time in the museum they continued to reproduce this narrative as one of the necessary steps to end the cycle of violence. The pedagogic objective of overcoming the conflict by acknowledging that “in the end we are all humans”, generated serious moral preoccupations for the mediators. These mixed feelings were often discussed outside the museum when the mediators were socializing at the end of a long workday or during the
mediation encounters, but they were never addressed or acknowledged during the school visits. The narrative being constructed in the MCM stands on the basis that “there are no good guys or bad guys in this story” and therefore we must “humanize the conflict”. We see then how the mediators have to balance working with collective memory & living memory while simultaneously recognizing their limitations.

¿Y los pelados, qué\textsuperscript{99}\?  

“Who are the first ones taken by a combo? Los pelados!  

Who are the first ones that stand in this city and say ‘dude, stop with the killing!’ Los pelados!  

But, who are the ones that never, ever, ever, have a voice or a vote. I mean, who never influence what is happening? Los pelados!”\textsuperscript{100}.

The preoccupation around the humanization of the conflict was present in all the interviews I had with the mediators and in most of the school visits. However, the issue around the child-victim was almost completely absent. Had it not been for Camilo and Catalina who had taken the museum’s exhibit to the Criminal Justice System for Adolescents in Medellín, it is very unlikely that the conversations around children as both perpetrators and victims, would have not happened at all. But as Camilo expresses, it is children and youth who have historically been in the midst of the conflict and peacebuilding efforts in Colombia, and who continue to be silenced and invisible in collective memory efforts in the museum.

\textsuperscript{99} In Colombia, a common word to describe children, particularly tweens, is pelados and peladas and gangs are called combos.

\textsuperscript{100} For reference, the original text reads: “¿Quiénes son los primeros que coge un combo? Dicen, los pelados. Quienes son los primeros que se paran en la ciudad y dicen marica, no maten más. Los pelados. Pero ¿quién son los que nunca, nunca, nunca, nunca tienen voz y voto? Perdón, voto. ¿Pues nunca tienen incidencia en lo que sucede? Los pelados”.
As explained in the Introduction, the MCM was the materialization of the efforts by local victims’ organizations who fought for symbolic reparation after the demobilization of the AUC's in 2005. Hence, the voices that the museum curates and promotes are the voices of those who the government recognized as victims, while in the diálogos de saberes children and mediators claim, reject, and contest the category regardless of its legal status. However, friction arises between this formal and informal ways of identification as a victim, both for the children visiting as well as the mediators. The young mediators and the children's and youth's experiences with the armed conflict are measured against this formally curated narrative. This, perhaps, explains why the young mediators prefer not to share their own victimizing stories. They might feel their voices and experiences are not as legitimate as the voices of the official, adult, victim, presented in the main exhibition. Or perhaps it is because of the distinction they have created between what they are willing to voice in the museum as their place of work, and among their peers in spaces of leisure and kinship.

As an example, the only testimony of victimization by a child in Present Stories was that of a girl who lived in a semi-rural neighborhood in the periphery of Medellín (Figure 16). She describes how living in a conflict affected area of the city made her sad and afraid, and the joy she felt when she and her family moved to a safer area of the city.
We learn how through art and writing she tells happy and hopeful stories and refuses to do so about violence since "violence is everywhere and we see it every day". She is shown drawing on a large canvas, playing the flute and taking care of her younger brother. We learn that she was even able to travel to Spain to showcase her art. When I asked the mediators about this particular testimony, they described it as corny, scripted, and fake, and therefore never included it in the visits. It is clear that as the only interactive exhibit that showcased a child-victim voice in the museum, the overlapping statuses of child and victim were to be apolitical, joyous, hopeful, and removed from suffering and harm. This protectiveness towards the figure of the child is nothing new. However, it did powerfully shape visitors’ constructions of the child-victim in the museum space. Furthermore, it solidifies children’s role in the armed conflict as witnesses of the horrors of war but who, due to their futurity, are able to focus only on the positive. Often, the preoccupation has been that by reducing children to victims, we might deny their agency and therefore, what they may be able to achieve in the post-conflict context (Wells, Burman, et al. 2014). And this view is exemplified in the MCM where children are reduced to traditional understandings of victimhood, and therefore, denied all possibility of political subjecthood despite their involvement with both violence and peacebuilding.

4. Conclusions

By accepting that being a victim has individual and social implications, we can also understand that there are some who are recognized as victims by society and the political apparatuses, and then there are other who identify (or not) with this category regardless of their legal recognition. Legal frameworks like the Justice and Peace law and the Victims law are the legal mechanisms through which the Colombian government
granted this official recognition. Within the museum, the curation by the mediators also constructs a novel understanding of the hierarchies of victimhood as shown with the examples of the individual iconic victims and the historically victimized collectives. Paradoxically, the museum’s objective to humanize the conflict also elevates the voices of the perpetrators.

Though both children and victims have often been defined by the idea of innocence, in the case of the child-victim, the museum denied children victims of the armed conflict any possibility as political subjects. And although requiring victims to refute the notion of innocence might be a politically undesirable approach to victimhood that “factors blame in the calibration of human suffering and inevitably results in the morally corrosive language of victim hierarchies” (McEvoy and McConnachie 2012, 535), the goal of humanizing the conflict creates serious issues for children’s and youth’s involvement in the post-accord context. Post-conflict societies are characterized by the existence of contested accounts of the past. The collective labor is the negotiation of these opposing narratives. Academics question how these opposing views are often a cause of conflict and an impediment to long-term resolution of conflicts. Furthermore, designations of “deserving victimhood” are often critical in assessing the probability of a conflict restarting (McEvoy and McConnachie 2012). But the museum, in its attempt to not present opposing narratives is generating a contradiction in which marginalized perspectives of the past gain the same value as contested and problematic versions that might legitimate the crimes perpetrated by the victimizers. In a desire to eliminate the friction created by opposing views, and therefore the problem around “deserving victimhood”, being a victim becomes a mundane experience in Colombia’s reality.
Victims in Colombia are not only symbols of the violence and sufferings inflicted to millions of Colombians. They are also an identity, that serves the dual purpose of explaining the origin of the museum in particular, but more broadly, are the real catalysts of multiple peacebuilding efforts in Colombia. By expanding this notion of victimhood to children, we might politicize childhood and secure children’s and youth’s political participation.

I echo Roche (1999) in the sense that, “the demand that children be included in citizenship is simply a request that children be seen as members of society too, with a legitimate and valuable voice and perspective” (479). And since victims are agentic, bearers of rights, a way to do so, is by extending their victimhood and therefore citizenship. For both Childhood Studies and scholarship on victimhood, agency itself is understood as the dialectical relationship between the individual sense of self and collective action. It is one’s agency that allows us to participate against oppression, to gain denied rights, to a greater sense of self confidence and to a further politicization of people struggling for rights (Moosa-Mitha 2005, 375).

Like Krystalli (2019), I see victims not as a "passive synonym for victimization or as a description for having suffered harm, but as a political status and category that different actors vie for, reject, wield, or contest" (10). This framing of what it entails to be a victim allows us to emphasize victims as political subjects, as a strongly political identity; as well as a set of actions, claims and relationships. In this sense, when children visiting the museum express that "we are all victims", they are reclaiming a violent past as their own. They are bringing our attention to the systematic inequalities and struggles that have been reproduced over and over in this almost 60-year-old war. Furthermore,
children are finding a way to claim their own political subjecthood outside formal political participation avenues. Instead, they chose to identify with those who have been historically oppressed in Colombia, acknowledging the violence found in the everydayness of the inequality that surrounds them in their streets, their neighborhoods, the news, and their own family dynamics. Hence being Colombian becomes synonymous with being a victim, naturalizing the conflict and denying the possibility of a future without war. But paradoxically, this reclaiming of a collective, national identity grounded on victimhood, is done at the expense of the voices of children-victims of the armed conflict. For the identification process is done with the legitimate, adult voices of the victims, and not with the muted and curated voice of the child-victim. The next chapter focuses on children who were given the space to express their victimhood stories and looks at how these testimonies about extreme violence alter traditional constructions around childhood.
Chapter 6. SAN CARLOS’ YOUTH
Witnessing and the reconstruction of a violent past

San Carlos was often referenced during the school visits as a symbol of nonviolent resistance and active victimhood, recognizing it as one of the nearby rural areas, most impacted by the dynamics of the armed conflict\textsuperscript{101}. As part of their training as mediators, the youth in the museum had a yearly visit to the Centro de Acercamiento para la Reconciliación - CARE\textsuperscript{102} in San Carlos to learn about the stories of resistance, despair, courage, and reconciliation that aligned with the museum’s pedagogy. According to the Center of Historical Memory, San Carlos was “everyone’s victim” due to its geostrategic location, natural and industrial richness, and collective action history\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} According to the Victims Unit and the Center of Historical Memory, San Carlos presents one of the highest levels of victimizations in terms of forced disappearance, landmines and forced displacement. Other common forms of victimizations were extortion, threats, selective killings, forced recruitment, massacres, sexual violence and kidnapping.

\textsuperscript{102} For more information on the mission and history of CARE see Chapter 2, Section 1.1 (Locating my research).

\textsuperscript{103} As the San Carlos report explains (2011), San Carlos is a rural municipality located in a strategic territory in eastern Antioquia. Its natural richness, particularly in terms of water resources, gained the attention of the central government followed by multinational enterprises that developed multiple macro-industrial dam projects during the 1980s. Towards the end of that decade, the guerrillas’ territorialization tactic shifted. Prior, the goal was to locate themselves in areas where serious agrarian conflict was underway and try to strengthen nexus with these communities through political and military goals. However, the new strategy relied on increasing the guerrillas’ presence in areas of major primary production, like San Carlos, in order to secure financial resources via kidnappings, extortions and other transactions (Pécaut 2000, 132). San Carlos procures 33\% of the energy of the country. The construction of this hydroelectric complex, paired with the closeness to the Medellín-Bogotá highway and the José María International airport, are part of a modernizing project key to the country’s development. However, these projects were developed without the community’s participation, consent, or benefit. This exclusion of the local campesinos ignited the political activism of the locals that resulted in the consolidation of impactful grassroots organizations and collective actions. It was this political capital, what draw the guerrillas to the area as part of their expansion and recruitment project. The guerrillas saw in San Carlos and its opposition to the hydroelectric projects an opportunity to capitalize on the community’s efforts by adding to their anticapitalism discourse the objection to this form of infrastructural projects. This predatory support was
Once the mediators arrived in San Carlos, they go to the CARE and meet with Pastora Mira, the social leader who manages this collective.

Just like she did with me when I first met her in January of 2019, she takes the mediators for a walk around San Carlos as she recalls the events that took place during the worst period of violence, from 1997 until the demobilization of the paramilitaries in 2005. Together they walk through the main square, where mass killings took place; a site which has now been commemorated as the Garden of Memory. Then she takes them to the top of the square by the church and turns towards the Julian Conrado David sports recreational center with a similar past and which now serves as a gathering place for the community. While walking through the uneven streets, one listens to the continuous passing of motorcycles and people greeting each other by their first names, a sign of how closely knitted the community is. People stop to greet and ask advice from Pastora and she patiently listens and promises to help. In a seemingly, disorderly fashion, impressive, colorful, murals decorate the sides of multiple houses, depicting campesino and Antioqueño culture with murals that showcase the nature of the area, beautiful women using traditional clothing, or messages about San Carlos’ memory (Figure 17).

what pushed the paramilitaries to target San Carlos as a guerrilla bastion and “reclaim” the municipality, often with the aid of the military and the police forces.
As she redirects the group towards CARE, here and there she points at abandoned military sighting-posts, rudimentarily constructed by various perpetrators, but naming them each of them is not important to Pastora as all of them used and abused the population. We finally reach the police station located one street behind the main square, where she explains how after the first incursion by FARC (1998), the Colombian army and police force abandoned San Carlos *a su suerte* [to their luck] and in what seemed like *de la noche a la mañana* [overnight], San Carlitans were at the mercy of the illegal armed actors. Finally, we are back at CARE and the visitor sees its colorful greeting sign that reads *Somos Voluntad* [We are Willingness]” (Figure 18) as a demonstration of the organizations commitment with peacebuilding and collective memory work. Pastora explains that the beautiful house was initially a prestigious hotel, but during the climax of the war, it was used as a paramilitary command. Locally known as a “chopping house”, it is where the bodies of those who had been assassinated were chopped to be easily disposed of and disappear, and the backyard was used as a massive burial ground. But
she quickly adds that the bodies that the organization found were identified and successfully returned to their families, and the house has had several spiritual, healing, rituals, to secure the cleansing of any trace of sorrow, suffering and despair.

