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## Teaching and Telling Difficult Stories: An Analysis of Colombian Narratives of Violence

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TEACHING AND TELLING DIFFICULT STORIES:  
AN ANALYSIS OF COLOMBIAN NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1: OFFICIAL NARRATIVES IN COLOMBIAN TEXTBOOKS	1
Literature Review: Fitting the Past into a Textbook	1
Findings: Textbooks' Take on Conflict and Identity	26
Discussion: Victimization, Normalization, and the Use of History	51
Textbook Analysis: Concluding Remarks	53
CHAPTER 2: PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT	55
Literature Review: Narrative and Memory in Colombia	55
Methods	81
Findings: Stories Told	82
Discussion: The Voice of Emotion	108
Narrative Inquiry: Concluding Remarks	110
CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN TEACHING AND TELLING. RECONCILING NARRATIVES	111
Actions	112
Actors	113
Motives	114
Peace	115
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS	116
REFERENCES	118
VITA	125

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. “Masacre,” by Fernando Botero.	30
Figure 2. Categorization of IHL violations, emotions, and opinion.	37

## ABSTRACT

Making sense of chaos takes a narrative form. It is for that reason that efforts to find and comprehend narratives commonly follow violent events. After all, violence leaves societies in a state of turmoil that demands some sort of order. Such order can only be reached through the act of telling and hearing difficult stories. However, in societies affected by conflict, stories are as diverse and biased as people's experiences. Privileging a single story can have the unintended effect of aggravating violence by failing to recognize the validity of people's interpretations of war. Echoing an array of stories is therefore imperative for understanding and addressing violence.

Colombia serves as an intriguing case for the study of narratives of violence. After over five decades of war, the Colombian armed conflict has caused 220,000 deaths and displaced more than six million people.<sup>1</sup> The primary actors of war in Colombia can be categorized in three classes – guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups, and the official armed forces.<sup>2</sup> The paramilitary underwent a peace process between 2003 and 2006. After four years of negotiations, the FARC guerrilla group reached a peace agreement with the government in 2016. Peace negotiations with the ELN guerrilla group are currently in process. Due to the prolongation of the armed conflict, the majority of Colombia's population was born in the midst of war. Conflict has thus filtered down to inform Colombians' sense

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<sup>1</sup> Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad*, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *¡Basta Ya!* report, published by the National Center for Historical Memory, paramilitary groups have mainly executed massacres, selective assassinations, forced disappearances, and have repeatedly acted with a certain pleasure for violence; guerrilla groups have relied on kidnappings, terrorist attacks, forced recruitment, and have attacked civilian goods; and members of the Colombian armed forces have contributed to violence through arbitrary arrests, torture, selective assassinations, and enforced disappearances. See *Ibid.*

of self. Unveiling exactly how conflict relates to identity requires a careful examination of history through stories.

With the purpose of uncovering Colombians' relationship with war, this survey examines official and alternative narratives of violence. The first phase of this study analyzes social sciences textbooks, which represent the official narrative of war. Adding to the range of potential perspectives of conflict, the second phase of this study contrasts the textbooks' narrative with the personal narratives of eight young students in Tumaco, a conflict-afflicted city in the southwest end of Colombia.

Both official and alternative narratives reveal fascinating features of Colombians' understandings of the armed actors, the acts of war, the underlying motives of conflict, and the possibility of peace. But personal narratives differ greatly from textbooks' grand narrative in the modes of telling and connecting events. By exploring and contrasting multiple narratives, this study hopes to help make sense of Colombia's chaotic past.

## CHAPTER 1

### OFFICIAL NARRATIVES IN COLOMBIAN TEXTBOOKS

Understanding textbooks as tangible accounts of the official narrative of the past, the first phase of this study analyzes three Colombian eleventh-grade textbooks. This analysis serves the purpose of unveiling the most prominent features of textbooks' narrative of conflict and peace.

#### **Literature Review: Fitting the Past into a Textbook**

Textbook revision arose alongside the foundation of the League of Nations, as the League searched for ways to reduce xenophobia and avoid stereotypes.<sup>1</sup> The study of textbooks thus emerged from an initial interest in international, and primarily European, revision of textbooks in the aftermath of World War I. It took decades for revision to transform into research. As a scholarly endeavor, textbook analysis dates back to the 1950s, when the International Institute for the Improvement of Textbooks was established in Braunschweig.<sup>2</sup> Its founder, Georg Eckert, was encouraged by his belief that liberating textbooks of stereotypes and portrayals of the enemy would ultimately lead to

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<sup>1</sup> Falk Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 2nd ed. (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The International Institute for the Improvement of Textbooks, created in 1951, later received the name of Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research. Eckhardt Fuchs and Steffen Sammler, *Textbooks Between Tradition and Innovation: A Journey Through the History of the Georg Eckert Institute* (Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, 2016).



international understanding and peace.<sup>3</sup> From its beginnings, textbook analysis has been unquestionably linked to peace-building efforts.

Textbooks are particularly special as a literary genre<sup>4</sup> due to their claim of objectivity.<sup>5</sup> When dealing with history textbooks, the alleged objectivity of the textbook is even more problematic because readers are expected to act as passive assimilators of the truth.<sup>6</sup> But textbooks reveal much of the hierarchical configurations of a society. Social sciences textbooks not only influence the development of group identities, but they provide direct access to official accounts of present and past realities. Through textbooks, states and identity groups decide which knowledge ought to be passed on and define the cultural demarcations of societies, serving as sites for the production and reproduction of ethnonational identities.<sup>7</sup> But beyond aiding the production of identities, history textbooks are concrete windows to official narratives of the past.<sup>8</sup> In post-conflict contexts, history

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Whether or not the textbook can be categorized as a literary genre is a matter of debate. However, some studies define the textbook as a genre and place it at the center of peace and conflict studies. See, for example, Felipe Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*, Eckert. *Dossiers*, vol. 11 (Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Language textbooks, for example, contribute to how students think of others in a way that other genres do not, partly because “poetry, for example, makes no claim to being ‘objective.’” See Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Eleftherios Klerides and Michalinos Zembylas, “Identity as Immunology: History Teaching in Two Ethnonational Borders of Europe,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 47, no. 3 (2017): 416–33, doi:10.1080/03057925.2017.1292847.

<sup>7</sup> Fuchs and Sammler, *Textbooks Between Tradition and Innovation: A Journey Through the History of the Georg Eckert Institute*; Klerides and Zembylas, “Identity as Immunology: History Teaching in Two Ethnonational Borders of Europe.”

<sup>8</sup> Koullapis makes the relationship between textbooks and official narrative explicit when asserting, with respect to Cypriot textbooks in the twentieth century, that “[narratives] were introduced into the textbooks, or, in other words, they were transformed into state propaganda.” Loris Koullapis, “The Presentation of the Period 1071-1923 in Greek and Turkish Textbooks between 1950-2000,” *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 24, no. 3 (2002): 283, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43057295>. On a similar note, as a result of her analysis of Somali representations in Kenyan textbooks, Foulds argues that “the xenophobic ideology of the state is well represented in the national curriculum.” Kim Foulds, “The Somali Question: Protracted Conflict, National Narratives, and Curricular Politics in

education, albeit only one mechanism to deal with the past, establishes beliefs and represents the most systemic account of past events,<sup>9</sup> so that “the narrative of a society’s violent past as it is presented in history education is one of the most tangible official narratives of war.”<sup>10</sup> Analyzing history textbooks thus allows understanding processes of identification, and exploring patterns of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>11</sup> In post-conflict settings, it serves the additional purpose of unveiling the official narrative of conflict.

The following sections focus on post-conflict and peace education. The first step of the argument is an analysis of the role of textbooks in the process of defining the Self and the Other is discussed, emphasizing the possible problems that post-conflict identity-building might entail. Then, a separate section addresses the issue of common knowledge in the aftermath of violence, and the significance of history textbooks in peace education. The next section reviews relevant studies on Colombian history textbooks and their approach to the Colombian armed conflict. A final subsection summarizes common methodologies in the field of textbook analysis.

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Kenya,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 53.

<sup>9</sup> Karina V. Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-Conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 289–309.

<sup>10</sup> Dea Maric, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 85.

<sup>11</sup> Fuchs and Sammler, *Textbooks Between Tradition and Innovation: A Journey Through the History of the Georg Eckert Institute*.

## History Textbooks and Identity

The formation of identities can be defined as the simultaneous construction of the Self and the Other, so that identity-building processes are inevitably linked to the practice of “othering.”<sup>12</sup> To establish a collective identity, human groups naturally rely on the past and, when scaled up to national identities, on history teaching. For this reason, history textbooks often foster a given self-image, commonly stereotyped, that contributes to building a group identity.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, history and geography textbooks simultaneously contribute to the development of the individual’s self-esteem and to the establishment of the borderlines of societies.<sup>14</sup> Because group identities entail forms of inclusion and exclusion, how these identities are formed and what they signify are delicate matters.

Acknowledging the complexities of identity-building through history education, textbook analysts study how different human groups are portrayed in school texts, thus exploring how the Self and the Other are constructed and if there is place for other identities.<sup>15</sup> For example, Rossi studies how the Self is constructed as superior, rational, prudent, logical, consistent, victorious, efficient, competent, and heroic.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the Other can be represented in textbooks in four ways – as an existential threat, as inferior, as violating universal principles, or as different.<sup>17</sup> In contexts of conflict, the Self and the Other are necessarily attributed oppositional features because “every hero has an arch-

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<sup>12</sup> Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*.

<sup>13</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

enemy.”<sup>18</sup> Every characteristic that is attributed to the Self or the Other in textbooks can give place to challenging consequences.<sup>19</sup> In violent contexts, the most problematic potential outcomes of textbook-sponsored views of the Self and the Other are stereotyping, victimizing, and normalizing.

### ***Stereotyping***

The interest in textbooks’ assertions about an alien culture and how these may produce simplistic, stereotypical depictions of the Other dates back to the very foundation of textbook analysis as a field of study. Removing problematic portrayals of the Other from textbooks is particularly urgent in contexts where the Self and the Other have been traditionally constructed as antagonistic groups. As Tripathi suggests for the case of India and Pakistan, the image of an enemy, constructed at an early age, remains with many people until their later lives, so that perceiving the Other as an enemy hinders long-term sustainable peace.<sup>20</sup> On a similar note, history teaching in Cyprus is criticized both in the Turkish and the Greek sides of the country for promoting ethnocentric narratives of the Cyprian history and promoting two antagonistic identities.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of textbook analysis for recognizing stereotypical depictions of the Other is grounded on the idea that language and illustrations create selective views of a matter, coining

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 11:35.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Kinklioglu argues that describing the history of Russia as an “endless number of foreign assaults on the most peace-loving country in the world” in textbooks, prepares pupils to see the division of the world in two as something natural. Suat Kiniklioglu, “Images and Representations of Turks and Turkey in Soviet History Textbooks,” *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 29, no. 3 (2007): 269, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43056313>.

<sup>20</sup> Dhananjay Tripathi, “Sustainable Peace Between India and Pakistan: A Case for Restructuring the School Education System,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 125–38.

<sup>21</sup> Klerides and Zembylas, “Identity as Immunology: History Teaching in Two Ethnonational Borders of Europe”; Eleftherios Klerides, “(Re)Reading National Identities in School Historiographies: Pedagogical Implications from the Case of Cyprus,” *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2016): 269–83, doi:10.1080/14681366.2016.1150324.

knowledge, stereotypes, and prejudices.<sup>22</sup> Since the late 1990s, when experts at the UNESCO Conference on Combating Stereotypes and Prejudice in History Textbooks of South-East Europe suggested that it was necessary to neutralize the historical narrative of textbooks and include positive assertions of neighboring countries,<sup>23</sup> numerous studies have condemned stereotypical images in textbooks.<sup>24</sup> It is important to stress that images of both the Self and the Other can be equally stereotypical. While the Self tends to be credited with a number of positive attributions, post-conflict situations can give rise to a stereotypical, not necessarily positive, Self. The next subsections discuss instances where the stereotypical Self is presented in non-positive ways.

### ***Victimizing***

The first form of a weakened stereotypical Self is the victim. In societies that have been subject to ethnonational conflicts, history is often used to promote a narrative that emphasizes the suffering of the nation.<sup>25</sup> This can result in the adoption of the collective role of “the victim,”<sup>26</sup> which is

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<sup>22</sup> Sabine Rutar, “Beyond the Powder Keg? Representations of the Former Yugoslav Countries in Italian History Textbooks of the 1990s,” *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 6, no. 2 (2004): 183–204, doi:10.1080/1461319042000242056.

<sup>23</sup> Heike Karge, “Disarming History: UNESCO Conference on Combating Stereotypes and Prejudice in History Textbooks of South-East Europe,” *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 21, no. 4 (1999): 406–12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43056313>.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Kiniklioglu analyzes the images of Turks and Turkey in Soviet textbooks, arguing that these are usually stereotypical and chauvinistic. Such images persisted for seven decades despite important political and ideological changes. See Kiniklioglu, “Images and Representations of Turks and Turkey in Soviet History Textbooks.”

<sup>25</sup> Yiannis Papadakis, “Narrative, Memory and History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Schoolbooks on the ‘History of Cyprus,’” *History and Memory* 20, no. 2 (2008): 128–48.

<sup>26</sup> Marić argues this is the case of the dominant Croat narrative of the Homeland War. See Marić, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching.”

particularly problematic because developing a “victim psychology” in the minds of pupils, as forming an inferiority complex, are considered to be psychological problems.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the processes of victimization and marginalization take place simultaneously, as the roles of victim and perpetrator are defined immediately following the end of a conflict. In the case of the Uganda, Savard argues, former child soldiers were marginalized after the civil war.<sup>28</sup> In this context, the education system, and history education in particular, served as a tool to marginalize former child combatants.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, history textbooks may contribute to instances of marginalization. In the US, according to Dyck, through the denial of the genocide of indigenous peoples, textbooks contribute to the marginalization of indigenous groups.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Normalizing***

The second form of a weakened stereotypical Self is perhaps the most problematic when dealing with post-conflict societies. In sharp contrast to the victimized Self, the normalized Self takes violence as a natural feature of its culture, thus accepting violent acts as typical way of acting. In this sense, how a violent past is addressed is utterly relevant because “the past constitutes the identity of each group and determines what actions these groups *prefer to perform*.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Julieta Ktshanyan, “Problems around Teaching the History of the Armenian Genocide in Armenian Schools,” in *2016*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 207–18.

<sup>28</sup> Michelle Savard, “Using Education as a Political Tool to Advance Marginalization in Northern Uganda,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 157–75.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Kirsten Dyck, “Confronting Genocide Denial in US History Textbooks,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 191–205.

<sup>31</sup> Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-Conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned,” 300–301. Emphasis added.

The notion of an identity that normalizes violence is clearly troubling, especially in societies that have suffered violence for decades or even centuries. Such is the case of Colombia. After a long-standing tradition of violence, conflict seems to be entrenched in the social structure and the culture of the Colombian society.<sup>32</sup> According to Padilla and Bermúdez, there exists an automatic association between conflict and violence in Colombia, meaning that disputes are commonly addressed through violence.<sup>33</sup> Such association, deeply rooted in the Colombian culture, ought to be countered in order to achieve peace because peace education entails understanding and unlearning war.<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, studying how history education can aid in the process of unlearning war is an intricate task. Current literature on history education in post-conflict settings discusses ways in which violence is normalized, such as omitting actors and promoting insensibility towards the Other. In this sense, omitting actors can promote an identity grounded on violence, as “agentless histories give an impression of historical inevitability and promote perceptions of violence as naturalized or culturally transmitted.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, narratives of conflict and violence have commonly failed to address suffering as a shared experience, thus ignoring the experiences of the victims on the other side.<sup>36</sup> This practice can trigger the misconception of violence as a natural response.

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<sup>32</sup> Angélica Padilla and Ángela Bermúdez, “Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano,” *Revista Colombiana de Educación* 71 (2016): 219–51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Michelle J. Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 188.

<sup>36</sup> Denise Bontrovato and Martina Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 15–28.

However, just as history teaching may contribute to conflict, it can contribute to the re-humanization of the Other.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, revising historical narrative can help to avoid the normalization of violence and to prevent a group from building an identity around violence. According to Papadakis, abandoning the narrative form, that is, the telling of history as a single story of the nation, implies rejecting the idea that history has a sole, moral story.<sup>38</sup> This means that the future is no longer presumed to be historically determined.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, the way in which the history of conflict is told can either suggest that violence is natural and that the future is thus predetermined by violence, or contribute to peace-building efforts.

#### History Textbooks and Common Knowledge

History teaching, and history textbooks accordingly, play a significant role in the formulation and perpetuation of group identities. As individuals form memory through group interactions, individual memory and collective memories are ultimately inseparable, so that history teaching ultimately shapes personal identities.<sup>40</sup> From a collective memory approach, individual members of society are connected to the past, meaning that the past trajectory of society guides individual decisions and actions, producing a sense of social cohesion.<sup>41</sup> But collective memory does not simply emerge from a society's traditions. Rather, collective memory, understood as shared knowledge of the past, is

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<sup>37</sup> Mneesha Gellman, "Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone," in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 141–55.

<sup>38</sup> Papadakis, "Narrative, Memory and History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Schoolbooks on the 'History of Cyprus.'"

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Maria Paula Nascimento Araújo and Myrian Sepúlveda dos Santos, "History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications," *RCCS Annual Review* 1, no. 1 (2009), doi:10.4000/rccsar.157.

<sup>41</sup> Klerides, "(Re)Reading National Identities in School Historiographies: Pedagogical Implications from the Case of Cyprus."



carefully constructed.<sup>42</sup> As a social construction, it is the result of power resources surfacing from particular circumstances.<sup>43</sup>

More explicitly, memory reinforces a history that is formulated to create a given mindset.<sup>44</sup> This assertion naturally implies that *a* history is formulated *by someone*. The question of who formulates history, like that of who formulates memory, can be easily dismissed by attributing this process to those in power, since “they decide which narratives should be remembered, preserved and disseminated.”<sup>45</sup> Examining when to refer to *a* history rather than to *the* history, on the other hand, is a more complex endeavor, partly because not everyone *owns* the same history. This implies that not everyone is entitled to transmit history. To this point, and referring to the Guatemalan civil war, Bellino notes that mestizo educators “worried about teaching a story that they did not fully understand, or that was not theirs to tell.”<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, dealing with the past necessarily involves interests, power, and exclusion, so that memory essentially operates as a selective process. It is for this reason that memory has the capacity of becoming a political weapon.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ina Markova, “Balancing Victimhood and Complicity in Austrian History Textbooks: Visual and Verbal Strategies of Representing the Past in Post-Waldheim Austria,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 3, no. 2 (2011): 58–73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Clement Sefa-Nyarko, “Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bontrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 61–84.

<sup>45</sup> Nascimento Araújo and Sepúlveda dos Santos, “History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications,” 81.

<sup>46</sup> Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala,” 177.

<sup>47</sup> Nascimento Araújo and Sepúlveda dos Santos, “History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications.”

The power of memory is particularly notable after controversial events, as nations seek narratives that justify their actions.<sup>48</sup> Even when stripped off of its political connotation, history teaching in the aftermath of violence, signifying the transmission of the collective memory of conflict, encounters four major dilemmas. First, if history should be critical or monumental; that is, if students should be confronted with the complexity and multiperspectivity of conflict or if they should be transmitted myths that increase loyalty to the nation.<sup>49</sup> Second, if history should be thought of as a “thing of the past” or as a signal of the future.<sup>50</sup> Third, the tension between remembering and forgetting, which ultimately boils down to a question of efficiency: “what amount of remembering is most efficient for reconciliation?”<sup>51</sup> Fourth, if society should invest in remembrance or in reconstruction.<sup>52</sup>

The question of efficiency is of paramount importance in recovering societies, as shown by the frequent reference to “useful history” or “usable past” in the literature that relies on textbook analysis for conflict and post-conflict education systems. For instance, Gellman explains that “history education after violence is also charged with creating a ‘usable past.’”<sup>53</sup> Further, he advocates neither for a culture of silence or a culture of dialogue, but for a middle ground in which the past is taught as a useful vehicle of collective memory that can inspire students to contribute to peace.<sup>54</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>48</sup> Tripathi argues that this is the case of India and Pakistan after the partition. See Tripathi, “Sustainable Peace Between India and Pakistan: A Case for Restructuring the School Education System.”

<sup>49</sup> Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-Conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>52</sup> Korostelina, “History Education in the Midst of Post-Conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned.”

<sup>53</sup> Gellman, “Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone,” 152.

<sup>54</sup> Gellman, “Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone.”

Bentrovato mentions the need for a “usable past,” even if it counters a critical examination of the past.<sup>55</sup>

Although controversial, it seems reasonable for post-conflict educators to demand accounts of history to be useful for reconciliation. After all, education promotes understandings of and lessons from the past with the goal of preventing repetition and advancing reconciliation, so that addressing war and peace in the classroom has the fundamental role of instilling the motto “never again.”<sup>56</sup>

While standard criticisms to history education revolve around factual knowledge and the representation of cultures and situations, post-conflict education systems can be charged with the greater fault of not promoting peace or failing to prevent future violence. In these contexts, the question is not only how to educate younger generations, but how to educate them *for* the sake of a better future.<sup>57</sup> Navigating the tension between accuracy and usefulness – should the “real” past be taught or should it be suited to fit contemporary and future needs?<sup>58</sup> – is in no way straightforward. In the end, “it is necessary to find a balance between an obsession with the past and attempts to impose forgetting.”<sup>59</sup>

Thus, defining history education practices in post-conflict situations ultimately points to the purpose of education. For instance, choosing to discuss controversial topics may develop critical

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<sup>55</sup> Denise Bentrovato, “Whose Past, What Future? Teaching Contested Histories in Contemporary Rwanda and Burundi,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 221–42.