Every street, every corner, every wall, seems to have a memory of the armed conflict. But regardless of the omnipresence of the shadow of the war, I found it particularly difficult to carry out my ethnographic work with San Carlitan children.

Originally, I had been invited to join a project with local children and the ICBF\textsuperscript{104} in which children were going to learn about the importance of preserving natural resources as a way of connecting to their campesino identity. Unfortunately, the project was promptly cancelled by the ICBF when the minimum number of participants was not met. It did not matter that during the particular weekend in which the workshop was scheduled coincided with the national school examinations. As a result, only 20 of the 33 expected participants showed up and as I was to learn during my fieldwork, these last-minute cancellations and rapid change of plans was not at all unusual in San Carlos. These cancellations which were often tied to empty, conditional promises of a faraway central government was something that the community in San Carlos was used to with projects

\textsuperscript{104} Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar [Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF in its Spanish initials)] is the governmental organization in Colombia that oversees the protection of children and youth. It also oversees matters around reproductive justice.
often being postponed or cancelled at short notice during the time I was there. Moreover, towards the middle of my fieldwork an even harder reality halted my data collection.

A month prior to the local elections, the wife of the candidate supported by CARE for the local assembly, and who was an active participant in their collective memory activities, was found brutally assassinated in a nearby municipality. The body had signs of sexual violence and had been burned with acid by the perpetrators. Unsure if the crime was personal or political, Pastora asked me to leave San Carlos and come back once the elections had been held. We agreed to remain in contact and she assured me that once she was sure things were *back to normal*, she would let me know so I could come back and continue my efforts with the victims organization in the area. Though she had been contacted by the mother of the political candidate, asking for her expertise in body retrieval and identification, she kindly walked me to the bus station and as a parting gift gave me a copy of a compendium that contained over eighty-three creative writing compositions written by San Carlitan youth.

Titled *Construccion Literaria Creativa* [Creative Literary Construction], the compendium was edited and published by a language teacher in 2007 as the culmination of an effort to “write and give meaning to the experiences” (Muñoz Tejada 2007) of the people of San Carlos. In the Preface, the editor explains that the entire process took four years during which students of 8th and 9th grades collected information, wrote up drafts, edited and rewrote their testimonies, and participated in local writing competitions held

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105 Since the projects with children and youth were either postponed or cancelled, Pastora invited me to support the victim’s organization composed by members of three municipalities: San Carlos, Granada and Santuario. The invitation was opened to everyone, and she was expecting to have children joining the meetings. She thought I would be able to interact with some of the local children, while help the organization with my media and communications background.
to further increase students’ participation\textsuperscript{106}. For the teacher, the two motivations behind the project was on one hand, “increase love and passion for reading and writing amongst his students” as well as to be a mediator between [us, the readers] and the youth, boys, and girls, whose writings “have little to do with fantasy, only reality is being written in the most stark and frivolous way”\textsuperscript{107}. The editor ends by explaining that he sees the benefits of this compendium not only in terms of a research tool around how children and youth deal with mourning, but as a fragment of San Carlos historical patrimony. However, there is no information on important aspects of the compendium including how this writing exercise was structured for the children as well as the evaluative criteria used to determine the final selection of narratives that compose the compendium.

What we do know is that the average length of each story is 350 words, and of the more than 80 stories included, 28 were written by girls in 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, 22 by boys in 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, 14 by girls in 9\textsuperscript{th} grade, 13 by boys in 9\textsuperscript{th} grade, with 2 girls and 4 boys not specifying their grades. The editor chose to also record the full name of the authors, however, to comply with IRB I will not include the students’ names. Furthermore, though I am interpreting these writings as childhood testimonies of the armed conflict, it is central to clarify that not all of the testimonies were created by first-hand witnesses. Some of the testimonies were the retelling of experiences of victimhood suffered by a

\textsuperscript{106} However, it is left unclear to the reader who carried out the four years of reworking of these materials and if the children were in 8\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade at the beginning or at the end of the editorial process.

\textsuperscript{107} For reference, the original text reads: “Continúo en este cuarto modulo con el compromiso de ser un mediador de los y las jóvenes y los niños y las niñas, para buscar desarrollar en ellos las competencias de lecto-escritura que a través de relatos y de experiencias vividas, permitieron recopilar la información que en este texto aparece. Nada tiene que ver con la fantasía, solo la realidad aparece escrita de la manera más descarnada y frívola”.
neighbor or an acquaintance. Therefore, the compendium collects both first-hand and second-hand accounts.

Consequently, when analyzing these writings, we must bear in mind that these writings were curated by adults, perhaps changing the nature of the testimony. But as (Spivak 2003) points out, when analyzing if the subaltern can speak, it is “not to describe the way things really were” (25). Instead, I am treating this compendium as a text and an archive. The compendium is then, the materialization of the editors wishes to voice children’s experiences with the armed conflict as a pedagogical exercise conducted in schools. This is key since "we are more likely to believe as true testimonies of war those which are attributed to children rather than to adults” (De La Ferriere 2014, 106). The recognition of this text as mediated, however, does not eliminate the power behind these testimonies since they are still valuable for us to understand the emotional and rhetorical power conveyed by these documents as well as its political and historical importance (De La Ferriere 2014). Furthermore, it positions children as constructors and narrators of an unintelligible and unspeakable reality.

Most of the testimonies were a factual recounting of particular events of victimization. But I am also aware that my reading, and subsequent interpretation, was mediated by the medium (a textual compendium), the removal of time between me and the testimonies (the texts were written in 2007 and I am reading them in at least twelve years later) and the circumstances in which the youth were tasked to write them in the first place (as a classwork exercise). As the teacher and editor explain in the Preface, these texts were reshaped over four years which hints at the fact that the editor desired specific elements from these testimonies. Therefore, it is quite likely that students may
have withheld aspects of what they truly felt about some of these events, actors, and of the task itself, namely, to bear witness to their violent past.

Drawing from this compilation, in this chapter I will describe how children’s testimonies reconstruct their understandings of San Carlos past, approaching the compendium as a key collective memory technology focused on campesino children. I propose that by paying closer attention to areas of high intensity conflict, the primary identities that children manifest is as members of the community and not as children. Being that violence is ubiquitous, the act of witnessing allows us to understand how their identities are seldom about reaffirming their status as children. Rather, these narratives disclose how the act of witnessing reinforces collective identities in terms of being Colombian, San Carlitan, Catholic, and campesino. I am particularly interested in drawing narrative threads that will allow us to gain insights around how children and adults negotiated these reconstructions. My hope is that by bringing children's voices into the reconstruction of San Carlos past, I will broaden our views of campesino children who were also witnesses to the Colombian armed conflict. By doing so I will not only question the multiple ways in which violence impacted children’s subjectivities, but also problematize the narratives that view rural, victimized childhood as overwhelmingly vulnerable, dependent, and framed less by this past than by their futurity. Instead, this chapter attempts to reconfigure the ways in which San Carlitan youth were constantly directed and tasked to inhabit their violent past by participating in local collective memory efforts and how they interpreted this exercise. To do so, this chapter will focus on three interrelated topics: the witnessing of the reconstruction of time; the witnessing of
the destruction of campesino identity; and the witnessing of the (dis)location of responsibility. To do so, the next section briefly introduces the concept of witnessing.

**Witnessing**

*Once again ... Terror!* 108

It was exactly six in the morning in the vereda 109 of El Cañaveral, in the municipality of San Carlos on July 26, 2002 when I opened my eyes and saw the light of day, I noticed a strange atmosphere, tense, as if something were going to happen. I didn’t pay much attention and got up in a hurry to help get the produce to the car, which was the custom every Sunday morning.

All the friends met at the place where the chiva 110 collected the loads and passengers, we had planned to have a chocolate by the puddle but when two more of our friends arrived, which we nicknamed Pólvora [Gunpowder] and Carnero [Ram], ready to go to town, the excitement decreased a bit. But still, we left and went as planned. After saying goodbye, one of our friends said “it makes me want to kill Polvorita and steal from him” since he was carrying a good amount of money to buy fertilizer for his crops. But then the same friend said "I’m kidding Polvorita I love you very much" and what he said was cause for laughter for a very long time.

They set out on their journey and when they reached the town an AUC checkpoint stood in front of the municipality's slaughter room. They requisitioned everyone and Pólvora was told that he had to stay, Carnero who accompanied him pleaded for him, but the thugs asked him if he wanted to die too. They took him away and within minutes the shots were heard, they had killed him. When Carnero realized this, he sent us the information through the radio station and that same day he became part of the AUC, according to him from there it was going to be easier for him to revenge the death of our friend.

When we heard the information we were shattered, the chocolate burned and we headed to the burial.

*DB 9th Grade, 2006.*

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108 Refer to Annex 1 for the original text.
109 Vereda is one of the administrative divisions for rural areas in Colombia. In ascending order, you will read about Veredas, Corregimientos and the Urban Center, or Pueblo (town). The municipality of San Carlos covers the urban center, or town of San Carlos and it's neighboring corregimientos: El Jordán, Puerto Garzas, and Samaná. Dos Quebradas, and El Cañaveral are examples of veredas. In total San Carlos’ area is 702 km² (271 sq mi).
110 Traditional means of transportation.
In its most simple definition, a witness is someone who is present for a particular event and can then partake in the retelling, or testimony, of what has occurred (Goodman and Meyers 2012). However, witnessing is a complex practice that can involve an actor who bears witness, the act of making a special statement, and the text of the statement itself. It is at its core, a discursive act of “stating one’s experience for the benefit of an audience that was not present at the event and yet must make some kind of judgment about it. Witnesses serve as the surrogate sense-organs of the absent” (Peters 2001, 709).

According to Peters (2001), the genealogy of witnessing can be traced to three main and inter-related sources. The first is to law and the notion of the witness as a privileged source of information for judicial decisions; the second is to theology and the notion of witness as particularly related to that of the martyr; and thirdly, to the witness as "a survivor of hell" which dates to the survivors of the Holocaust. It is this genealogy that allows Peters to state, "these three domains endow ‘witnessing’ with its extraordinary moral and cultural force today, since each ties the act of witnessing, in some deep way, to life and death" (Peters 2001, 708). Goodman and Meyers (2012) also found a pattern in the testimonies they collected from Holocaust survivors, in which most of the accounts collected were raw descriptions of atrocity, depravity, dying and death.

It is in the voicing of what has been witnessed, where we can find the tension between "witnessing in the sense of eye-witness to historical facts or accuracy and witnessing in the sense of bearing witness to a truth about humanity and suffering that transcends those facts" (Oliver 2004, 80). To witness then can be either the passive act of seeing and the active act of saying. But the transformation of the experience from one that has been seen to one that is said tends to be precarious and always questioned,
particularly when such experience is mediated by violence, pain, and suffering (Scarry 1985; Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997). When one is a witness or is bearing witness, one becomes the bridge between the experience of suffering and the —presumably— empathetic listener\textsuperscript{111}. The objective of the witness is to persuade the listener into believing the veracity of their testimony by materialising the painful experience into a communicative act. And though words can be exchanged, the true impact of experiences, particularly traumatic, cannot.