<sup>56</sup> Bentrovato and Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace.”

<sup>57</sup> Bentrovato, “Whose Past, What Future? Teaching Contested Histories in Contemporary Rwanda and Burundi.”

<sup>58</sup> Sefa-Nyarko suggests that textbooks transmit “acceptable historical narratives from the past into the present”, while alerting it in accordance to the present. See Sefa-Nyarko, “Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010.”

<sup>59</sup> Nascimiento Araújo and Sepúlveda dos Santos, “History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications,” 77.

thinking and foster dialogue, while transferring preconceived one-sided narratives can potentially deepen tensions and contribute to new conflicts.<sup>60</sup> However, the question on how an education system deals with a violent past and, therefore, what is considered to be “useful history,” is naturally complicated. There are few direct sources of information on the subject. It is for this reason that textbooks, recognized as critical sites of memory,<sup>61</sup> are amply used as sources of information on ways of dealing with the past through education. They hold all that is considered to be common patrimony, containing the knowledge that political authorities believe all citizens should learn.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the perspectives that are included or excluded from post-conflict textbooks simultaneously produce dominant narratives and silence alternative narratives of conflict.

### ***Censoring for Unity***

Dominant narratives can be understood simply as those that are most commonly transmitted. These are presented as objective narratives, disregarding the fact it is impossible to create an undisputed narrative or to exhibit total objectivity.<sup>63</sup> The most challenging issue with the perpetuation of dominant narratives is that they are presented as more accurate and more reliable than others, ultimately signifying that the dominant narrative is *the* only true account of a story. As can be easily deduced, the establishment of an overriding story necessarily implies that all other narratives are omitted or downplayed. Just as dominant narratives may render particular events more meaningful,

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<sup>60</sup> Maric, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching.”

<sup>61</sup> Gellman, “Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone.”

<sup>62</sup> Rutar, “Beyond the Powder Keg? Representations of the Former Yugoslav Countries in Italian History Textbooks of the 1990s.”

<sup>63</sup> Karge, “Disarming History: UNESCO Conference on Combating Stereotypes and Prejudice in History Textbooks of South-East Europe.”

they can also exaggerate or underestimate the presence of certain characters and populations.<sup>64</sup> Indirect actors of conflict, or bystanders, are prone to be left unaddressed, leading to problematic outcomes when teaching about traumatic events.<sup>65</sup> While the omission of actors and events may be a natural social response in post-conflict settings,<sup>66</sup> the purpose of censoring past events after intra-state conflicts is often to produce a unified, unifying narrative.

In countries with a legacy of conflict, textbooks are likely to silence the voices of diverse people and focus on the unified nation.<sup>67</sup> Such censorship can be as complex as the complete omission of a culture's voice or as simple as bypassing an apparently harmless fact, and it may be harmful in the longer term.<sup>68</sup> For example, Bentrivato argues that Burundian textbooks omit all reference to ethnicity.<sup>69</sup> Analogously, Tripathi notes that, with the purpose of defending a unified identity around Hinduism, Indian textbooks omit evidence that beef was consumed in ancient India.<sup>70</sup> Beyond the

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<sup>64</sup> For example, Koullapis mentions how Turkish textbooks in Cyprus do not record cultural influences of local peoples. See Koullapis, "The Presentation of the Period 1071-1923 in Greek and Turkish Textbooks between 1950-2000."

<sup>65</sup> For instance, Hirsch and McAndrew warn against the lack of space that history textbooks in Quebec devote to explaining the role of society in the Holocaust, stressing that, because the ideology that allowed the Holocaust to be carried out without significant criticism from society is left unexplained, textbooks encourage "the association of the idea with an absolute (rather than a more human) imagination of evil." See Sivane Hirsch and Marie McAndrew, "The Holocaust in the Textbooks and in the History and Citizenship Education Program of Quebec," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 6, no. 1 (2014): 30.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, the first generation of Armenian genocide survivors in the 1920s "were so terrified and emotionally exhausted after the massacres that for some time they attempted to forget the past and shield their descendants from its trauma." See Ktshanyan, "Problems around Teaching the History of the Armenian Genocide in Armenian Schools," 209.

<sup>67</sup> Julia Lerch, "Embracing Diversity? Textbook Narratives in Countries with a Legacy of Internal Armed Conflict, 1950 to 2011," in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrivato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 31-43.

<sup>68</sup> Bentrivato and Schulze, "Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace."

<sup>69</sup> Bentrivato, "Whose Past, What Future? Teaching Contested Histories in Contemporary Rwanda and Burundi."

<sup>70</sup> Tripathi, "Sustainable Peace Between India and Pakistan: A Case for Restructuring the School Education System."

evident problems that the censorship of actors entails, such as the issue of representation and definition of human groups – who defines whom, when, and how<sup>71</sup> – textbook censorship can produce pedagogic difficulties. In particular, it might collide with students’ personal experiences.<sup>72</sup> Students whose interpretations of war differ from the official narrative can choose to express their dissent in class or to remain silent, claiming, in both cases, that they know the “real” history.<sup>73</sup>

An additional form of censorship that some conflict and post-conflict textbooks pose is the lack of attention given to the reasons for conflict. For instance, one of Gellman’s critiques to the Sierra Leonean “culture of silence” around the civil war is the discourse of forgetting.<sup>74</sup> This discourse promotes advancing without addressing *why* the war occurred.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Bellino claims that Guatemalan textbooks neglect the internal circumstances that motivated the Peace Accords, thus wrongly situating the accords as an outcome of a global human rights movement.<sup>76</sup>

Perhaps the most extreme example of the potential reach of censorship and silence is the history of the Belgian Congo. The Belgian King Leopold II obtained Congo as a personal possession in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then brutally exploited Congo’s population.<sup>77</sup> Through forced labor and disproportionate measures of punishment and terror, King Leopold II benefited

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<sup>71</sup> Foulds, “The Somali Question: Protracted Conflict, National Narratives, and Curricular Politics in Kenya.”

<sup>72</sup> Bentravato and Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace.”

<sup>73</sup> Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala.”

<sup>74</sup> Gellman, “Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone.”

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala.”

<sup>77</sup> Geert Castryck, “Whose History Is History? Singularities and Dualities of the Public Debate on Belgian Colonialism,” in *Europe and the World in European Historiography*, ed. Csaba Lévai (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 71–88.

economically from the exploitation of Congo's rubber resources.<sup>78</sup> Estimates of the number of victims from massive killings and exposure to hardship, hunger, danger, and disease range from 100,000 to 10 million.<sup>79</sup> In the early 2000s, when a monograph about this horrific destruction was translated to French, Belgium was shocked.<sup>80</sup> According to Castryck, Belgians allegedly “did not know or did not want to know what historians – so they pretend – already knew for ages.”<sup>81</sup>

#### Current Literature on Colombian History Textbooks' Approach to Conflict

Analyses of Colombian textbooks are limited and not necessarily related to the history of conflict.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, current literature on social sciences education in Colombia relies on textbook revision to study the historiography of the Colombian armed conflict. For example, a recent survey on Colombian textbooks' representation of conflict analyzes 33 social sciences textbooks, published between 2003 and 2013, intended to be used in grades third through fifth.<sup>83</sup> In this study, Duque uses content analysis and description of trends as a methodological framework, further relying on quantitative methods to assess the presence of given categories in the content, activities, and iconography of textbooks.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Daza studies an eight-grade textbook to analyze its approach to US imperialism, race and ethnicity differences, and the discourse of progress. This study places the textbook as a storytelling device and applies storytelling as a methodology, focusing on the expository writing and its interplay with visuals. See Stephanie L. Daza, “Storytelling as Methodology: Colombia's Social Studies Textbooks after La Constitución de 1991,” *Qualitative Research in Education* 2, no. 3 (2013): 242–76, doi:10.4471/qre.2013.28.

<sup>83</sup> Luisa Fernanda Duque-Gómez, “Conflicto Social Colombiano: Representación En Textos Escolares de Ciencias Sociales,” *Magis, Revista Internacional de Investigación En Educación* 9, no. 19 (2017): 49–68, doi:10.11144/Javeriana.m9-19.cscr.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

As this study suggests, the experiences of the victims are seldom included. Indeed, in the 33 books that Duque analyses, the category of “Victims of the Colombian armed conflict” only represents 7.1% of the content and 2.1% of the activities.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, this category ranks highest in the analysis of textbooks’ iconography, with a presence of 22.8%.<sup>86</sup> It could be argued, then, that textbooks fail to address who the victims are and what war has meant to them. However, evidence of victims’ suffering is amply used to visually describe the reality of the armed conflict. Another utterly underrepresented category is “Definition of conflict,” with a representation of 6.3% in content and 0.7% in activities.<sup>87</sup> In short, textbooks’ narratives tend to omit the reasons that gave place to war, as well as to silence the voice of the victims.

Another relevant study on narratives of the Colombian conflict, published in early 2016, compares ninth-grade textbooks to a report, funded by the National Centre of Historical Memory, entitled *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* [Enough! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity].<sup>88</sup> The results of this study show that textbooks’ narrative follows a linear structure and emphasizes political actions, while the *¡Basta Ya!* report maps the causes of conflict in a web and underscores the victims.<sup>89</sup> According to this study, the word most frequently used in textbooks is “government.”<sup>90</sup> Textbooks also emphasize presidential periods, following a linear narrative

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Padilla and Bermúdez, “Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



structure.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the experience of victims is overlooked.<sup>92</sup> The description of victims' experiences is timid and general, thus disserving the purpose of comprehending the human dimension of war.<sup>93</sup>

In short, Padilla and Bermúdez argue, the narrative of conflict that Colombian textbooks offer privileges the perspective of the State, thus hindering the understanding of perspectives, objectives, and interests of the different stakeholders of conflict.<sup>94</sup> This narrative also dismembers the web of causal factors that explain the origin and transformation of conflict, and marginalizes the experience and the voice of the victims.<sup>95</sup> As a result, textbooks not only fail to explain the prolongation and degradation of conflict, but they also obstruct pupils' comprehension of the emotional, physical, social, cultural, and economic harm that conflict has done to Colombia.<sup>96</sup>

Although Duque draws on her textbook analysis to advocate for multiperspectivity and the inclusion of individual experiences of social conflict, she makes no specific recommendations as to how to reshape the traditional approach to the history of Colombian conflict. More importantly, due to the choice of textbook publication dates, the texts included in Duque's analysis barely address the peace negotiations that ultimately led to the ratification of the final Peace Accord in 2016. Similarly, because Padilla's and Bermúdez's study was published before the final Peace Accord was

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

announced, the impact that the alleged attainment of peace can have on dominant and neglected narratives is not addressed.