DB’s testimony is an example of the fluidity of bearing witness. He moves from the position of a first-hand witness as reflected in his opening statement when he details how he opened his eyes and something made him feel as if “something was going to happen”, to that of a second-hand testimony, when he extracts himself from the sequence of events and narrates how they, his group of friends, “set out on their journey” when they were halted by the paramilitaries. With this shifting stance, we are able to move alongside him and try to comprehend how the events affected him both individually and collectively. Furthermore, he prepares his audience in the first couple of lines to accept the inevitability of violence: he senses that something bad is going to happen, but he patiently takes us with him through the journey of his day. As his audience, we both fear and expect in anticipation, and when we least imagine it, the violent event occurs. While we, as unaware readers are shocked by this sudden turn of events, for DB and his group of friends, this event appears routine, almost banal. The memory of the extraordinary

\textsuperscript{111} Here I am only referring to the testimonies of witnesses done without any type of coercion. The well documented study of torture on the other hand, would not be a persuasion exercise but a retrieval of information without the consent of the witness grained on the dehumanization of the witness by the “listener” (Scarry 1985).
violent event fades, and he ends his testimony sharing with us how his “normal Sunday” ended.

1. **Witnessing and the fluidity of time**

DB’s testimony is built on a complex and layered construction of time. He begins his statement by letting us know the exact date in which the narration of his memory begins, 26th of July 2002 at exactly 6 am, letting us know that this is a date that is so meaningful that he has not forgotten it. He then narrates a “normal Sunday morning” in the life of a teenage *campesino* boy, where he helped with the transportation of the produce, met his friends, and they got ready to enjoy a leisurely day by the water. The title (Once Again… Terror!), his premonition that something calamitous was about to happen, and his friend’s “joke” around expressing a desire to kill Polvorita, introduces to the audience the fact that violence is always present. Violence is present in the form of humorous threats, as real possibilities to join an illegal armed group, or in the omnipresent reality of being killed. DB has learnt to share his routine with violence, both expecting and fearing it. This expectation, however, has shifted what is considered truly violent. His testimony includes changes in rhythm. When he wakes up, the premonition asks us to pause and assess the uncertainty for the future. In contrast, the expected death of his friend happens in a few minutes. The presence of violence as both a threat and a reality effectively changes the pace of time.

Like DB, most of the testimonies in the compendium situate the reader temporally. They include a date, and a time to the events that the witness is about to explain. Taken as a whole, the compendium could be used to outline the most significant events of collective violence in San Carlos. A particular salient episode was the Dos Quebradas massacre that occurred on January 16th of 2003. Some youth include the fact
that it was a beautiful day, others write that it was a Saturday. That evening between 7.30 and 8.00 pm, around 19 people were assassinated by the guerrillas for supposedly aiding the AUC’s. Some testimonies include the fact that one of the victims was a “woman six months pregnant, but they [the ELN guerrilla] did not care that she was carrying in her womb an innocent baby that had nothing to do with these matters” (MA, 8th Grade). All include the fact that the rest of the campesinos were forced to remain in their houses for the rest of the night and until around 4 pm of that Sunday. This is when the police in San Carlos sent a bus to bring the survivors back to the urban center of San Carlos. It took three days until the families could go back to Dos Quebradas and mourn the dead.

These testimonies seem to recall the violent events with acute precision. Furthermore, this precision inserts the children’s testimonies into a timeline of historical events that narrate the collective traumas of the people in San Carlos. In the particular case of the Dos Quebradas retelling, one of the child witnesses closed their testimony with a gesture towards the progress that had been made since this massacre:

“It is worth adding that everyone left the vereda for the town. Here [in San Carlos] they have been greatly supported to move forward; it has been three years and some of them have gone back to the vereda and today live very happy lives” (LA).

Though narratives of progress tend to be regarded as historical narratives associated with schematic narratives of improvement and development (Zerubavel 2003) in this case, the happy ending should not be seen as a movement to a better future, but a return to an idyllic pre-violent past. What is being signaled in the passing of time is not the future but this past. In his research of the Colombian armed conflict, Pécaut (2000) explains that in contexts of terror and extreme violence “the uninterrupted passage of events, all reference points are erased, and obliviousness of the past determines one’s
relationship to the present. ‘Immediatism’ prevails, enfolded in a time deprived of a “horizon of expectation” as well as stable points of reference rooted in the past” (140).

And as LA explains, after three years of being displaced from the vereda, and forced to remain in the urban area of San Carlos, they have “moved forward” by being able to go back to Dos Quebradas. For the youth, happiness was achieved by survivors once they were able to go back to their abandoned lands and reclaim their campesino identity instead of becoming a victim of forced displacement.

Another recurrent element in the narration of time by the young witnesses is how violence though omnipresent, always disrupted mundane activities. The use of expressions such as “on a regular day” and “it was a normal Saturday”, paired with the exactitude of the dates, were used by the students to heighten the irrationality of the violence perpetrated on the population:

“Although I believed this only happened on television, it was the 12th of April of 2005 when my father, on a normal working day, was walking with one of his colleagues along one of the paths of La Mirandita, when they stepped on a mine”.

*EP, 8th Grade.*

At first glance, the fact that the students always chose to ground the event on a specific date but also simultaneously dilutes this into a sense of everydayness, shows how extraordinary violence distorts traditional understandings of time and the mundane. The irrationality and disruptiveness of violence was also refracted by juxtaposing individual or collective incidents of victimizations with mundane, rural, activities like enjoyment of the regional festivities, participation in local sports, and working the land. Therefore, the testimonies situate the young witnesses not in a separate, and more precarious and vulnerable position, but in the same risk as the adults. EP’s testimony describes the day in which her father stepped on a landmine and lost his sight. Her father was not alone as he
was with a colleague who did lose their life. She then explains how her father was able to go back to the house, and some family members were present and were able to help him. Her pain is tied to the fear of almost losing her father. The extraordinary violence disrupted what was to be “a normal working day”. However, her pain is not heightened because of her age, but because of living in the midst of irrational violence.

Both of these testimonies - the Dos Quebradas Massacre and the landmine in La Mirandita - problematize our views of children living in contexts of extreme violence as more vulnerable than adults. Rather, they show how in these situations, age is certainly not a determining factor. The only actual mention of age refers to the pregnant woman to signal even unborn babies as possible victims. In contrast to this, their shared identity of being campesinos who have been forced to leave their lands, animals, and homes behind, appears to be quite significant in these narratives.

2. Witnessing the destruction of campesino identity

_There were many attacks that marked the history of our town, among them: when the AUC gathered a large portion of the inhabitants in the Julián Conrado David sports center, the Dos Quebradas massacre, and many other events such as the bomb in the market square, the murder of many people, the destruction of many bridges by terrorists, the car bomb in the main square, numerous disappearances, and other shameful and disgraceful acts._

_The inhabitants began to flee and abandon the municipality and veredas; we were becoming a ghost town, but the people that remained never yielded and brought out their antioqueñidad and did not give up despite the blows and unhealed wounds that we were accumulating._

_However, we have been able to gradually overcome these moments of crisis and bitterness, each time with our heads held high and with the hope of seeing San Carlos we dream of in a not-so-distant future._

_LCNG, 9th Grade._
In her testimony, LCNG begins by listing some of the most significant collective traumas that the people of San Carlos have endured. Most importantly, these events also present to the reader, details of how everyday lives were disrupted by the armed conflict. During my time at San Carlos, I noticed how the main square was the place where every introduction, work meeting, and social time, occurred in one of the many coffee shops that line the perimeter of the square. This behavior repeated itself when I visited Santuario and Granada and is a social behavior that goes back to colonial times\textsuperscript{112}. At the end of the workday, town folks retreated to their homes, rested, showered, and changed into more fancy clothes and spent time with family, friends, and new acquaintances around the main square. It is not coincidental that the square was also where the illegal armed groups carried out their collective crimes to terrorize the community by carrying out mass killings in front of the church and blowing up bombs in the market, both located in the periphery of the main square. By disrupting these everyday activities and using this location as a prime site for carrying out extreme violence, the armed groups were destroying the everydayness of rural experiences.

Regional and rural identity was also constantly featured in the youth’s testimonies particularly around highlighting the natural goodness of the campesino and their deep connection to their vocation of working the land. This is evident in how JCOG remembers his uncle:

\begin{quote}
He was a humble person, he worked in a small limes farm with which he supported his family, which consisted of three children and his wife.

It is then, that when he had a crop, he would travel by bus to the Puerto Naré municipality in Antioquia, selling his limes. When he was coming back in the two
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{112} Following the urbanization process designed by the Spaniards, the main square was —and continues to be— the center of all socio-economic events: the market, the church and the major’s offices are located around the main square in every town in Colombia.
o'clock bus from Puero Naré to San Carlos, reaching a place called Puente Alcanzar, a van passed the bus making it stop. [...] These men asked my uncle if he sold limes to the guerrillas and he replied that he sold lime to all the people who wanted to buy them no matter who they were, since he only cared about making an honest living to support his family that he loved so much. However, these men drew their firearms and murdered him”

**JCOG, 8TH Grade.**

One of the characteristics of the conflict was the “branding” of entire areas as collaborators of one side or the other. The territorial disputes would then make examples of possible contributors by sentencing them to death as a sign of warning to the rest of the community. But as JCOG’s testimony shows, often the collaboration was as nonsensical as selling a piece of fruit, helping someone, or moving to an area that drew condemnation. For a community so tightly linked to the land, this created a sense of “non-place” where social ties could not be maintained and everyone felt under constant surveillance (Pécaut 2000, 136).

DB’s testimony “Once again, Terror!”, which opened the section of Witnessing, also presents us with the everydayness of his life in San Carlos under the siege of the paramilitaries. As a survivor and witness he is “a morally justified individual who speaks out against unjust power” (Peters 2001, 714). He abstains from judging his friends’ decisions or actions, but his narrative conveys a sense of discomfort in the reader with hints of how his normalcy is in reality extraordinary due to his coexistence with the constant threat of extreme violence. What appears to be a playful narrative, is in reality a testimony to witnessing a murder. He not only presents us the facts of living in San Carlos during the height of the paramilitary violence, but also with the intimacy of his constant fear and anxieties. We are not only privy to the decisions the youth confronted on a daily basis in their coexistence with violence but are also made aware of the
mechanisms they’ve devised to explain, negotiate, and “normalize” violence. This invitation into the objective and subjective facts of what occurred, is the way in which DB as a witness transforms the “unspeakable into existence” (Goodman and Meyers 2012, 4). We are not only learning about his past, but his testimony is an invitation to go beyond what “actually happened” and to enter into his personal story in that particular moment of his existence (Zerubavel 2003). His description of his tasks as a rural boy, a friend, and a victim, allows him to identify with the collective experiences of campesinos, victims of the armed conflict, and youth living in contexts of everyday violence.

Drawing from their identities as campesinos, San Carlitans and even their regional identity as Antioqueños, was key to understand the unyielding strength of the people despite the extraordinary violence. In some of the writings, San Carlos is described as the most beautiful town in south-eastern Antioquia, and its people as good and innocent. Similarly to DB, when LCNG explains that people began to flee from San Carlos, she does not judge the people who were forced to migrate and leave the town. She recognizes that the individual choices to survive do not hinder the collective efforts to resist. But despite their strength, it was their rurality that is viewed as the main reason for the heightened vulnerability that San Carlitans experienced:

“To begin, I want to tell you all how the fundamental right to live is denied to the campesino people”.

LYM, 8th Grade.

In the opening sentence of her testimony, LYM seems to explain her violent past in terms of her rural identity. She is aware that her identity as campesina is what makes her life more precarious and vulnerable and perhaps less grievable (Butler 2006). Being
campesina then is both a gift and a burden. Regarded as a source of strength, the collective identity is constructed mainly in opposition to an urban identity:

“To conclude, I will say that many of these people are now living in the city of Medellín trying to survive, since, daily they are forced to face the challenges that the city presents, and even worse, trying to get used to a context that is not the one they are used to”.

SPT, 8th Grade.

As the narratives in this section have shown, many of the testimonies in the compendium describe the loss of the campesino identity via the victimization of forced displacement. To reach San Carlos, one has to take a bus ride from Medellín and travel for four hours on bumpy, unpaved roads and every so often, one sees the abandoned houses of those who left to never come back. The abandoned houses sit in contrast to the emerald green mountains, as forsaken symbols of the violent past. According to the Center of Historical Memory (2011), seven of every ten San Carlitans were forcibly displaced by the armed conflict between 1998 and 2006. As explained in the introduction, this period coincides with the climax of the violent confrontations between the FARC, ELN, AUC´s, AUCC´s, and the Colombian Armed Forces. Unlike the dialogues between the museum’s mediators and the children visiting the MCM, these testimonies do not center the denuncia in terms of the witnesses age, but as campesinos who suffered the loss of their rural identity. Pécaut (2000) explains that those who live in the midst of contexts of extreme violence create a “split subjectivity”, that is, “the division that occurs in the subject torn between contradictory frames of reference or levels of life experience superimposed on one another” (148). This refers to the loss of any control or even the possibility to adapt to the volatile but at the same time routinely extraordinary circumstances. Clearly, the armed actors were the main perpetrators of the destruction of
campesino identity. However, this does not explain the issues around accountability and responsibility. Children’s and youth’s testimonies also raised these questions.

3. **Witnessing the (dis)location of responsibility**

Another recurring element in the testimonies was the (dis)location of responsibility. While DB chose to not judge his friend’s decision to join the AUC’s to revenge their murdered friend, he clearly antagonizes the paramilitaries by calling them thugs, and in the construction of his narrative signals them and their actions as the catalysts for his friend’s decision. In his testimony, the unfair assassination of his friend Polvorita and the recruitment of Carnero are both the responsibility of the paramilitaries. Furthermore, like DB’s recounting of how the paramilitaries stopped them to ask for their identification, or when JCOG shares how his uncle was signaled out for selling limes to the guerrillas, these behaviors show new daily routines of a militarized present. Many of the testimonies explained how the armed actors would come to the town, gather everyone, and with a list and everyone’s cédula\(^{113}\), they would be identified, rounded up and then killed.

The violent act alongside the suffering that ensues can never be truly explained (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997). Nonetheless, one of the objectives of seeing and then bearing witness, is to appeal to the moral sensibility of the interlocutor. In the case of the compendium, the young witnesses are trying to locate the responsibility of the atrocious acts that either ended the life of a loved one, or that allowed them to survive. This need to

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\(^{113}\) *Cédula de ciudadanía*, is the colombian ID card. Similar to the Social Security Number in the US, this number is unique to every off-age citizen. However, it is a public record and it is widely used, more similar to the driver’s license in the States.
assign responsibility was also a demand for accountability, and the latter was more explicitly present in some of the testimonies.

3.a. Witnessing the irresponsibility of the State

“My mother says that she was twenty days old and that her parents, that is my grandparents, had to leave their farm in Córdoba, Quindío, to the city of Armenia. In 1959, tired of so much violence, they were displaced to the municipality of San Carlos, Antioquia. Here they started from scratch and had the good fortune of doing well.

Now, San Carlos was a calm municipality until the enterprises brought progress and with them violence, drugs, prostitution, among other unhealthy behaviors, all of this creating a negative change in the culture of our people”.

ERS, 8th Grade.

In her testimony, “The beginning of the Violence” ERS traces her family’s history to the period known as La Violencia in the 1950s. She shares with us how her family’s past has always been marked by forced displacement. However, she is also aware that despite this broader continuum of violence, the two moments that she discusses have been caused by different though interrelated circumstances. For ERS, progress and industrialization are responsible for the recent suffering of her family. She is referring to the hydroelectric projects between the regional authority of the Antioquia governmental office and the multinational companies. She is now the third generation in her family to suffer the consequences of the armed conflict. But the explanation of the structural violence is also due to the failures of the government to secure development alongside the wellbeing of the rural communities.

Another way in which I could assess children’s and youth’s interpretation of the role of the State was by looking at the descriptions that include the army and police forces. The testimonies that focus on 1998 explain how in one of the earlies incursions on
August 3\textsuperscript{rd}, the guerrilla faced the police for more than 12 hours. When the guerrilla realized the police would not easily surrender, they went to the local church, found Father Alpidio, a local San priest, and “asked” him to tell the police to either give up or they would set off an explosive device. The police surrendered the command, and all the police officers were forcedly pushed out of the station into several trucks and they were never seen again (LYC, 8\textsuperscript{th} Grade). This testimony, alongside the one about Dos Quebradas, where we learned how the police officers sent a bus to take away the inhabitants so they could abandon their lands before the paramilitaries came back, demonstrates how power and authority continuously shifted between the illegal armed actors, the military forces, and the church. These changing conditions would increase the sense of dislocation and loss of trust among San Carlitans and raised questions around who exactly was responsible for the violence.

The failure of the state is also present in the testimonies when the youth explain the abandonment suffered by those forcibly displaced. Some of the testimonies explained how the victims, after losing their livelihoods, were forced to survive often without the support or aid of the local and the central government. The testimonies of the youth dwell on the complexities of forced displacement; the displacement was not simply from rural to urban areas. It varied in terms of the dislocation between veredas, from a vereda to the urban center in San Carlos, or from San Carlos to the city of Medellín. The minimal and uncertain aid received by victims of forced displacement is also present reflected on the discrepancy among some of the testimonies: A few corroborate that some of the campesinos received aid from the government when they reached San Carlos; other like DAG express that:
“today, many of this families [the forcibly displaced] remain with no type of support, from the community, nor the major’s office, have provided any type of help”

**DAG, 8th Grade**

Another circumstance in which the State and its institutions failed San Carlitans is explained by MGR of 9th Grade in her testimony titled “A tragic and Painful day”. She retells the story of a case of sexual abuse in which the young victim was assassinated by her perpetrator. This young witness:

“would like to make it clear that as in most cases, the law was unfair and convicted an innocent person.

The neighbors were not happy, and they began to investigate since they knew who the real perpetrator was who remained free and doing his own thing. It is fair to say, that since the truth always triumphs, it only took them three months to discover the truth. The neighbors, furious, caught the perpetrator, and they dragged him with a truck through the main roads, until he was killed.

It can be concluded that being truly pure will save us from evil”.

**MGR, 9TH Grade**

This crude and emotionless narration of a case of extra-legal justice, shows how the corruption of the judicial system normalizes violent behavior in the name of righteousness and justice. Furthermore, it highlights the fractured trust in what is seen as a corrupt institutionality when MGR qualifies the wrongful conviction as that which happens in most cases. In her description, the replacement of systematic impunity with a demand for justice and truth, ending in the torture and killing of a rapist, was a fair result. This was one of the few cases in which the testimonies included cases of vengeance. However, in stark contrast to this many testimonies relied on faith to relocate responsibility.

3.b. Witnessing Grace

“The most beautiful thing about divine justice is that these evil men lie in the same place as my uncle, with the difference that my uncle is enjoying in a place
full of peace and tranquility, according to my faith, while those [men] who knows where they will be”

_JCOG, 8th Grade._

The irrationality of the armed conflict, paired with the fractured relationship with the Colombian state due to its failure to protect its citizens, appeared to be more bearable because of the community’s trust and faith in religious institutions, particularly that of the Catholic church (Aranguren Romero, Cardona Santofimio and Agudelo Hernandez 2021). And as the government, developmental progress, and the absence of the state were to blame for the continuation and degradation of the conflict, the faith in God was heightened and made even more palpable. Faith often served as the reason why they had survived. In many of the testimonies, the youth attribute surviving to the grace of God. In “What is left after the war” EP explains that her father was on his way to one of his fields with a friend when they stepped on a landmine. She explains how her father’s surviving was due to God’s will. She continues to explain “This is why I am never tired and never stop thanking the all-mighty for protecting my father of all evil and danger” and although her father was blinded by the blast and injured, he told her how he saw a light shining on the path which helped guide him back to them.

LAM of 8th Grade also explains how one of the attacks perpetrated on a Saturday in the main square was not as bad because “thanks to God’s grace it was raining and most of the people stayed home”. It is not surprising that San Carlitans rely on their Catholic beliefs to comprehend their reality. Religiosity and specifically Catholicism, was very salient in paisa culture where God’s grace, God’s will, and the Virgin’s company are just some examples of expressions that are exchanged on a daily basis. The Catholic church has played a historical role in the armed conflict. There have been priests that have joined
both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries, and others that have been central to the negotiation of peace agreements. In the testimonies, peace was achieved if the killed received sacred burial, staying alive was the greatest gift God could provide, and it was by God’s grace, that they had managed to escape near encounters with death or the paramilitaries. God’s grace served as a refuge to the living and it also replaced the failures of the government to provide security and justice. Some of the testimonies argued that while human justice often failed, the perpetrators would eventually be judged.

4. Conclusions
The testimonies that comprise the compendium consist of an intricate narrative mapping of the violent past of San Carlos. They show how living in the midst of extreme violence affects one’s understandings of time, the self and relationships with institutions of power. Interestingly, many of the testimonies ended on a note of hope particularly in the form of returning to the land that had been stolen and to the time before the war. At the moment of the writing of these testimonies, San Carlos was close to being a desolate ghost town. Only a few victims had decided to return to the area and seek the governmental assistance that ensured their rights would be restituted by the State. However, the testimonies also highlight the insufficiency of these endeavors since many lost their cattle, crops, friends, coworkers and of course, family members. Though the children intended to leave their reader with a notion of hope, this sense of progress is always weighted down by the trauma and suffering of being dispossessed, on some occasions more than once.

114 JCGE from 9th Grade tells how as he was gathering fruits with his two best friends in his field, he saw how around 40 guerrilleros came on horses. They started to gather his cows and him and his older brother begged the one in charge to at least let them keep the milking cows. They were dismissed and the guerrilleros stole 90 cows.
As Peters (2001) explains, "the curious thing about witnessing is its retroactive character, the jealousy the present has for the past. The present may be the point of decision, but it is always under-informed about what will come after. Most observers don't know they are witnesses when the event is happening; they are elected after the fact" (Peters 2001, 722). Across the testimonies glimpses of hope to go back to the pre-armed conflict times are paired with feelings of fear, loss and being lost. What complicates Peters description of witnessing as retroactive in terms of the Colombian context is the fact that we have accepted the myth that violence has been present "forever". According to Pêcaut (2000) “the populations caught up in the present violence endlessly swing back and forth between the event and the myth, the past of the present and the present of the past. What is denied them is the possibility of being participants in a history oriented towards the future” (141). For the youth in San Carlos, the future was not only uncertain as Peters points out, but it also almost became impossible, trapped in a temporal sway ruled by violence.

Instead of defining their possibilities as children looking to the future, San Carlitan youth reconfigured their possibilities by looking to the past and their identity as San Carlitans and as campesinos. Age as a demarcation became secondary, and it was only visible in the fact that they are all school age children. Beyond that fact, their testimonies present us with their experiences of the armed conflict less as children witnessing the war and more as San Carlitans who have survived the Colombian armed conflict. When asked to participate in collective memory work children and youth are constructing their subjectivities in painful but empowering ways that connect them with
the shared experiences of the adults around them. They are acknowledging the terrible events while showing great courage, respect, and strength.

As a childhood studies scholar interested in children and youth’s participation in collective memory, my goal is to broaden our discipline’s views on the way in which ‘marginal’ children construct and interpret their contexts. Furthermore, by learning from their testimonies, the objective cannot be to only learn about their suffering since pain and suffering can never truly be communicated or verbalized (Scarry, 1985). Instead, these testimonies allow us to recognize children and youth as active constructors and co-narrators of their past in relation to their subject position embedded in notions of rurality. This subjectivity deeply rooted in notions of being campesino invites us to reflect on the complex ways in which children living in the midst of violence in rural Colombia, inhabit multiple temporalities. This sway across kaleidoscopic pasts, allows them to not only cope and understand their circumstances, but to reimagine their future not only in terms of being children, but as members of vulnerable communities. The testimonies invite us to see these vulnerabilities under a new light. Not as disempowering, but as the catalyst to a plethora of possibilities that are not necessarily looking into the future as the end point but into the past. Thus, childhood studies researchers that want to work in contexts of extreme violence must study the children and the youth living in the midst of extreme violence by suspending all judgment and understanding that violence orders everyday lives. This new order imposed by violence, affects and sometimes suspends our morality and forces us to see children beyond their age, and as key members of their communities.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

“¿Por qué amamos a Macondo?
Si con tanto dolor ajeno, me hace doler el vientre.
Si la tía Esperanza sigue viva, solo porque se salvó de la bomba.
Si al parecer a los colombianos nos tocó un Dios despistado.
Así que no nos sigan, que vamos perdidos.
Necesitando acetaminofén, para este dolor de patria.
Y aun así, creyendo en la paz”.