### Methods of Analysis

There are two general forms of textbook analysis – didactic analysis and content analysis.<sup>97</sup> The former refers to the pedagogy behind the text and the methodological approach to the topic, while the latter examines the text itself.<sup>98</sup> Textbook analysis generally focuses on content, intent, and omission, meaning that textbook analysts are interested in what is said, how it is said, and what is not said.<sup>99</sup> Investigating the factual knowledge provided by textbooks and its interpretations allows analysts to grasp the overall image of the past that the text presents.<sup>100</sup> In each case, textbook analysts search for patterns and surprises within and among texts, supporting their assertions about and critiques of

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<sup>97</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Maric, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching.”

<sup>100</sup> Petar Todorov, “Teaching History in Macedonia after 2001: Representations of Armed Conflict between Ethnic Macedonians and Ethnic Albanians,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrovato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 111–24.

textbooks' narratives on direct citations.<sup>101</sup> Patterns can be found with respect to a number of instances, such as representation,<sup>102</sup> politization,<sup>103</sup> marginalization,<sup>104</sup> and denial.<sup>105</sup>

Textbook analysts have implemented a number of techniques, primarily comparative, to determine how appropriate a particular text is. Some compare textbooks from different countries;<sup>106</sup> some compare textbooks written in different time periods;<sup>107</sup> some compare the facts, terms, context, periodization, and interpretation of events with the findings of academic research and debate;<sup>108</sup> and some study teachers' and students' responses to textbooks, with particular interest in how textbooks' narratives fit in with their knowledge and practice.<sup>109</sup> More recently, textbook analysts have shown

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Foulds, "The Somali Question: Protracted Conflict, National Narratives, and Curricular Politics in Kenya"; Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*; Tripathi, "Sustainable Peace Between India and Pakistan: A Case for Restructuring the School Education System."

<sup>102</sup> With an interest on representation, Foulds addresses the questions of who is shown in Kenyan textbooks, who is not, and where are they situated. See Foulds, "The Somali Question: Protracted Conflict, National Narratives, and Curricular Politics in Kenya."

<sup>103</sup> For example, Sefa-Nyarko analyzes trends in the "politization of history" in Ghanaian textbooks from the period 1987-2010. See Sefa-Nyarko, "Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010."

<sup>104</sup> For example, Savard studies how the dominant narrative is presented in the Ugandan education system and how it serves to marginalize northern Ugandans. See Savard, "Using Education as a Political Tool to Advance Marginalization in Northern Uganda."

<sup>105</sup> For example, Dyck analyzes contemporary textbooks to examine the denial of genocide in the US. See Dyck, "Confronting Genocide Denial in US History Textbooks."

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*. This study compares narratives about the War of the Pacific in order to analyze how the Self and the Other are constructed in Chilean, Peruvian, and Bolivian textbooks.

<sup>107</sup> For example, Sefa-Nyarko, "Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010."

<sup>108</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Christiane Hintermann et al., "Debating Migration in Textbooks and Classrooms in Austria," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 6, no. 1 (2014): 79–106; Sefa-Nyarko, "Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010"; Ktshanyan, "Problems around Teaching the History of the Armenian Genocide in Armenian Schools"; Meenakshi Chhabra, "A Social-

interest in the use of images in textbooks, arguing that pictures guide memory.<sup>110</sup> Few studies make explicit reference to the activities proposed in textbooks<sup>111</sup> or to the time allocated to the topic.<sup>112</sup>

With respect to content analysis, authors commonly categorize the textbooks' narrative according to themes that are relevant to a particular topic of interest.<sup>113</sup> Choosing a particular theme, event, or character to search for in textbooks serves to guide comparison.<sup>114</sup> Discursive analysis relies on a number of practices, such as searching for specific terms and adjectives in the textbooks.<sup>115</sup> For instance, to assess how the historical narrative is constructed, as well as its possible implications, Sharp analyzes five qualities of textbook narratives: labels, features, arguments, perspectives, and

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Psychological Perspective on Teaching a Historical Event of Collective Violence: The Case of the 1947 British India Partition,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrivato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 243–56; Clare Magill, “Approaches to Teaching the Civil War and Franco Dictatorship in Contemporary Spain,” in *History Can Bite: History Education in Divided and Postwar Societies*, ed. Denise Bentrivato, Karina V. Korostelina, and Martina Schulze (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2016), 257–86.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Markova, “Balancing Victimhood and Complicity in Austrian History Textbooks: Visual and Verbal Strategies of Representing the Past in Post-Waldheim Austria”; Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*.

<sup>111</sup> For examples of textbook analysis including references to activities and tasks, see Rossi Schmechel, *The Constructions of Self and Other in the History Textbooks of Bolivia, Chile, and Peru in Relation to the War of the Pacific*; Maric, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching.”

<sup>112</sup> For an example of a critique to the lack of time spent on a lesson, see Maric, “The Homeland War in Croatian History Education: Between ‘Real Truth’ and Innovative History Teaching.”

<sup>113</sup> For example, Kiniklioglu categorized the context of textbooks according to seven themes, ranging from “Ottoman Turkish Advances prior to the Nineteenth Century” to “The Cold War.” Kiniklioglu, “Images and Representations of Turks and Turkey in Soviet History Textbooks.”

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Sefa-Nyarko, “Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010.”

<sup>115</sup> See Koullapis, “The Presentation of the Period 1071-1923 in Greek and Turkish Textbooks between 1950-2000”; Savard, “Using Education as a Political Tool to Advance Marginalization in Northern Uganda.”

prioritization of utterances.<sup>116</sup> As the case of Mayan peoples in Guatemalan textbooks demonstrates, the tense in which representations are written can also be relevant. In this instance, efforts to remove discriminatory representations of the Mayas from textbooks included eliminating excerpts that referred to Maya peoples in the past tense.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Bellino notes that textbooks rely excessively on passive voice to relate the events of the Guatemalan conflict.<sup>118</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Confronting history is commonly depicted as one of the keys to achieving peace in the aftermath of violence, yet education systems have failed to help younger generations make sense of the past.<sup>119</sup> It is for this reason that textbook analysis in post-conflict settings is critical. As dominant patterns of conflict shifted from external to internal wars, and peace came to be understood as primarily fragile, the object of textbook revision changed, and textbooks became part of a broader interest in peace education, within which reconciliation is a paramount goal.<sup>120</sup> In this sense, current literature on textbook analysis suggests that a textbook equipped to inform peace education should deconstruct historical myths and avoid ethnocentric perspectives, thus promoting social inclusiveness.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Heather Sharp, “Representing Australia’s Involvement in the First World War: Discrepancies between Public Discourses and School History Textbooks from 1916 to 1936,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–23.

<sup>117</sup> Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala.”

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Todorov, “Teaching History in Macedonia after 2001: Representations of Armed Conflict between Ethnic Macedonians and Ethnic Albanians”; Bentrovato and Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace.”

<sup>120</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>121</sup> Todorov, “Teaching History in Macedonia after 2001: Representations of Armed Conflict between Ethnic Macedonians and Ethnic Albanians.”

As discussed before, debates on role of education in post-conflict settings show tension between requests to remember and to overcome past violence. While some warn against fixating on traumatic events, others stress the danger of being oblivious to the legacies of conflict and injustice.<sup>122</sup> Said tension materializes in post-conflict education in a number of debates, such as the juxtaposition of diversity and cohesion.<sup>123</sup> Although cultures of silence continue to exist in the period immediately following violence, there is evidence that reflecting on a negative past consciously and openly can become a value in itself, as dealing with the past takes a positive meaning.<sup>124</sup> In addition, remembering traumatic events is essential because “violence is more likely to reoccur within cultures of silence.”<sup>125</sup>

The overall global acceptance of a new approach to history teaching, one that promotes critical thinking and teaches students to think like a historian, has resulted in the interest for including multiple perspectives in textbooks. From this perspective, students should have access of a variety of primary sources, experiences, and interpretations in order to develop critical thinking skills.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, confronting young students with the realities of war is a delicate process, as being exposed to historical documents detailing horrific scenes may have an overdose effect.<sup>127</sup> In addition,

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<sup>122</sup> Bentrovato and Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace.”

<sup>123</sup> Lerch argues that education systems in post-conflict contexts face the tension between the valorization of multiple minority groups and the construction of a unified nation. Lerch, “Embracing Diversity? Textbook Narratives in Countries with a Legacy of Internal Armed Conflict, 1950 to 2011.”

<sup>124</sup> Pingel, *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*.

<sup>125</sup> Gellman, “Only Looking Forward: The Absence of War History in Sierra Leone,” 142.

<sup>126</sup> Bentrovato and Schulze, “Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace.”

<sup>127</sup> Ktshanyan, “Problems around Teaching the History of the Armenian Genocide in Armenian Schools.”

some history teachers argue that including multiple narratives can be confusing and excessive,<sup>128</sup> and that the use of sources that have not been approved by the state must be handled with discretion.<sup>129</sup> Further, frequent revisions to curricula and textbooks can have the unintended consequence of lowering people's confidence in the educational system.<sup>130</sup> In short,

“The inclusion of more diverse historical actors and conflicting representations of the past in textbooks cannot stand on its own as a policy recommendation. It also requires as a corollary a policy commitment to the making of *(more) coherent*, pluralist identities and histories.”<sup>131</sup>

Textbook analysis for the promotion of peace should consequently examine how the Self and the Other are constructed, paying special attention to the potential forms of victimization and normalization that may develop from textbooks. Moreover, examining post-conflict textbooks is useful in determining the official narrative of conflict. Adding traditionally neglected narratives of conflict to textbooks is a possible solution to the problematic unicity of the dominant narrative, but it must be handled with extreme caution. Alternative narratives, in the form of life stories, have a growing place in history teaching.<sup>132</sup> In the particular case of Colombia, current literature suggests that history textbooks overlook the personal narratives of victims and indirect actors, underscoring political actions. However, the newness of the Peace Accord's announcement, defeat, revision, and

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<sup>128</sup> Chhabra, “A Social-Psychological Perspective on Teaching a Historical Event of Collective Violence: The Case of the 1947 British India Partition.”

<sup>129</sup> Sefa-Nyarko, “Competing Narratives of Post-Independence Violence in Ghanaian Social Studies Textbooks, 1987 to 2010.”

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Klerides, “(Re)Reading National Identities in School Historiographies: Pedagogical Implications from the Case of Cyprus,” 280.

<sup>132</sup> For example, personal testimonies of the Holocaust are made available to students through literature and film. Hirsch and McAndrew, “The Holocaust in the Textbooks and in the History and Citizenship Education Program of Quebec.”

eventual approval inevitably limits the scope of previous research on Colombian post-accord education.

### Methods

In accordance with Colombian regulations for social sciences education, eleventh-graders are expected to understand the emergence of the guerrillas, the paramilitary, and drug trafficking in Colombia.<sup>133</sup> In addition, students should assume a critical stand on the peace processes that have taken place in Colombia,<sup>134</sup> taking into account the standpoints of all the implicated parts.<sup>135</sup> For this reason, this study considers the three most popular eleventh-grade social sciences textbooks used in Colombian schools in 2017: *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer, Sociales 11*,<sup>136</sup> from Santillana (hereafter Santillana), along with its accompanying pamphlet *Educación Para la Paz 11*,<sup>137</sup> *Avanza Sociales 11*,<sup>138</sup> from Norma (hereafter Norma); and *Applica 11, Ciencias Sociales*,<sup>139</sup> from SM (hereafter SM).