During one of the selfcare workshops for the mediators, they were asked to reflect on why they chose to work in collective memory and peacebuilding. They were given markers, sheets of paper, wool, glitter and glue, and other materials, to create a representation of why they willingly chose to make collective memory and peacebuilding their vocation. One of the mediators, Jose, constructed a poem which, with his permission, I have shared above and translated below:

“Why do we love Macondo?
If with so much other people’s pain, it makes my gut ache.
If aunt Hope is still alive only because she dodged the bomb.
If it seems that us Colombians have been given a distracted God.
So do not follow us, we are lost.
Needing acetaminophen, for this homeland pain.
And yet, still believing in peace”.

This project had me staring at Colombia’s violent past, sometimes closely and personally, and during other times with the separation that academia seems to require. But always directly, and almost unyieldingly, for more than three years. I tried to do so through the eyes of my family and the stories shared by my great aunts, the matriarchs of the family who, when we are together, recall their memories of growing up in rural Nunchia. I wanted to convey how in their words, I always sense a suspension of time. A time of a young child’s idyllic communion with nature that was often interrupted by the violence and brutality experienced by campesinos and campesinas who were forced to
“share” their lands with the armed actors. These memories of what they experienced in the 1940’s are events that continue to take place even today. I have stared at the conflict, through the eyes of the social leaders who despite their victimizations, continue to choose to oppose the armed actors by their efforts around peaceful resistance. Their actions stem from the belief that what this country needs is silence, so that those who tend to be muted have the opportunity to disclose their experiences, and time, so we can understand what has occurred, while continuously working on a long-lasting peace. I also tried to stare at the conflict through the eyes of the mediators who reminded me that it is okay to sometimes want to “burn everything down” as long as we continue to show up the next day and aid in the construction of a more just, and less forgetful, Colombia. And I also tried to stare at the conflict through the eyes of the children. Those who in the rural areas, suffer this omnipresent war as they wait for their school to be built. And those who visiting the museum, describe the war through the heroism of those who are long gone and blame it on the greed of the human race while continuing to dream with becoming president one day. We, Colombians, have become experts at waiting.

1. Children’s construction of a political self

Traditionally, research on children’s experiences in contexts of armed conflict have portrayed children either as vulnerable victims and/or perpetrators (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2017; Rosen 2005; Wessells 2016). However, recent studies have also centered the experiences of children who refuse and who oppose the systemic and protracted violence by becoming peacebuilders and collective memory constructors (Berents 2018; Habashi 2013). Cultivating Hope showcases how children and youth participate in spaces of collective memory by reflecting on the violent past, the transitional present, and a hopeful future. These reflections draw from collective
narratives with the armed conflict where the intractability of the conflict is made apparent when children and youth share how their families, their neighborhoods, their veredas, or even themselves, have experienced direct suffering due to the armed conflict. However, and similarly to our assumptions and ideas around childhood, how we remember is socially mediated (Zerubavel 2003). Thus, *Cultivating Hope* is not only reflecting on what is being remembered, but how and to what extent, children and youth shape the ways in which spaces of collective memory memorialize the conflict. It questions how children and youth remember, and how this memorializing broadens our understandings of the construction of collective memory as well as the political position that the peace-accord context is giving to children and youth during the transitional period in Colombia.

But despite their historical and political agency, children and youth are usually imagined as pre-political in these institutional spaces. The peace education and collective memory work that took place in the museum saw the children and youth visitors as citizens in the making who need “to see to not repeat”. The pedagogic premise then is that by discussing the stories about the multiple forms of violence and non-violent resistance of the victims of the conflict, the post-accord generation will be able to end the cycle of violence, thus ending the intractability of the Colombian armed conflict. However, this characterization of children as future citizens is also the result of the barriers children and youth face when they participate in collective memory processes and peacebuilding efforts. These barriers were placed to preserve children’s pre-political status and to protect their innocence and vulnerability that could be compromised by them becoming “too political”. According to Cordero Arce (2015), usually children’s participation requires, "previous adult assurance that children are capable of forming
their own views, they are allowed by those *adults* to express those views freely in matters that, according to those *adults*, affect them, the views thus expressed being given the weight that *adults* deem they should have, according to the *adult* diagnosis of those children's development and maturity"^{115} (292). In other words, children do not have control on their participation, but it is moderated and displayed by adults.

Furthermore, the degree to which children had been impacted by the armed conflict was insufficient to ensure their participation in collective memory construction vis-à-vis the adult-victims who were considered the more legitimate actors. Through my research, we see both the possibilities and the limits that this participation entails for children’s construction of a political self. It elucidates the tension between the imaginary of an innocent childhood that should not be politicized by discussing the armed conflict, and the desire and the need to increase their political and historical agency and literacy through peace education and collective memory work.

Furthermore, as pre-political beings, children and youth construct a sense of a national identity that is not based on traditional democratic or liberal ideals. Rather, they rely on *saber* which appears to stem from the sense of a historical and ubiquitous harm. Being Colombian then, is being a victim, and the right for a political claim is grounded in the construction of a national, harmed, or at a minimum, a wronged, self. Hence, in the case of the children and youth participating in collective memory, what is being cultivated is a sense of a shared responsibility as victims, as Colombians, and as citizens. Children are asserting political identities not as individuals, where their vulnerability and innocence is salient due to their age, but as members of broader collective identities.

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^{115} Emphasis given by the author.
However, and perhaps due to these restrictions, children are not only aware of the political and historical causes of the violence that characterizes the armed conflict, but when asked to participate in collective memory, they chose to do so, from an understanding of a collective self in terms of other marginalized communities like the Indigenous, or the women, or the *campesinos* victims of the armed conflict.

2. **Children’s construction of a collective identity**

Children’s and youth’s participation in collective memory allows for the fostering of a sense of belonging to different communities by becoming co-narrators of our shared history as Colombians with the armed conflict. This conarration is made possible due to the witnessing of the deconstruction not only of the individual sense of time, but through the reconstruction of what it means to be a child. More importantly, these witnessing allowed for a reconstruction of a victimized, empowered, collective sense of self. The museum on the other hand, is a space in which children and youth are able to reconstruct Colombia’s violent past, reclaim marginal collectives’ identities as their own, and question their sense of a collective, national self within the limitations and barriers placed by adults. The museum although it sees itself as a place where knowledge dialogues occurred regardless of one’s age, still expects the young museum workers to follow the script set by the museum’s peace education agenda. Hence, the idea that the museum is a *thirdspace* where resistance, contestation, and negotiation take place, is ambiguous. This ambiguity was produced by the institution’s assumptions of children as a pre-political public and the related need to humanize the conflict as a core value in the mediation pedagogy.

Though the difference between *conocer* and *saber* is what allows for their collective identification as victims, it also highlights the tension of how this form of
collective recognition limits dialogues around accountability and responsibility. This blurring of the allocation of responsibility and accountability manifests as an obstacle for children who, in the transitional context of the post accord, are also trying to participate in the restitution of their rights to truth, justice and reparation. Furthermore, the pedagogic premise that “we are all humans”, should not prevent children from discussing who are the perpetrators of the different forms of violence. This ambivalence around naming the perpetrators serves as a continuing dilemma in contexts of intractable conflict where the potential of rendering this more tractable is paradoxically tied to processes that exceed articulations around shared commonality as humans and victims.

3. Children’s understandings of time in contexts of intractable conflict

*Cultivating Hope* also rises questions regarding how children living in a context of intractable conflict construct and relate to time. Although, the children and the youth visiting the museum would often sustain their right to participate in collective memory because “they are the future”, the shared reference of violence as mythical, tampers with the idea of the future as a moving forward. Instead, children and youth co-construct and dream of a past and a present in peace since the future is always itself uncertain. This project therefore suggests that existing assumptions around children’s political subjecthood require to be interrogated in the case of children and youth who participate in collective memory in contexts of intractable conflict. Even though the children are seen as citizens in the making, by incorporating children in collective memory work, they are constantly reconfiguring themselves in terms of the violent past and not their assumed hopeful futures. It shows how children and youth dwell with the pain, frustration, and in
some cases defeat, that the young mediators and the children sometimes felt while participating in these endeavors.

Time then, is not necessarily linear, but due to the protractedness of the violence, children and youth must constantly sway between the past and the present. Furthermore, time is constructed in relation to the victimizations and suffering of not only the victims showcased in the museum, but their own families, friends, and communities. In some of the conversations between the mediators and the children visiting the museum it seemed that what was ongoing was the violence which stalled time’s progress. Not even the peace accord or the new context of transition seemed sufficient for children and youth to understand the Colombian temporal context as a moving forward. Future research should further explore how children and youth understand how growing up in contexts of intractable conflict affects their constructions of time as a social construct.

As I was finishing up my dissertation and trying to bring all these voices alive through my written, translated, academic words, news broke out about the most recent military operation against the FARC dissidents in which at least twelve children were killed. On March 2nd, 2021, the bombing of the rebel camp took place in the Colombian Amazons, in the department of Guaviare and was directed against dissident FARC leader “Gentil Duarte”. The recently appointed minister of defense, Diego Molano, blamed FARC by stating that the guerrillas were turning “those children” into “machines of war”. In an interview with W Radio, he explained that the children were not innocent, but that had been brain washed and indoctrinated by the illegal armed groups. No longer seen as children, their deaths were just part of the dynamics of war. To make matters worse,
Molano’s previous role had been as the ICBF’s director [Colombian Institute of Family Welfare] charged with the responsibility of reintegrating former child soldiers. Molano arrived in the ministry as the replacement of Guillermo Botero, whose resignation was the consequence of social pressure due to the excessive use of force by anti-riot police during the paro nacional and the bombing of a FARC camp where eighteen children were killed in Caquetá. Both areas were promised health services, sewage systems, roads, and schools. However, the state presence never came, and the illegal groups like FARC dissidents now controlled these coca growing communities.

I tend to describe Colombia as a place where everything happens, and then nothing happens. As Héctor Abad Faciolince, the popular Colombian author has expressed, Colombians learn to laugh and cry at the same time and our happiness is always in a dangerous, unstable balance, about to slide off a cliff of desolation\textsuperscript{116}. And while we continue to decipher how to break the cycle of pain, we are also forced to acknowledge that some of us ask these questions from the comforts of our homes, classrooms, and the security of being in the cities, while hundreds of Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and campesino children continue to join the war effort. \textit{Cultivating Hope} centers the voices of young pedagogists and children and youth visiting a collective memory museum and participating in collective memory efforts in their rural hometown. However, the dynamics of the conflict itself forced me to center my observation in the urban area of Medellín, and I had to cut short my observation in my rural site, San Carlos. I had intended to bring to the center, not only the experiences of children living in urban, marginalized, communities but to also, shed light on how rural childhoods must broaden

\textsuperscript{116} Excerpt from \textit{El Olvido que seremos} [Forgotten We’ll Be] by Héctor Abad Faciolince (2005).
our understandings of the experiences of children living in the midst of violence, as peacebuilders, in contexts of intractable conflict. However, this aspect of my project had to be limited to the discourse analysis of the testimonies by San Carlitan youth, showcased on chapter 6. It is my hope, to continue with this research in the near future.

Thus, Cultivating Hope brings children’s and youth’s views on the armed conflict to the center of the transitional moment that Colombia is experiencing. Furthermore, I invite you, the reader, to see children and youth as political agents who must be included in the construction of the past, and therefore, the present. I am no longer understanding the post-accord period as a moving forward, but as a sway between the past and the present, and a broadening that, despite Jose’s and my own homeland pain, requires the continued belief in peace.
APPENDIX A.

Figure 19. Floor plan of the permanent exhibit and the 17 memory technologies that compose it.

As soon as the visitor enters the main exhibit, they face a mirrored wall that showcases short messages about mundane experiences such as the smell of rain, the taste of a recently fallen fruit, or the laughter of children. To the right, images of different rural landscapes are projected on the wall. These experiences, Absences (1) and Nostalgic
Landscapes (2), seek to create a sense of longing in the visitor by recalling what the victims of the armed conflict have lost. During the school visits, the open space across Nostalgic Landscapes served as an entryway to the main area of the exhibit where more often than not, the young mediators would gather to chat, joke, or complain about their workday.

Once the visitor passes this first section, an open area houses the other fourteen experiences that compose the permanent exhibit (Figure 20). The exhibits vary in the modes of representation used. Cartography is used to map places of victimization, memory places and memory sites in Sensible Territories (4), as well as in Medellín: Horizons and Borders (3) in which a historical explanation of the configuration of the Medellín territory is provided. Touchscreens and digital media are also used in Chronology (6), Present Stories (11) and Art’s View (14) all of which can be seen in Figure 7.

Drawing from mass media archives, in Chronology (6) the visitor is given the opportunity to simultaneously navigate three yearly timelines for Medellín, Antioquia and Colombia. Chronology focuses on assassinations, mass protests and other Colombian historical landmarks forever preserved under a journalistic lens. This memory technology questions history’s idea of advancement while at the same time, draws from the work carried out by journalists as narrators and archives of the armed conflict.
In *Present Stories* (11) the museum intends the visitor to be part of the collective memory work via the testimonials of two groups of people they categorize as witnesses. These two groups are academics and politicians on one hand, and victims and social leaders on the other. In this memory technology, the visitor chooses who they want to listen to, from a layout that imitates the interface of a smartphone. Seeking to simulate face to face interaction, the visitor stands under the sound cones (seen at the top of figure 8) and selects what testimony they want to listen to. However, often in different school trips the uneven volume within the videos of the testimonies and between different panels, made the listening experience difficult for the visitors. Additionally, the navigation affordances of the technology’s main menu were not always working.

The third memory technology that uses digital technology is *Art’s View* (14). With this experience the museum seeks to explore the representation of the armed conflict by famous Colombian artists. This technology was never used in any of the school visits I accompanied. Although some children did gravitate to it, once they saw that they were basically only seeing paintings, the interest would redirect to something else. Some of the art exhibited did include childhood and youth tropes to signal the innocence, vulnerability, or rebelliousness of the armed conflict victims. For example, *Anatomy Lesson* uses dismembered dolls to show the traces of land mind wounds, *Family in Misery* is the representation of a displaced family begging in a dark corner of an undetermined Colombian city and *Hippies* shows the Medellín youth of the 1970’s marching and protesting for their rights in an era of high activity and persecution for the student movement.
There were two memory technologies that relied on the sense of hearing. These aural experiences were *Whispers* (10) and *Sonorous Memory* (13) (Figure 21). In *Whispers*, the visitor is compelled to listen in the privacy of a secret, stories of loss, pain, and suffering. The idea is that there are some pains so unforgettable, some wounds so profound, that they cannot be either silenced but should also only be spoken via a whisper. There are ten wooden boxes attached to the wall, and through a small hole, the visitor can listen to these raw testimonies. According to the mediators, these were the most violent stories, so they were almost never included during the school’s visits I accompanied. However, children, particularly teenagers, did visit the experience often. Mediators never redirected them but allowed the young visitors to listen as best as possible. Some of the boxes appeared to be broken and nothing could be heard and as with *Present Stories*, the difference in volume hindered the listening experience. However, when we would gather to share what the children had learned, stories of sexual violence or witnessing tortures would often be shared.
Sonorous Memory (13) sharply contrasted in the use of the aural experience with Whispers. In this memory technology the visitor can choose from a wide variety of music genres and listen to songs that incorporate the armed conflict in their lyrics. From traditional cumbia to some punk rock groups that characterized the Medellín of the 1990’s, the museum attempted to showcase how music has always been another route for different communities to participate in collective memory work. Similarly to Whispers, Sonorous Memory was never incorporated during the school visits by the mediators and nonetheless, would often attract children, particularly younger ones.

Tables (7), Child Words (5), and Multiple Faces of Violence (8) were the three memory technologies that did not rely on eliciting interaction with the visitors. Scattered throughout the center of the room, Tables pays a homage to different sectors of Colombian society who have suffered different forms of victimization such as women, teachers, journalists, human rights defenders, the police, campesinos, Indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, among others. In our interview, Catalina, who is seen by her peers as the “children expert” because of her previous work as a children entertainer, explained that for her the main exhibit revolves around three main axes when it pertains children: the dispute for the land and the reconfiguration of space, emblematic cases and the assassination of social leaders, and the different forms of victimization suffered by the victims of the armed conflict. Therefore, during the school visits, Tables was always included, particularly the ones that discussed the assassination of human rights defenders, journalists, and unionists, the persecution of campesinos, and the wounds inflicted to the land.
One of the groups that was not represented in Tables was children. This did not mean that there were no memory technologies focused on children’s experiences of the war. Child Word (5, Figure 22) served as the only experience about children in the permanent exhibit. This memory technology is based on the book Casa de las estrellas: el universo contado por los niños [House of stars: the universe told by children] by Javier Naranjo, published in 2013. Naranjo, a former teacher, collected 133 words and 500 different definitions that resulted from his work in creative writing with the children he taught in different rural towns of western Antioquia over a period of 10 years (Wallace 2013). The museum summarizes the intention of this experience as Desarmando el sentido which would directly translate to “disarming meaning”. By playing with the word disarming, the museum is not only signaling how children do not belong in the world of war, but how they live and deconstruct everyday life and how adults should consider their reality if we get access to their “innocent” and therefore, “truer” understanding. As shown on figure 10, Child Words imitates a dictionary or primer but attempts to reflect a sense of play by randomly organizing the letters. Therefore, the experience begins with A which includes amor [love] and

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117 This experience explains that while war, violence and death were happening around them, Naranjo witnessed how his students “did not see this reality” but instead reshaped its meaning.
asesinato [assassination] and is then followed by the letter M, N and E. The brief
description is “signed” by the child who created the definition and their age.

Located at the end of the floorplan, next to Memory’s Space the visitor finds a
room formally known as The Lab but colloquially named by the staff as
Fabiolita (15). Named after Fabiola Lalinde, this white room with wooden
floors was considered the children’s space where mediators would either introduce or give closure to school visits (Figure 23).

Separated by a door, the space allowed mediators to show documentaries, project
children’s eBooks for storytelling, or organize games that required movement. It also
allowed them to be “noisier” without disrupting the other visitors in the museum.

However, when one of the displays of the temporary exhibition had to be installed in
Fabiolita, the mediators had to come up with new group dynamics to cope with the new
restrictions due to the loss of the space.

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118 Fabiola Lalinde, mother of law student Luis Fernando Lalinde, was one of the first recognized victims of extrajudicial killings in Colombia in 1984.
To exit the temporary exhibition, the visitor exits the main room and walks back to the main entrance through *The Resistance Path* (17, figure 24).

Flanked by a series of windows, this corridor intends to give the visitor a sense of hope as she walks down the path. To the left, the visitor sees faces of social leaders who have lost their lives in the fight for peace and the names of different victims’ collectives. To the right, lyrics that talk about the armed conflict and some literary quotes that discuss resistance decorate the wall (Figure 16). During my fieldwork, this area of the museum served as a pathway, but the technologies actual content was never used as part of the mediation pedagogy. However, after the mounting of the temporary exhibition, this area of the museum was also used by the mediators to either initiate or conclude the school visits. Like the entrance hall, the *Resistance Path* was repurposed by the mediators in order to compensate the lack of a space in the museum strictly designed with the children and the youth visiting the museum in mind.

During my fieldwork, different areas of the museum showed heavy signs of deterioration, which created a lot of problems to the overall structure and hindered the mediation by the youth. I saw how on several occasions the youth would make sure no one would stand too long by the sliding door which received the nickname of the guillotine due to its precarious motion sensor. The apathy by local authorities became even more obvious when the opening for the temporary exhibition “The voice of Hands,
practices that reconcile” had to be postponed because the ceilings in the rooms of the first floor, designated for the temporary exhibits, were damaged due to liking, mold, and humidity. This lack of space and perilous infrastructure was solved by the museum’s management by closing the rooms on the first floor and repurposing Fabiolita. This left the mediators without a space to engage with the children visiting the museum in a comfortable way.

It was really interesting to see the differences between what mediators’ thought was useful to use when children and youth were visiting the museum, versus, where children opted to go and interact with when given the chance (Figure 25).
The map above compares these situations. As shown in this figure, the only memory technology in which mediators and children coincided was that of *multiple faces* (which is further discussed and explained on Chapter 3 alongside *Memory’s Space*). In relation to *Tables* though, there was an exception shown with a star on figure 13. Children would often pay little attention to the majority of the tables except for one, *La
Guerra y La Vida (War and life). Referred to as la ruleta (the roulette) among the mediators, this table sought to reflect how in a country like Colombia being affected by war was a matter of chance. The table had a wheel, and it was divided between mundane activities—which included some forms of victimizations—and different populations that inhabit Colombia, including children, and it had two needles one on the top and one on the bottom. There was a motion sensor on the bottom, right corner, of the table, and when the visitor passed her hand over the sensor, the roulette would spin and then a population and an activity would be paired. In one of the mediation encounters, I was teamed with two mediators and we had to analyze all the tables. I was particularly interested in this table since I knew it was the one that caught the children’s attention. After I analyzed it with the two mediators, I concluded that this table was the one that contradicted the overall message of the museum the most.

Being a victim of the armed conflict is not something that happens by chance. Furthermore, by including this type of exhibition the actors involved in the armed conflict are freed of all responsibility of the acts they have committed against civilians. During the socialization I asked the group why there was a table in the exhibit that contradicted everything they were explaining in the school visits. That is, that the armed conflict has specifically targeted campesinos, social leaders and human rights defenders. They explained that that was not the purpose of the table. But to show that to be a victim we only needed to be alive since “it does not matter if you are rich or you are poor, you are Afro-Colombian, indigenous or mestizo, we can all be victims”. I pushed and said, “but it is more likely that I’ll join an illegal armed group if am a male Afro-Colombian living in Tumaco, that if I am an upper-class mestizo living in Bogota”. They agreed but they still
though the table showed the potential vulnerability that all Colombians face and the paradox remained unresolved. So why was this table so interesting for children? The movement sensor made it the only interactive table in the entire room. The other 15 tables were to “see and not touch”, but on *War and Life* children would race to see who could make the roulette spin faster. It was not about the content; it was about the interactivity affordances given by a misfortunate memory technology.
APPENDIX B.

Making sense of senseless violence through play

The dialogues about the armed conflict were not limited to conversations between the young mediators and the children visiting the museum. The mediators also relied on a repertoire of games that served as pedagogical methods that facilitated children’s understandings of the consequences of the violence that characterizes the Colombian armed conflict.

One of the questions I asked the mediators was “how do we explain the armed conflict or Medellín’s violent past to the boys, girls and young people visiting the museum”. According to Jose, the dialogues with children needed to be euphemistic, which he found particularly challenging since his job was to carry out the “special visits” with former combatants, politicians, and members of the armed forces. I always teased him that he preferred to mediate the main exhibit to former-paramilitaries than seven-year-olds. He explained that he did not see himself as a spontaneous mediator. On the contrary, he was too schematic when mediating with children. He constantly worried about how to translate and make the content more simple and clearer for the children. But the challenge did not only rely on the vocabulary or the language. As previously mentioned, mediators were also concerned about the content. When Jose said, “how am I supposed to translate this?” the this refers to the stories of victimization that compose the main exhibit. Complying with the museum’s objective to include all victims, the stories include testimonies of collective violence, sexual abuse, forced disappearance, forced displacement, and magnicides, among others. The multiple forms of victimization are also represented in a multimodal manner that includes aural, visual, oral, and graphic
representations that were devised and curated in a way that move the visitor to question her own role in the conflict.