Each of these sources was reviewed to elucidate how each textbook approaches the Colombian armed conflict. First, an exploratory reading of the texts informed the choice of categories that would structure the analysis. Then, pieces of the narrative, proposed activities, and imagery of the textbooks

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<sup>133</sup> Ministerio de Educación Nacional, “Estándares Básicos de Competencias En Lenguaje, Matemáticas, Ciencias y Ciudadanas. Guía Sobre Lo Que Los Estudiantes Deben Saber y Saber Hacer Con Lo Que Aprenden” (2006).

<sup>134</sup> There have been several attempts to find a negotiated end to the conflict. Failed attempts took place in 1981, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1998, 1999, and 2002. The final negotiations initiated in 2012.

<sup>135</sup> Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguaje, Matemáticas, Ciencias y Ciudadanas. Guía sobre lo que los estudiantes deben saber y saber hacer con lo que aprenden.

<sup>136</sup> Jessica Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11* (Bogotá: Santillana, 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Miguel Ángel Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11* (Bogotá: Santillana, 2017).

<sup>138</sup> José Eduardo Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11* (Bogotá: Norma, 2015).

<sup>139</sup> Pablo Aristizábal Castrillón, María Johanna Castaño Pachón, and Osvaldo Vladimir Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales* (Bogotá: SM, 2016).



were categorized into five themes: armed conflict in Colombia, other social and armed conflicts, identity, inequality, and additional information. The topic of armed conflict in Colombia was further categorized into concepts, causes, actors, actions, consequences, and victims. Analyzing text and images, it was possible to find patterns in the narrative of each of the textbooks. Moreover, the three textbooks were compared in a final stage of analysis. This stage allowed to unveil the most relevant features of the dominant narrative of the Colombian armed conflict.

### **Findings: Textbooks' Take on Conflict and Identity**

#### **Identity: The Colombian Self**

Textbooks tend to define Colombia as part of a broader category. With expressions such as “in developing countries like Colombia,”<sup>140</sup> textbooks place Colombia within the greater collective of developing countries. However, Colombian identity is more commonly linked to a wider Latin American distinctiveness.<sup>141</sup> In fact, each of the textbooks reviewed in this study addresses Latin American, rather than Colombian, history.<sup>142</sup> For instance, SM states that “the conquest of the continent promoted a certain cultural uniformity, that currently exists. Catholicism is the predominant religion, and Spanish and Portuguese are the most spoken languages.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>141</sup> For instance, Norma includes a picture of a marginal neighborhood with the caption “peripheral neighborhood of a Latin American city.” This caption suggests that both cities and social classes are constructed similarly in all of Latin America. See Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 29.

<sup>142</sup> For example, Santillana examines the political history of Latin America, Norma discusses the history of recent economic developments in Latin America, and SM comments on the common features of Latin American architecture and geopolitics. See Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 110–35; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 68–72; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 68,82-85.

<sup>143</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 82.

The correspondence between the Colombian Self and the Latin American Self is further constructed in opposition to other identities. Textbooks present Colombia as part of a greater set of developing countries that are fundamentally different from developed countries.<sup>144</sup> In general, contrasts between countries “like Colombia” and developed countries stresses the economic superiority of the Other, further highlighting how Colombia struggles with social problematics alien to developed countries. A striking example of this view is SM’s incorporation of an image of a homeless man in Paris, followed by the caption “in developed countries, there *also* exist serious poverty problems.”<sup>145</sup> The fact that a comment on the existence of poverty in developed countries is needed, points to textbooks’ assumption that Colombian students presume the social superiority of the developed Other.

This contrast is further underscored by textbooks’ emphasis on global inequality. To be sure, textbooks frequently point out causes and expressions of international inequality, such as geographical privileges,<sup>146</sup> the power of the West and the American hegemony,<sup>147</sup> the way external debt shapes Latin American realities,<sup>148</sup> and the general constitution of power structures within international organizations.<sup>149</sup> Textbooks also comment on how research, innovation, and technology

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<sup>144</sup> For instance, Norma states that “Western European countries registered a fast increase in their industrial production. A similar situation occurred in the United States and Australia ... Meanwhile, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean have been left behind.” Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 85. Similar contrasts can be found in each of the books. See Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 27, 56, 59, 99, 101; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 20.

<sup>145</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 49. Emphasis added.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>148</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 23–27.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 158, 161.

serve as sites of inequality,<sup>150</sup> explaining that globalization processes have exacerbated existing disparities.<sup>151</sup> For instance, Santillana states that “globalization is dehumanizing”<sup>152</sup> and that it has hindered the construction of territorialized identities.<sup>153</sup> Noting the decay of globalization, Norma points to the regionalization of Latin America. The authors highlight that some Latin American countries have adopted the motto “our north is the south.”<sup>154</sup>

### ***The Positive Self versus the Negative Self***

Textbooks include only a few positive comments about Colombia, mostly related to the country’s diversity, both cultural and natural.<sup>155</sup> In particular, biodiversity is underscored as a valuable, incomparable feature of the country. For instance, SM states that Colombia is “recognized globally as one of the most biodiverse [countries].”<sup>156</sup> On a similar note, Santillana notes that “*here*, there is 10% of the earth’s biodiversity.”<sup>157</sup> The use of the word *here* when referring to Colombia’s biodiversity contrasts with other pieces of Santillana’s narrative, most prominently with an excerpt from the chapter on conflicts in Latin America. In this section, Santillana states that

“The armed conflict in Colombia is the only current war on a large scale in Latin America. *There*, since 1960, the military forces, the paramilitary, and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN),

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<sup>150</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 101.

<sup>151</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 76.

<sup>152</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 34.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>154</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 26.

<sup>155</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 163.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>157</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 83. Emphasis added.

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) guerrillas, have been confronted.”<sup>158</sup>

It could be argued that Santillana encourages a sense of attachment to diversity that contrasts with a certain alienation from conflict. However, the constant reference to Colombia as a place of conflict is outstandingly common among the textbooks. This is sometimes set in opposition to the stability of the institutions<sup>159</sup> or with the values enshrined in the Constitution.<sup>160</sup> Textbooks characterize this reality as paradoxical<sup>161</sup> or ambivalent.<sup>162</sup>

Textbooks suggest that the armed conflict, along with some related problematics, has permeated every dimension of the Colombian identity. In most sections of the textbooks, regardless of whether they address economics, history, or geography, the conflict appears as defining the overall Colombian landscape. For instance, at the end of the chapter on the history of Latin American economy, Santillana introduces a proposed activity in which students are asked about the way in which the armed conflict has shaped the dynamics of investment, management of resources, and life styles in Colombia.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Norma examines the configuration of geographical space in relation to conflict.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>159</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 99; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 114.

<sup>160</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 171.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>162</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 99.

<sup>163</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 28.

<sup>164</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 31.

Additionally, textbooks include more explicit references to the effect of the armed conflict in the establishment of a collective culture. For example, SM states that “[drug trafficking] has been the driving force of a subculture in which illegality, easy money, and the ‘anything goes’ are seen as models to copy.”<sup>165</sup> SM further suggests that the presence of drug trafficking and armed groups has “modified the ethical values of the population.”<sup>166</sup> Finally, Santillana presents an image of *Masacre* [Massacre], a painting by Colombian artist Fernando Botero. The caption states that “violence is a referent that has penetrated *our* history, and that has been represented countless times through art.”<sup>167</sup> It could be argued that, by referring to Colombian art and using first person plural in the caption, Santillana links violence to Colombia’s culture and identity.



Figure 1. "Masacre," by Fernando Botero. Taken from Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 206.

As collective identity shapes personal identities,<sup>168</sup> textbooks assume that students identify themselves as Colombians and that they understand the disadvantages that such identity entails. For

<sup>165</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 122.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>167</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 206. Emphasis added.

<sup>168</sup> Nacimiento Araújo and Sepúlveda dos Santos, “History, Memory and Forgetting: Political Implications.”

instance, when examining migration patterns in the region, Santillana quotes testimonies of illegal Colombians in Venezuela. One of the problems addressed is the *stigmatization* for being Colombian.<sup>169</sup> The reasoning behind stigmatization is left unaddressed, thus suggesting that students understand why being Colombian might be intrinsically prejudicial.

### Approaching Conflict

#### ***Foreign Conflicts***

Colombian textbooks' approach to war goes beyond the Colombian armed conflict. Textbooks often discuss social struggle around the globe, commonly including images of social protest or mobilization.<sup>170</sup> Textbooks also examine foreign conflicts and compare the Colombian conflict to other wars. For example, SM offers a whole section on armed conflicts in Africa<sup>171</sup> and Santillana lists six wars in Africa and three in Asia. For each conflict, Santillana offers a brief description of the beginnings, development, and present state of war.<sup>172</sup> Textbooks also describe foreign peace processes, such as the negotiation process leading to the independence of South Sudan,<sup>173</sup> the peace accords achieved in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala,<sup>174</sup> and the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel of 1978.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 101.

<sup>170</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 116,135,139,170; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 109,163,166; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 71,110-111,115,154,166,212; Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 16.

<sup>171</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 87.

<sup>172</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 172–73.

<sup>173</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 86.

<sup>174</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 174.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

When searching for common features among diverse conflicts, textbooks tend to focus on the victims, stressing how war affects civilians. Reference to foreign victims is mostly seen in textbooks' imagery. For example, Norma includes a picture of a group of women and children in front of a military tank in Palestine,<sup>176</sup> Santillana presents an image of a refugee camp in Rwanda,<sup>177</sup> and SM incorporates a picture of victims in Kenia.<sup>178</sup> In SM, an image of a child standing in front of a group of soldiers is described with the caption "as in *all* armed conflicts, the civil population remains in the middle of war."<sup>179</sup> In addition, textbooks emphasize the role that sexual violence has played in particular conflicts,<sup>180</sup> exemplifying how "sexual aggression becomes a tool of war."<sup>181</sup>

Most comparisons between foreign wars and the Colombian armed conflict are left for the proposed activities. For example, as part of the section on African armed conflicts, SM includes the testimony of a former child combatant in Congo who describes soldiers as murderers, thieves, and bandits who kill and rob the civil population, regardless of their tribes.<sup>182</sup> Following the testimony of the Congolese child cited from a report by Save the Children, SM asks students to search for the testimony of a Colombian child who has been recruited by guerrilla or paramilitary groups and to discuss the similarities between the two cases.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 158.

<sup>177</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 198.

<sup>178</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 87–89.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–89,93.

<sup>181</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 121.

<sup>182</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 87.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

In the same vein, Santillana proposes an activity in which students are invited to research at least two recent peace and reconciliation processes taking place in Africa. Then, students are asked to examine the steps followed in these processes and to reflect on how they could apply to the Colombian context.<sup>184</sup> Overall, by contrasting peace processes abroad to the Colombian conflict, textbooks imply that Colombia could benefit from considering the lessons learned abroad.

### ***Sources of Knowledge About Conflict***

In general terms, the textbooks reviewed in this study have an informative narrative that emphasizes political events and presidential periods.<sup>185</sup> This is consistent with previous studies of Colombian textbooks.<sup>186</sup> Emphasis on legal concepts is also frequent, particularly in the sections that link the principles of International Humanitarian Law to the Colombian armed conflict.<sup>187</sup> Political and legal narrative is sometimes contrasted with references to previous knowledge, personal experiences, testimonies, or alternative sources. In this sense, while Santillana introduces the conflict from an outsider's perspective,<sup>188</sup> both SM and Norma assume a certain level of previous knowledge of the Colombian armed conflict.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 170.

<sup>185</sup> For example, SM presents a table with pictures of each of Colombia's presidents from Alberto Lleras Camargo (president 1958-1962) to Virgilio Barco (president 1986-1990), offering a brief description of their government and their approach to the armed conflict. See Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 114–15.

<sup>186</sup> See Padilla and Bermúdez, “Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano”; Duque-Gómez, “Conflicto Social Colombiano: Representación En Textos Escolares de Ciencias Sociales.”

<sup>187</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 152–56; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 192–212; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 128–31.

<sup>188</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 175.

<sup>189</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 77; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 88–89.



Regarding personal experience, one of the textbooks' only allusions to students' individual understanding is SM's question "what actions related to the armed conflict do you remember? Which has been the most shocking to you? Why?"<sup>190</sup> The fact that students' personal experience is barely addressed stands in sharp contrast to the textbooks' consistent association of the Colombian collective identity with the armed conflict. Moreover, in asking students to share their memories in such a casual manner, textbooks presume that the reader is not a victim, as it would be irresponsible to treat stories of trauma without a sufficient support system, which can assure that these stories will not be used irresponsibly.

Significantly more common than personal experiences, while still not central, are references to victims' testimonies, which are usually cited from news articles or official reports. For instance, Norma quotes the testimony of a displaced family and asks students to reflect on the intention behind the interview.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, Santillana's pamphlet includes the stories of two child soldiers who were recruited by guerrilla groups in Colombia. Students are expected to use these stories to discuss how the armed conflict has affected Colombian children and teenagers.<sup>192</sup> Finally, SM cites the testimony of an unnamed indigenous person who explains how antipersonnel mines have impacted the community.<sup>193</sup>

In contrast to the testimonies of victims, SM includes an excerpt of the personal confession of a *narco* [drug lord], who highlights his charity work and his role as a father, husband, and friend. SM

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<sup>190</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 118.

<sup>191</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 22.

<sup>192</sup> Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 17.

<sup>193</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 128.

asks students to analyze the text and identify unsettling contradictions in the drug lord's narrative.<sup>194</sup>

This activity perfectly exemplifies how Colombian textbooks recognize the growing normalization of violence, while making an important effort to counteract such normalization. In this case, SM expects students to find it contradictory to be both involved in drug trafficking and to be committed to social work. Moreover, the authors seem to anticipate that students will find this testimony disconcerting.

Other activities ask students to search for victims' testimonies as primary sources for learning about the Colombian armed conflict. For example, Santillana asks students to find the testimony of a victim of antipersonnel mines and to honor the victims by designing a poster about victims' rights.<sup>195</sup> Textbooks also direct students to search for personal testimonies about different topics, such as Mexican immigrants' lives in the United States<sup>196</sup> and communities in the Colombian-Venezuelan border.<sup>197</sup>

Interestingly, students are also encouraged to search for testimonies among their families. For example, one of Norma's proposed activities from the chapter on *La Violencia* asks students to talk to elderly relatives to inquire about the memories they have from this time.<sup>198</sup> The fact that students are invited to search for narratives among their families points to two important findings. First, that textbooks can fairly assume that *all* of the students' families will remember *La Violencia*. This fact supports the idea that the age of violence that characterized Colombia in the twentieth century is part

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>195</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 211.

<sup>196</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 67.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>198</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 100.

of the collective memory. Second, that students are expected to feel emotionally connected to this time of suffering, yet distant enough that they can comfortably share these family histories with their teachers or classmates.

In an analogous activity, SM asks students to conduct a survey among their classmates, friends, teachers, and families, to learn about other people's knowledge of the actors, events, political perspectives, and consequences of the Colombian armed conflict.<sup>199</sup> With this activity, SM not only acknowledges that different people will potentially carry different accounts of the conflict, but also encourages students to learn about diverse perspectives. Textbooks also lead students to videos, movies, reports, news, and other alternative sources on the armed conflict.<sup>200</sup> However, victims' voices are not central to the textbooks' narrative of conflict and are mostly found in proposed activities. If students are expected to form a broad perspective of the social and humanitarian underpinnings of conflict, they are expected to do so through their own research.

#### Colombian Armed Conflict: Official Narratives

The three textbooks reviewed in this study approach the history of the armed conflict from a similar perspective, presenting general information and statistics about the scope of Colombia's armed conflict in an instructive way. However, when assessing the textbooks' angle on the essence of the armed conflict, Santillana shows a narrative distinct from the narrative in SM and Norma. Santillana follows an orderly, methodical strategy for explaining the armed conflict. In contrast, SM and Norma highlight the conflict's complexity and transformation.

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<sup>199</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 109.

<sup>200</sup> See, for example, *Ibid.*, 113, 117, 120, 127; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 89, 109; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 29.

More specifically, Santillana offers concrete definitions of internal conflicts<sup>201</sup> and crimes against humanity,<sup>202</sup> further classifying violent actions.<sup>203</sup> Santillana's emphasis on categorizing expressions of violence can be appreciated in the following table, included as one of the suggested activities in Santillana's peace education pamphlet. In this activity, students are invited to analyze three images of victims, which are contrasted with IHL regulations, and to express their emotions and opinions about each of the images.




Imagen	Normas del Derecho Internacional Humanitario	En Colombia ocurrió	Emociones que experimentas ante este hecho	Opinión
	"Se prohíbe atacar la vida, la integridad y los bienes de la población civil, aún si esta simpatiza con uno de los bandos en conflicto".	"Los grupos paramilitares y los guerrilleros atacaron civiles de manera selectiva, saquearon sus bienes por considerarlos simpatizantes del enemigo".		
	"Ningún civil puede ser forzado a abandonar su propiedad o su territorio".	"Los desplazados son el grupo más numeroso de víctimas del conflicto. En la actualidad hay cerca de tres millones de desplazados".		
	"Las mujeres y los niños gozarán de trato especial por parte de los combatientes, quienes respetarán su integridad física".	"Las mujeres y los niños son las principales víctimas del conflicto. Las vejaciones sexuales a las mujeres y el reclutamiento forzado de los niños".		

Figure 2. Categorization of IHL violations, emotions, and opinion. Taken from Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz* 11, 25.

By asking students to relate to these images emotionally, textbooks suggest how history *should* feel. The same is true for a number of instances where emotions and attitudes, such as empathy, optimism, honesty, gratitude, fear, and tolerance, are defined and linked to the content.<sup>204</sup> Although the extent to which it is admissible to guide emotions through this type of activities is beyond the scope of this analysis, it is fascinating angle to view how textbooks aid identity-building processes.

<sup>201</sup>Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 196.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>204</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 18, 29, 35, 56, 66, 89, 92, 102, 108, 121, 126, 143, 152, 164; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 30, 44, 56; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 32.

By guiding emotion, textbooks construct a “moral of the story.”<sup>205</sup> This, in turn, contributes to establish a common, cohesive imagination that connects individuals to past events.<sup>206</sup>

Beyond conceptualizing violence, Santillana introduces the Colombian armed conflict as one of various examples of internal conflicts. The authors argue, for example, that

“Some examples [of armed confrontations] are the armed conflict in Colombia, the civil wars in Somalia and Libya, the uprising of the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the civil war in Syria, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the terrorist actions of extremist Islamic groups in many countries.”<sup>207</sup>

Particular events occurred during the Colombian conflict, such as the Bojayá massacre, are cited as examples of victimhood.<sup>208</sup>

Overall, Santillana gives the impression that the Colombian armed conflict can be unpacked to fit a schematic outline of war. It is likely that this approach could help students contrast the Colombian reality to other circumstances, encouraging them to find patterns and warning signs of lessons learned elsewhere. However, Santillana’s systematic approach fails to ground the armed conflict in the history of Colombia, thus limiting students’ opportunities for making sense of the past. In sharp contrast, the narrative found in SM and Norma suggests that the Colombian armed conflict is a nearly organic process that has grown, transformed, and mutated for decades.

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<sup>205</sup> Shreya Ghosh, “Identity, Politics, and Nation-Building in History Textbooks in Bangladesh,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 6, no. 2 (2014): 25–41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44320033>.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.; Klerides, “(Re)Reading National Identities in School Historiographies: Pedagogical Implications from the Case of Cyprus.”

<sup>207</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 188.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

The idea of conflict as a mutating process is most evident in textbooks' choice of words. For example, SM states that mid-twentieth-century Colombia experienced a crisis in its democratic institutions that “*converted* into armed confrontation the struggle between supporters of liberalism and conservatism, *incubated* in almost two decades of isolated violence.”<sup>209</sup> Norma, on the other hand, states the “the armed conflict experimented an intense *mutation* from the decade of 1990.”<sup>210</sup> Norma also has a section entitled “Paramilitary: demobilization and mutation,” in which the authors assert that paramilitary groups did not disappear after the peace process leading to their demobilization between 2003 and 2006. Rather, Norma argues that these groups transformed into criminal bands, giving place to new forms of violence.<sup>211</sup> Through the frequent use of terms such as “transformation,” “mutation,” and “recrudescence,” textbooks insist on the cyclical nature of the Colombian armed conflict. On the whole, SM and Norma leave the reader with the perception that every advancement towards the end of the armed conflict has complicated, rather than diminished, war.

### ***Defining and Conceptualizing War and Peace***

Defining and categorizing conflict-related concepts is another approach found in textbooks. Explicitly defining conflict, peace, and other notions related to conflict, such as guerrilla groups, paramilitary forces, and specific tools of war, textbooks attempt to offer a grounded description of violence. Norma, for example, states that “a conflict is the expression of interests that are opposing,

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<sup>209</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 136. Emphasis added.