For Jose though, this does not apply to (young) children. The goal cannot be to shock them with the gruesome anecdotes of the multiple forms of violence the victims have endured. Instead, the museum had to rely on different strategies enabled children to understand the reasons that have allowed for the war to go on for so long, so they do not repeat our mistakes. As a public, children are understood as useful in their futurity, as keepers of a peace that is yet to come. The diálogos then are reduced to violence prevention and the imagination of situations where the participants refuse the cycle of violence. As Jose said, the interactions with the children through the games did not seek a moralizing discourse, but an interaction in which children “will be aware that they live in a hostile setting, that perhaps if they lived in another country things would not be as hostile, so they are aware of what is happening, but that the awareness is done with responsibility, and not through fear”.

The museum, in line with Western tradition, understood play as the appropriate activity to materialize peace education. In line with the 18th century Romantic’s view of play as a natural habitus for childhood, the museum capitalized on different games to carry out their peace pedagogy. Mainly, the museum concern with children and youth was to create awareness of the continuation of the conflict, the pleads of the victims, and to foster children’s reflections around alterity, the importance of the collectivity and empathy.

So, what were these games like? I have chosen three different examples of games played between the mediators and the children and youth visiting the museum. As you
will notice, the games’ dynamics were not unique to the museum but what was exceptional was the conversations that these games elicited. These games translate the language that constructs the peace education pedagogy into relatable, everyday experiences. Furthermore, the commonplace that was created in these games, cemented the rapport between mediators and visitors and allowed for questioning of our roles as perpetrators of individual, structural and/or, symbolic violence.

The “onion game” or learning about the armed conflicts dynamics

During one of the school visits with students between the ages of nine and eleven, the mediators decided to divide the group into two distinct teams. The children were asked to form a line. One of the ends acted as an axis, and the rest of the children wrapped around each other, creating an “onion”. Once they had created their “onions”, each mediator chose one of the groups and began pulling each child away. The “rules” specified that if you were successfully separated from your team, you were now tasked with aiding the mediator who had pulled you away. As the game progressed, children became louder, more aggressive and determined to be the last team standing. The children who were still together tried their best to not let any of their team members be pulled away. Shirts came untucked, arms got scratched, and claims about cheating were made. At the end, children and mediators were sweating and laughing, and while everyone began to cool off, one of the mediators asked “Ok, guys, how did you feel?”.

Initially the responses were of how fun the activity was and how crucial team effort had been. But as the conversation progressed, the tone became more serious. One child said he noticed how, although he was hit on the head, he knew for him to succeed he needed to worry and protect those around him first. After a while, the mediator Carolina explained that the onions can also be interpreted as our local communities, and that the
force trying to pull them away is the war. She compared children’s efforts to the non-violent resistance historically exercised by Colombian citizens and how crucial it is to take care of each other to survive violence. To further her point, a male student explained that the mediators were representing violence, but the children were representing the victim and how, when violence came to a territory, it polluted everyone. The person you consider a neighbor or a friend, was now the enemy also victimizing the community. Federico, the male mediator took this opportunity to explain how the problem with violence is that it spreads. It tends to multiply often nurtured with a need for vengeance. The mediators gave closure to the activity by inviting the children to go around the main exhibit and learn about the resistance stories represented in the museum so that they continue resisting violence.

The labels game or learning about alterity
One of the games implemented with the older visitors was the labels game. In this roleplay activity, everyone would receive a small paper with a “role” written on it. Once you were given your label, you were instructed to not look at it and we were supposed to never reveal the role’s our peers had been given. Instead, we all had to place the label on our forehead and intermingle so we could learn everyone’s roles. According to the mediators’ explanation of the activity, the goal with this game was to think how we can reconcile with an Other and how our own biases and prejudices play a role in our everyday relationships. The labels included roles such as police officer, guerrillero, paramilitary, campesino, child, sexual worker, millionaire, politician, homeless, rapper, social leader, human rights defender, priest, and gay person, to name a few. Once everyone was given their role, the mediators would ask the students to pair and hold
hands with this person. The first instruction given by the mediators was to tell this person how they would reconcile with them.

On the occasions that I participated in this activity, people were confused on what reconciling with the Other meant. This confusion seemed to arise because they did not know how to reconcile with an Other when they were unsure what role they were playing. In a way, not knowing if they were “good” or “bad” was more important for them to know how to reconcile. This is not surprising if one agrees that to make an ethical decision about whether to reconcile with someone, one must know their own role in the suffering of the Other. Once this first round of reconciliation had taken place, the mediators proposed a set of questions to the group: who you would tell a secret to, who would you help first, whose example would you follow, who would you vote for, who would you join to work for a better country and lastly who we need to forgive. Then, the mediators would ask the group to think of strategies that could aid in these reconciliation efforts.

I found particularly interesting not only that the students were reflecting on who they were interacting with, but also that the game allowed for a reflexivity in the role we had been given. On one occasion the game was taking place, the mediator Mariana asked the group if they were enjoying the game, and one of the female students said, “well not really, I must be a horrible person because no-one is choosing to interact with me”. When I looked at her, I noticed that her label was “drug-addict”. I could see she was physically bothered by the fact no one was engaging with her, and her efforts were more focused on trying to decipher who she was, than in those around her. After the activity ended, she took the opportunity to mention to the group how unfair she felt the situation had been.
The game sought to question the stereotypes and the way we relate to each other by including people that we encounter on a daily basis. However, when playing the game, all forms of violences and of grievances, seemed to have the same value. This standardization of pain opens crucial questions and jeopardizes the fragile peace that Colombia is currently trying to build. If I was facing a paramilitary, or a catholic priest, two of the roles allocated to the participants, can I blindly reconcile with either, regardless of my own role? Am I able to both judge and be judged, forgive and be forgiven, regardless of my own identity? For the museum, the answer seemed to be indisputably yes. To end the cycle of violence, everyone is redeemable.

The thread game or learning about collectivity and intersubjectivity

With some of the younger children, the mediators would create rapport by playing the thread game. In this activity we would gather in a circle and the mediators would be holding a large ball of yarn in her/his hands, they would introduce themselves and mention a quality they had or something that made them happy. Then they would throw the yarn to someone else who would do the same. Children seemed to enjoy the activity despite being nervous about dropping the yarn and disrupting the threaded network that was being created. Once everyone had introduced themselves to the group, the mediators would use the exercise to explain how now we were all interconnected and belonged to the same community.

The activity also helped the mediators to demonstrate how, regardless of the degree of the violence, the social fabric is always affected. To demonstrate the fragility of the Colombian social fabric, one of the mediators would drop their own thread and show how if just one of the members of the community stops supporting the network, it is enough to weaken what had been constructed with everyone’s effort. It was important for
the mediators to explain that a community was not constructed or solely dependent on the government, or the politicians or adults, but on the common people who formed this social fabric. Then, the mediator would pass their thread and he or she would run through the interconnected spiderweb and destroy what we had collectively constructed. During one of the times this game was played, the mediator Catalina explained “and this is what the armed conflict and violence does and, in this museum, we will learn about the stories of those who have destroyed the social fabric as well as those who have resisted in the face of these injustices”.

The thread game not only allowed the mediators to create a rapport with the young visitors, but also served to exemplify how violence is a multidimensional concept that can affect society. Violence can be misinterpreted as one-dimensional, but the game allowed the mediators to showcase how violence varies in degree, how it can be caused by an individual or a collective and how it has different temporalities. It also allowed the children to be part of an interconnected community and introduced them to the concept of social fabric which was to be often referenced by the mediators when interacting with students between the ages of six to eleven years old. With this particular age group, the sense of community that was being built relied on notions of solidarity, collectiveness, and unity.

The museum used games and other play-like activities to translate their peace pedagogy, into relatable, everyday experiences. Furthermore, the commonplace connections that was created in these games, cemented the rapport between mediators
and visitors and allowed the questioning of our own roles within the continuation or the disruption of the cycle of violence.

Play was used by the museum as an ideal idiom so that the children and the youth visiting the museum could learn about the armed conflict. Grounded in Western ideals of play as a child’s right, need and essence, play served as a way to translate into childhood languages the horrors of the Colombian armed conflict. Fruitfully, the games elicited conversations between the mediators and the children that invited everyone involved to reflect on the war. However, the playfulness could potentially restrict what children feel is appropriate to share in these encounters. It is extremely hard to know if some of the children visiting were the daughters or sons of victims or perpetrators or even victims themselves, but it is important to consider whether by translating these difficult conversations into play, children feel dissuaded to share personal experiences with the armed conflict.

Furthermore, the narratives constructed around the armed conflict present children with the inevitability of the conflict. Although the museum’s pedagogy relies on peace building to prepare the “future generation” to be the “post-accord generation”, the sentiment of violence as Colombia’s inescapable manifested future is still present when children are tasked with resisting instead of overcoming, with forgiving regardless of one’s actions, or with holding on, despite the hardships. By no means am I trying to diminish or deny these efforts. I do believe that faith and hope are keeping my country together, but the question still remains: how are we to work alongside children and youth so that we not only tell them of our errors, but also acknowledge and allow children and youth to tell their own experiences with the armed conflict?
APPENDIX C.
In this section I include the complete text of the testimonies discussed on Chapter 6 first in Spanish and then my translation into English.

1. Una vez más... ¡Terror!
Eran exactamente las seis de la mañana en la vereda el cañaveral, del municipio de San Carlos el 26 de julio del año 2002 cuando abrí mis ojos y vi la luz del día, notaba un ambiente extraño, tenso como si algo fuera a suceder. No hice mucho caso y me levanté de prisa para ayudar a sacar los productos agrícolas al carro, lo cual era costumbre todas las mañanas del día domingo.

Todos los amigos nos reunimos en el lugar donde la chiva recogía las cargas y los pasajeros, teníamos planeado realizar un chocolate en el charco pero cuando llegaron dos más de nuestros amigos los cuales los apodábamos pólvera y carnero, listos para irse al pueblo, los ánimos se nos bajaron un porco. Pero aún así, nos despedimos y echamos marcha a lo planeado. Luego de la despedía uno de nuestros amigos dijo "me hacen ganas de matar a polvorita y robarlo" puesto que él llevaba buen dinero para comprar abono para sus cultivos. Pero luego el mismo amigo dijo "mentiras polvorita que yo a usted lo quiero mucho" y lo dicho fue causa de risa por mucho rato.

Emprendieron el viaje y al llegar al pueblo había un retén de las AUC frente a la sala de sacrificio del municipio. Requisaron toda la gente y a Pólvera le dijeron que se tenía que quedar, Carnero quien lo acompañaba abogó por él, pero los maleantes le dijeron que si él también se quería morir. Se lo llevaron y a los pocos minutos se escucharon los disparos, lo habían matado. Carnero al darse cuenta nos hizo llegar la información a través de la emisora y ese mismo día entró a formar parte de las AUC, según él desde allí le quedaba más fácil cobrar la muerte de nuestro amigo.
Nosotros al escuchar la información quedamos destrozados, el chocolate se quemó y nos dirigimos hacia el sepelio.

**Once again ... Terror!**

It was exactly six in the morning in the vereda of El Cañaveral, in the municipality of San Carlos on July 26, 2002 when I opened my eyes and saw the light of day, I noticed a strange atmosphere, tense, as if something were going to happen. I didn't pay much attention and got up in a hurry to help get the produce to the car, which was the custom every Sunday morning.

All the friends met at the place where the chiva collected the loads and passengers, we had planned to have a chocolate by the puddle but when two more of our friends arrived, which we nicknamed Pólvora [Gunpowder] and Carnero [Ram], ready to go to town, the excitement decreased a bit. But still, we left and went as planned. After saying goodbye, one of our friends said "it makes me want to kill Polvorita and steal from him" since he was carrying a good amount of money to buy fertilizer for his crops. But then the same friend said "I’m kidding Polvorita I love you very much" and what he said was cause for laughter for a very long time.