<sup>210</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 107. Emphasis added.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

antagonistic, or incompatible between people, social groups, or institutions.”<sup>212</sup> Further, Santillana distinguishes between international and internal armed conflicts, defining the latter as “those in which the governmental Armed Forces fight against armed groups, or in which rebel groups fight each other, within the limits of the national territory.”<sup>213</sup>

In contrast, peace is defined as a “reflection of tranquility and a good state of mind.”<sup>214</sup> For there to be true peace, “it is not enough that physical violence disappears.”<sup>215</sup> This suggests that peace is not simply defined in opposition to war, but as the absence of both physical and systematic violence. Moreover, the definition of victim is not necessarily consistent. For instance, Norma originally describes victimhood as a transitory state,<sup>216</sup> but then asserts that “foreigners and members of the public force have the *right* to recognize themselves as victims.”<sup>217</sup> This contrasts with Santillana’s statement that the victims of the Colombian armed conflict are, for the most part, “civilians who have nothing to do with any of the armed groups.”<sup>218</sup>

Going beyond concrete definitions, textbooks make important efforts to categorize conflict-related notions. SM categorizes conflicts in three classes, namely, international conflicts, conflicts for independence, and internal conflicts aiming to change the government of a country.<sup>219</sup> Guerrilla

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>213</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 196.

<sup>214</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 184.

<sup>215</sup> Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 14.

<sup>216</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 154.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 116–17. Emphasis added.

<sup>218</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 205.

<sup>219</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 76.

groups are defined as examples of *comunidades beligerantes* [belligerent communities],<sup>220</sup> and the emergence of paramilitary forces is described as a complex phenomenon that goes beyond the Colombian context.<sup>221</sup>

Categorization efforts specific to the Colombian armed conflict are common in textbooks' proposed activities. For example, Norma instructs students to classify paramilitary groups, drug traffickers, criminal bands, and guerrilla groups in accordance to short descriptions of each actor.<sup>222</sup> Other activities prompt students to match violent actions to violated rights, usually referring to the norms of International Humanitarian Law.<sup>223</sup> Following a similar approach, Santillana classifies violent actions into five categories: crimes against integrity, selective assassinations, forced displacement, use of non-conventional weapons, and involvement of civilians. Among others, Santillana classifies kidnapping, extortion, recruitment of children, sexual violence, torture, massacres, assassination of social leaders, displacement of indigenous populations, threats, and the use of antipersonnel mines, cylinder bombs, and biologically or chemically contaminated ammunition, into these categories.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 185.

<sup>221</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 48.

<sup>222</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 152.

<sup>223</sup> See, for example, Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 129; Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 208.

<sup>224</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 204.



### *Causes*

When introducing the principles of IHL, each of the texts asks students to reflect on *why* it is necessary to humanize war rather than banning it.<sup>225</sup> It could be argued that, through this activity, students are expected to accept that war is an unavoidable feature of complex human interactions. In the Colombian case, textbooks recognize three major motives of war: inequality in the access to and property of land, absence of the State, and past violence. As less prominent triggers of violence, textbooks mention international influences, particularly the Cuban Revolution.<sup>226</sup> Textbooks also note how the United States' interventions in the internal conflict have helped to shape the war.<sup>227</sup>

Regarding inequality as a motive of conflict, Norma makes a straight argument that the unequal distribution of territory in Colombia has given place to the appearance of guerrilla groups.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, Norma implies that land ownership and violence in Colombia are connected by a continuous cycle. Conflicts over land give place to violence, and violence, in turn, complicates land ownership dynamics.<sup>229</sup> To this point, SM recognizes land restitution as one of the greatest

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<sup>225</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 129; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 152; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 195.

<sup>226</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 111; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 101.

<sup>227</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 125; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 108.

<sup>228</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 31.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

contemporary challenges in Colombia.<sup>230</sup> Institutional weakness is also mentioned as causing, or at least enabling, the perpetuation of the armed conflict.<sup>231</sup>

### Past Violence and The Nature of Conflict

The description of violence as a historical constant is one of the most prominent common points of all the textbook narratives. For instance, Santillana highlights the series of revolutions, civil wars, and armed confrontations of the nineteenth century, as well as the emergence and intensification of armed conflicts and violence in the twentieth century.<sup>232</sup> SM also underlines the fact that Colombia suffered nine civil wars between 1830 and 1902,<sup>233</sup> and provides a thorough overview of the mid-twentieth-century age of violence known as *La Violencia*.<sup>234</sup> SM's lack of a clear distinction between *La Violencia* and the current armed conflict suggests that *La Violencia* somehow transformed into the armed conflict. This idea is more clearly summarized in Norma, where an image of FARC leader Pedro Antonio Marín, also known as Manuel Marulanda, is followed by a caption stating that Marín took part of the liberal guerrillas in the 1950s and then, in 1964, led the armed peasant groups that would go on to found FARC.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 139.

<sup>231</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 99; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 116.

<sup>232</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 202.

<sup>233</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 110.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–15.

<sup>235</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 101.

Similarly, Norma argues that the armed conflict, repression, and displacement, are long-lasting historical phenomena.<sup>236</sup> When listing the factors that contributed to bipartisan rivalry, Norma includes “the *inheritance* of violence from the civil wars of the XIX century.”<sup>237</sup> Using an analogous logic, Norma argues that the agreement leading to the end of *La Violencia* excluded non-traditional political ideologies and failed to recognize the social underpinnings of conflict, thus generating new forms of violence.<sup>238</sup> In short, Norma suggests that each conflict in the history of Colombia was grounded on previous, unresolved, conflicts.

The idea of a never-ending chain of conflict is addressed in Santillana as a problematic in need of clarification. Indeed, Santillana lists reasons that allow for the continuation of the armed conflict, including social marginalization, trafficking of drugs and weapons, economies depending on war, and “ideologies that justify the use of violence to achieve their ideals.”<sup>239</sup> SM, on the other hand, encourages students to think about “the social damage provoked by the *historic continuity of violence* in Colombia.”<sup>240</sup> Overall, textbooks point out to the undeniable prevalence of violence in Colombian history, not without acknowledging that the continuity of conflict demands reflection.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 88–89.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 96. Emphasis added.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>239</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 207.

<sup>240</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 130. Emphasis added.

### *Actors*

Santillana states that there are two types of armed actors in the Colombian conflict: the forces of the State and illegal armed groups.<sup>241</sup> More specifically, SM and Norma recognize guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and official armed forces, as the concrete actors of the Colombian conflict.<sup>242</sup> Among the guerrilla groups taking part in the conflict, textbooks mention FARC, ELN, EPL, M-19, and, in few cases, other “minor guerrilla groups.”<sup>243</sup> Further examination of the peculiarities of each group are rare and limited to the groups’ emergence and ideology.<sup>244</sup> For example, SM argues that the origins of FARC are in groups of peasant self-defense, that ELN was created by college students influenced by the Cuban revolution, that EPL followed the ideas of Mao Zedong, and that the M-19 was an urban guerrilla that included former combatants of FARC and left-wing militants.<sup>245</sup>

To address existing differences between modalities of violence performed by different armed groups, SM cites an excerpt of the *¡Basta Ya!* report.<sup>246</sup> Following this excerpt, students are asked to name the groups responsible for human rights violations and to classify each of the groups’

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<sup>241</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 203.

<sup>242</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 116; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 102.

<sup>243</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 104.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 99, 103; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 120.

<sup>245</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 118.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 153. This reference adds a level of complexity to Padilla’s and Bermúdez’s study of the contrasts between textbooks’ narratives and the narrative of the *¡Basta Ya!* report. See Padilla and Bermúdez, “Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano”; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad*.

participation in war crimes.<sup>247</sup> Norma includes a similar activity, in which students are expected to match actions to actors.<sup>248</sup>

Aside from the concrete, armed actors of conflict, textbooks recognize drug trafficking as an abstract actor. Textbook narratives rarely mention particular drug lords or cartels, attributing actions to drug trafficking as a phenomenon. For example, SM states that “since the decade of 1970, drug trafficking has been an important actor in the recrudescence of the armed conflict in Colombia.”<sup>249</sup> It is important to note that drug trafficking is introduced as an actor originally alien to the armed conflict. This phenomenon is therefore charged with altering the nature of conflict: “with the entrance of drug trafficking, there was a *total degradation* of the armed conflict.”<sup>250</sup> The involvement of drug trafficking as a degrading breaking point is an example of textbooks’ argument that the conflict mutated into a nonsensical dispute.

### ***Actions***

Textbooks generally list acts of war in plural and without going into details. For example, SM argues that paramilitary groups in the 1990s “controlled the main networks of drug trafficking, robbed *thousands* of peasants of their land, and incurred in *all kinds* of human rights violations.”<sup>251</sup> The authors also list homicides, disappearances, death threats, attacks to civilians’ property, displacement, use of antipersonnel mines, recruitment of minors, and sexual violence as tools of

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<sup>247</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 153.

<sup>248</sup> See Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 111.

<sup>249</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 122.

<sup>250</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 204.

<sup>251</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 124.

war.<sup>252</sup> In addition to these actions, Norma and Santillana offer more detailed information on massacres.<sup>253</sup> Some government-mandated reactions, such as the establishment of the *Plan Colombia* or the peace process with AUC, are also discussed.<sup>254</sup>

The only action explicitly attributed to official armed forces that is discussed in textbooks is the practice of “false positives.” This practice, consisting in assassinating civilians to wrongly count them as killed guerrilla combatants, is briefly explained in each of the textbooks.<sup>255</sup> Across all textbooks, the most thoroughly discussed actions are forced displacement and antipersonnel mines.<sup>256</sup> In fact, images portraying victims of the Colombian armed conflict generally show victims of these violations.<sup>257</sup>

### ***Consequences***

The most cited consequence of conflict in textbooks is the high number of victims. Victims are frequently mentioned in statistics about the conflict<sup>258</sup> and are almost always named in plural.

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>253</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 107; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 188, 205, 209.

<sup>254</sup> See, for example, Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 111; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 119.

<sup>255</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 125; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 109; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 199.

<sup>256</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 139, 128; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 21, 32, 108, 109, 113; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 102, 197, 210, 211.

<sup>257</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 113; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 210, 211; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 128.

<sup>258</sup> See, for example, Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 131; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 21; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 210.

Textbooks also observe that the conflict has disproportionately affected women.<sup>259</sup> It is interesting to note that, overall, victims are presented as victims of the conflict; not of particular actors. For example, SM includes the testimony of a woman who claims that indigenous peoples are “victims of other people’s war.”<sup>260</sup> As this quote suggests, the subject causing victimhood is war. This assertion is consistent across textbooks.<sup>261</sup>

In some cases, textbooks make vague statements about the number of victims. This approach is sometimes used to support the idea that all Colombians are, to some extent, victims. For example, Norma states that “the number of displaced persons, people mutilated by antipersonnel mines, false positives, kidnappings, murders, and robbed lands, are the crude evidence of how much this situation has affected Colombians.”<sup>262</sup> Similarly, SM argues that the armed conflict “afflicts the country.”<sup>263</sup>

In addition to the high number of victims, textbooks acknowledge economic, environmental, and reputational consequences of the armed conflict. With respect to economic consequences, Santillana stresses that the need to finance the armed conflict has impeded investments in social programs.<sup>264</sup> Similarly, Norma contrasts the amount of resources spent in weaponry with expenditures in education and health.<sup>265</sup> Textbooks also mention environmental consequences of forced displacement, such as

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<sup>259</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 121, 123.