They set out on their journey and when they reached the town an AUC checkpoint stood in front of the municipality's slaughter room. They requisitioned everyone and Pólvora was told that he had to stay, Carnero who accompanied him pleaded for him, but the thugs asked him if he wanted to die too. They took him away and within minutes the shots were heard, they had killed him. When Carnero realized this, he sent us the information through the radio station and that same day he became part of the AUC, according to him from there it was going to be easier for him to revenge the death of our friend.
When we heard the information we were shattered, the chocolate burned and we headed to the burial.

**DB 9th Grade, 2006.**

### 2. LA MASACRE DE DOS QUEBRADAS

El 16 de enero de 2001 fue la peor pesadilla de la vereda Dos Quebradas y Arenosas, cuando las guerrillas del ELN interrumpían la tranquilidad de los habitantes, llegaron entre las 7:30 y 8:00 p.m., unos hombres fuertemente armados atacaron los habitantes de las casas y los maltrataron vilmente; en las tiendas y teléfonos les decían que eran colaboradores de las AUC.

En esa masacre mataron más de 18 personas y hubo varios heridos. Estuvieron por más de 18 horas con todos los muertos y heridos sin poder traerlos a la cabecera municipal, pues les prohibieron venirse. Un señor que vivió esa noche de terror en esa vereda, me contó que le tocó meterse debajo de la cama y llegaron tocando la puerta y uno de ellos dijo que en esa casa o vivía nadie, y por esta razón, se salvó de morir.

Después de las 10.00 p.m., se fueron y no se sentía sino el llanto de los que pudieron escapar de esta muerte fatal, toda la noche se la pasaron rezando y ayudando a los heridos hasta el otro día. Al as 4:00 p.m., resolvieron desplazarse hacia el municipio de San Carlos, un viejito llamado G, fue el único que se quedó viviendo en esta vereda.

Cabe concluir que todas las personas se vinieron de la vereda para el pueblo. Aquí les han ayudado mucho para que salgan adelante; ya han pasado 3 años y algunas personas han retornado nuevamente a la vereda y en estos momentos viven muy felices.
THE DOS QUEBRADAS MASSACRE

On January 16, 2001, was the worst nightmare of the Dos Quebradas and Arenosas veredas, when the ELN guerrillas interrupted the tranquility of the inhabitants, they arrived between 7:30 and 8:00 p.m., heavily armed men attacked the inhabitants in their houses and vilely mistreated them; in stores and through telephones they were told that they were collaborators with the AUC.

In that massacre, more than 18 people were killed and several were injured. They were for more than 18 hours with all the dead and wounded without being able to bring them to the urban center, as they were forbidden to come. A man who lived that night of terror told me that he had to get under the bed and they came knocking on the door and one of them said that no one lived in that house, and for this reason, he was saved from dying.

After 10.00 p.m., they left and nothing was felt but the cry of those who were able to escape from this fatal death, they spent the whole night praying and helping the wounded until the next day. At 4:00 pm, they decided to move to the municipality of San Carlos, an old man named G, was the only one who remained living in this village.

It is worth adding that everyone left the vereda for the town. Here they have been greatly supported to move forward; it has been three years and some of them have gone back to the vereda and today live very happy lives. L.A.
3. LO QUE NOS DEJA LA GUERRA

Recordando que desde hace algún tiempo nuestro municipio de San Carlos, ha vivido los rigores de la guerra y que ésta, nos ha dejado como regalo de muerte muchos campos minados, de los cuales mi padre LFP fue víctima de uno de ellos.

Aunque creía que esto sólo pasa en televisión, fue un 12 de abril de 2005 cuando mi padre en un día normal de trabajo transitaba con uno de sus compañeros por uno de los caminos de la vereda La Mirandita pisaron una mina. Sin embargo, Dios no quiso que mi padre nos abandonara. Por esta razón no me canso y no dejo de darle gracias al altísimo por haber protegido a mi padre de todo mal y peligro.

Aunque su amigo GM no corrió con la misma suerte que mi padre; pues que, la explosión de la mina lo alcanzó totalmente. Mi padre, a pesar de lo afectado de la explosión, ya que su visión quedó totalmente reducida por lo que no pudo auxiliar a su amigo, si pudo dirigirse a la casa donde se encontraba hospedado de manera milagrosa; él cuenta que lo único que veía era una luz que le iluminaba el camino y fue así como poco a poco pudo llegar.

Finalmente, a pesar de que mi padre se encuentra con nosotros y vivimos muy felices como familia, él manifiesta un sentimiento de culpa por no haber ayudado a su amigo, pero también entiende que no pudo hacer hecho más debido a la crisis que en ese momento acontecía.
WHAT WAR LEAVES US

Remembering that for some time our municipality of San Carlos has lived through the rigors of war and that it has left us as a gift of death many minefields, of which my father LFP was the victim of one of them.

Although I believed this only happened on television, it was the 12th of April of 2005 when my father, on a normal working day, was walking with one of his colleagues along one of the paths of La Mirandita, when they stepped on a mine. However, God did not want my father to abandon us. For this reason I never get tired and I do not stop thanking the all mighty for having protected my father from all evil and danger.

Although his friend GM, did not have the same fate as my father; since, the explosion of the mine impacted him completely. My father, despite being affected by the explosion, since his vision was totally reduced, he could not help his friend; he could go to the house where he was staying in a miraculous way; he says that the only thing he saw was a light that illuminated his way and that was how little by little he was able to get there.

Finally, despite the fact that my father is with us and we live very happily as a family, he expresses a feeling of guilt for not having helped his friend, but he also understands that he could not do more due to the crisis than at that time was he was going through.

EP 8th Grade, 2006
4. TERROR Y ESPERANZA EN NUESTRO MUNICIPIO

Hace poco nuestro municipio vivía en medio de una disputa territorial entre varios grupos armados, tanto legales como al margen de la ley. Para ninguno de los que aún estamos aquí no es secreto que nos sumamos en el miedo y veíamos cómo nuestros paisanos morían, quizás muchas de estas muertes, sin motivos aparentes; algunos a manos de aquellos que querrán tener dominio sobre nosotros y de nuestro territorio.

Fueron muchos los atentados que marcaron la historia de nuestro pueblo entre ellos: cuando las AUC reunieron a gran parte de los habitantes en el polideportivo Julián Conrado Daivd, la masacre en la vereda Dos Quebradas y otros muchos hechos como la bomba en la plaza de mercado, el asesinato de muchas personas, la caída de muchos puentes a mano de terroristas, el carro bomba en el parque principal, numerosas desapariciones y demás hechos bochornosos y repudiables.

Los habitantes empezaron a irse y dejar solo el municipio y gran cantidad de veredas; nos estábamos convirtiendo en un pueblo fantasma, pero la población que todavía permanecíamos aquí nunca desfalleció y sacó a su flote su antioqueñidad y no se daba por vencida por más golpes y heridas sin cicatrizar que teníamos acumuladas.

No obstante, hemos sabido superar de manera paulatina, estos momentos de crisis y amargura, cada vez con la frente en alto y con la esperanza de ver en un mañana no muy lejano el San Carlos que soñamos.
TERROR AND HOPE IN OUR MUNICIPIO

Not long ago, our municipio lived in the middle of a territorial dispute between various armed groups, both legal and outside the law. For none of us who are still here it was no secret that we joined in the fear and we saw how our countrymen died, perhaps many of these deaths, for no apparent reason; some at the hands of those who wanted to have dominion over us and our territory.

There were many attacks that marked the history of our town, among them: when the AUC gathered a large portion of the inhabitants in the Julián Conrado David sports center, the Dos Quebradas massacre, and many other events such as the bomb in the market square, the murder of many people, the destruction of many bridges by terrorists, the car bomb in the main square, numerous disappearances, and other shameful and disgraceful acts.

The inhabitants began to flee and abandon the municipality and veredas; we were becoming a ghost town, but the people that remained never yielded and brought out their antioqueñidad and did not give up despite the blows and unhealed wounds that we were accumulating.

However, we have been able to gradually overcome these moments of crisis and bitterness, each time with our heads held high and with the hope of seeing San Carlos we dream of in a not-so-distant future.

LCNG, 9th Grade.
5. LA MUERTE DE MI TÍO

A continuación les contaré sobre la muerte de mi tío LDJLG, hecho ocurrido el 11 de diciembre de 2000 en el municipio de San Carlos, Antioquia.

Él era una persona humilde, trabajaba en un pequeño cultivo de limones con el cual sustentaba a su familia, compuesta por 3 hijos y su esposa. Cierto es que cuando habían frutos, él se desplazaba en un bus hacia el municipio de Puerto Nare, Antioquia, vendiendo sus limones. Cuando venía de regreso en el bus que salía a las 2:00 p.m., de Puerto Nare a San Carlos, y llegando a un lugar llamado Puente Alcanzar, una camioneta se adelantó al bus la cual posteriormente hizo detener el vehículo según versión de los pasajeros que allí viajaban, cuentan éstos, que se subió un hombre fuertemente armado el cual hizo descender a los pasajeros con el objetivo de realizar una requisita, finalizada esta, dejaron a mi tío detenido y lo montaron en la camioneta.

A mi tío le preguntaron estos hombres que si él vendía limones a la guerrilla y él respondió que les vendía a todas las personas que le compraran sin importar quién o quiénes eran, pues lo único que le importaba era ganarse la vida honradamente para sostener a su familia que tanto quería. Sin embargo, éstos sujetos sacaron armas de fuego y lo asesinaron.

Ahora bien, su funeral fue muy triste para la familia; pues que, él era una persona muy cariñosa y entregada a su familia como también gozaba del parecido de quienes lo conocieron por ser buena persona.

Cabe mencionar, que estas personas que asesinaron a mi tío causaron un enorme daño a su familia, puesto que, dejó hijos huérfanos y una buena mujer como esposa viuda. Pero esto no es todo, lo más bonito de la justicia divina es que éstos hombres
malos yacen en el mismo lugar que mi tío, con la diferencia que mi tío se encuentra
gozando de un lugar lleno de paz y tranquilidad — según mi fé —, mientras que ellos
quién sabe dónde estarán.

Hoy en día la familia de mi tío se encuentra en el Departamento del Chocó, se
encuentran bien económicamente gracias a la ayuda de un hermano.

THE DEATH OF MY UNCLE

Following, I will tell you about the death of my uncle LDJLG, which occurred on
December 11, 2000, in the municipality of San Carlos, Antioquia.

He was a humble person, he worked in a small limes farm with which he
supported his family, which consisted of three children and his wife. It is then, that when
he had a crop, he would travel by bus to the Puerto Naré municipality in Antioquia,
selling his limes. When he was coming back in the two o’clock bus from Puerto Naré to
San Carlos, reaching a place called Puente Alcanzar, a truck passed the bus making it
stop according to the testimonies of the other passengers. In addition, they retell, that a
heavily armed man got on and made the passengers descend with the objective of
conducting a search, when finished, they detained my uncle and put him in the truck.

These men asked my uncle if he sold limes to the guerrillas and he replied that he
sold lime to all the people who wanted to buy them no matter who they were, since he
only cared about making an honest living to support his family that he loved so much.
However, these men drew their firearms and murdered him.

Now, his funeral was very sad for the family; Well, he was a very loving person
and dedicated to his family as he also enjoyed the opinion of those who knew him for
being a good person.
It is worth mentioning that these people who murdered my uncle caused enormous damage to his family, since he left orphaned children and a good woman as a widowed wife. But this is not all, the most beautiful thing about divine justice is that these evil men lie in the same place as my uncle, with the difference that my uncle is enjoying in a place full of peace and tranquility, according to my faith, while those [men] who knows where they will be.

Today my uncle's family is in the Department of Chocó, they are doing well financially thanks to the help of a brother.

JCOG, 8th Grade
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