<sup>260</sup> Informe de Actividades Colombia, “Situación Humanitaria,” 2011., quoted in Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 128.

<sup>261</sup> See, for example, Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 128, 129, 131; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 154; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 205.

<sup>262</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 111.

<sup>263</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 126.

<sup>264</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 29.

<sup>265</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 58.

urban overpopulation, occupation of forest reserve areas, and erosion due to changes in the use of land.<sup>266</sup> Finally, textbooks note how the armed conflict has complicated international relations and harmed the reputation of Colombia abroad.<sup>267</sup>

### *Peace*

Textbooks address the notion of peace in a consistent manner, focusing on how and why each of the peace processes attempted throughout the history of Colombia has failed. For instance, Norma explains that, in the 1980s, the government achieved a truce with the M-19, EPL, and FARC guerrilla groups. The authors stress that former FARC combatants formed the political party UP and that “the attacks against the M-19 negotiators and the assassination of thousands of UP militants . . . put the peace process in crisis.”<sup>268</sup> SM also discusses these events, along with more recent failed peace negotiations, in a section entitled “failures in the peace processes.”<sup>269</sup> Santillana examines the 1998-2002 failed peace process with FARC and the peace negotiations with the AUC paramilitary groups of 2003-2006.<sup>270</sup>

The intention guiding textbooks’ discussion of failed attempts at achieving peace is to encourage students to have a critical perspective on peace negotiations. This is evident in questions such as “what were the results of the peace processes that took place in the last decades of the XX

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<sup>266</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 83.

<sup>267</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 157, 164; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 106.

<sup>268</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 104.

<sup>269</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 124.

<sup>270</sup> Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 22–25.



century?”<sup>271</sup> and “explain the causes of the failure of the peace processes undertaken prior to 2012.”<sup>272</sup> In addition, students are encouraged to learn from failed processes in order to take a critical stand on the 2012 peace process.<sup>273</sup>

### Peace Process of 2012

With the exception of Santillana’s pamphlet on peace education, each of the textbooks reviewed in this study was published prior to the signing of the Peace Accord in late 2016. However, each text devotes a short section to the 2012 peace process. SM presents the preliminary agreements that had been achieved by mid-2015. Then, the authors state that “the negotiations have had to circumvent diverse difficulties,” and mention political opposition and the interruption of a military truce.<sup>274</sup> Norma, on the other hand, asks students to research the current state of the peace negotiations and to assess the partial agreements.<sup>275</sup> Santillana summarizes the agenda of the peace negotiations.<sup>276</sup>

Textbooks also highlight the relevance of the current government’s recognition of the existence of an internal armed conflict, as opposed to the previous government’s suggestion that the conflict was just a terrorist threat.<sup>277</sup> However, the distinction between different governments’ approaches to violence is only briefly mentioned. Finally, Santillana’s pamphlet discusses the development of the

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<sup>271</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 119.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>273</sup> See, for example, *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>275</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 105.

<sup>276</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 207.

<sup>277</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Applica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 124; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*.

negotiations, the support and opposition to the agreement, and the fact that the accord would be ratified through a plebiscite.<sup>278</sup> Despite being published in 2017, this pamphlet does not discuss the results of the plebiscite.

### **Discussion: Victimization, Normalization, and the Use of History**

Overall, textbooks pseudo-homogenize both armed groups and victims. In referring to the actions of “the guerrilla” and only occasionally considering the specificities of different guerrilla groups, textbooks flatten the ideological, regional, and historical peculiarities of illegal armed groups. Individual soldiers, *guerrilleros* [guerrilla combatants], or *paramilitares* [paramilitary combatants] are effectively omitted. This entails unrecognizing the multiplicity of experiences that exist within the armed groups. With the exception of gender-based violence and a few ethnic differences, textbooks generally homogenize victims. By referring to armed actors and victims collectively, textbooks overlook the motives and consequences of conflict that depend on individual experiences and backgrounds. As a result, textbooks’ narratives could inhibit students’ understanding of war, which, according to Padilla and Bermúdez, is essential for unlearning violence and achieving peace.<sup>279</sup>

The fact that it is *the conflict* that victimizes, and not a clear Other, puts the Self in a bystander position. In this sense, Colombian textbooks’ account of victimhood is an example of what Bellino calls “agentless stories.”<sup>280</sup> This type of narrative implies historical inevitability and culturally-transmitted violence.<sup>281</sup> In Colombian textbooks, such implication is not only suggested, but

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<sup>278</sup> Pulido, *Educación Para La Paz 11*, 26–27.

<sup>279</sup> Padilla and Bermúdez, “Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano.”

<sup>280</sup> Bellino, “Learning through Silence in ‘Postwar’ Guatemala.”

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

explicitly stated. Moreover, because there is no Other against whom to define the Self, students are situated outside of the conflict. Textbooks nonetheless prompt students to take action by honoring the victims or suggesting solutions to break the cycle of violence.<sup>282</sup>

Textbooks also contribute to the formulation of an identity grounded on the perpetuity of conflict. But the social cohesion informing collective memory,<sup>283</sup> in this case, is no other than the disordered cohesion of complex, almost unexplainable, violence. As peace entails understanding war,<sup>284</sup> the notion of a bewildering conflict, while accurate, could complicate the attainment of peace. Indeed, due to textbooks' consistent emphasis on approaching peace critically, readers are left with the impression that the conflict will continue to mutate in baffling ways. Attention to critical thinking is consistent with accepted practices in history teaching.<sup>285</sup> Yet, given the Colombian context, such emphasis on a critical examination of the past might limit the "usefulness" of the past, which, in Bentreovato's words, can inspire students to contribute to peace.<sup>286</sup> In fact, textbooks seem to have resolved the question of efficiency<sup>287</sup> by presenting general facts without going into detail, consequently reinforcing the role of students as bystanders.

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<sup>282</sup> See, for example, the proposed activities in Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplicación 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 122, 131; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 154; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 212.

<sup>283</sup> Klerides, "(Re)Reading National Identities in School Historiographies: Pedagogical Implications from the Case of Cyprus."

<sup>284</sup> Padilla and Bermúdez, "Normalizar El Conflicto y Des-Normalizar La Violencia: Retos y Posibilidades de La Enseñanza Crítica de La Historia Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano."

<sup>285</sup> Bentreovato and Schulze, "Teaching about a Violent Past: Revisiting the Role of History Education in Conflict and Peace."

<sup>286</sup> Bentreovato, "Whose Past, What Future? Teaching Contested Histories in Contemporary Rwanda and Burundi."

<sup>287</sup> The question of efficiency, that is, "what amount of remembering is most useful for reconciliation?" is discussed in Korostelina, "History Education in the Midst of Post-Conflict Recovery: Lessons Learned."

Colombian textbooks overwhelmingly conclude that the Colombian armed conflict has lost its sense. The complexity added by drug trafficking practices, along with the prolongation of war, are the two main reasons that textbooks quote for claiming the conflict's loss of meaning. For instance, SM argues that "in its beginnings, armed movements pretended to fight for the demands of the Colombian people. However, as the conflict was prolonged with no decisive actions, violent and questionable practices appeared."<sup>288</sup> This narrative is supported by the use of terms such as "degradation," "degeneration," "mutation," and "recrudescence" when describing the conflict and the armed groups involved.<sup>289</sup> The Colombian armed conflict is thus condemned for having degraded into an appalling, purposeless, violence.

However, the idea of a senseless conflict follows textbooks' focus on the political underpinnings of war. More explicitly, it could be argued that the reason why textbooks arrive at the conclusion that there is no clear underlying motive of conflict is because they follow a political and legal narrative almost exclusively. As the war "mutates" beyond the realm of politics, textbooks struggle to accommodate the conflict's development within the political narrative. Textbooks thus suggest that conflict is too deep and complex to comprehend.

### **Textbook Analysis: Concluding Remarks**

Colombian textbooks describe the internal armed conflict as a process going back centuries into the history of the country. Being grounded on structural and historical issues, the armed conflict stands firmly as a defining feature of Colombia. Further, violence defines and stigmatizes Colombian identity.

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<sup>288</sup> Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 118.

<sup>289</sup> Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 98, 103, 107, 109; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 109, 117, 118, 122; Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 204.

Textbooks seem to condemn Colombia's generalized normalization of violence, while simultaneously contributing to the idea of violence as a normal ingredient of national life. Additionally, textbooks emphasize the suffering of civilians. It is interesting to note that, in spite of textbooks' description of concrete actors, the overall narrative constructs the conflict itself as the enemy. Indeed, textbooks hardly mention fundamental distinctions between particular actors, and victimhood is attributed to the conflict.

Regarding peace, textbooks recognize the need for dialogue while addressing peace processes critically and cautiously. The idea of a mutating conflict, in which every step towards peace is followed by the emergence of new forms of violence, suggests that peace is unattainable. By insisting on the cyclical, unbreakable nature of conflict and taking a strong, critical stand on peace processes, textbooks leave readers with a sense of helplessness.

## CHAPTER 2

### PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT

The purpose of this study is to add to the narratives of the Colombian conflict that currently exist in the country. More specifically, this study aims at compiling stories of conflict, war, and peace of young students who live in Tumaco, Department of Nariño, a city that has been deeply affected by conflict.

#### **Literature Review: Narrative and Memory in Colombia**

Writing as a victim of the armed conflict a month prior to the Plebiscite for Peace, Colombian writer Héctor Abad Faciolince stated that he understands the recent history of Colombia not through theories, but through family stories.<sup>1</sup> In his words, growing up in a big family makes fiction unnecessary because everything has already happened at some point.<sup>2</sup> After centuries of ongoing violence, it could be stressed that Colombia has seen nearly all conceivable events happen. Following Faciolince's thought, this makes fiction redundant. People's stories, however, can unveil unimaginable truths that ought to be acknowledged if Colombia is to achieve real peace. The impulse to tell stories is natural and universal.<sup>3</sup> And the basic assumption of narrative inquiry is that people

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<sup>1</sup> Héctor Abad Faciolince, "Ya No Me Siento Víctima," *El País*, 2016, [https://elpais.com/cultura/2016/09/01/babelia/1472748478\\_962352.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2016/09/01/babelia/1472748478_962352.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008).

are storytelling creatures.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if the Colombian war is to be understood through stories, then narrative inquiry fits as an appropriate method to understand Colombia.

Connelly and Clandinin suggest that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.”<sup>5</sup> But the notion of story is closely related to that of narrative, so that narrative theory can be similarly applied to literary, spoken, written, or visual materials.<sup>6</sup> Referring to oral storytelling, Kohler Riessman frames narrative as the process through which a speaker selects, organizes, and connects events into a sequence that is deemed significant for the meanings that listeners are expected to take away.<sup>7</sup> This means that, to shape a narrative, the narrator must impose both meaning and order to events. It is for this reason that narrative structures are essentially related to meaning-making activities.<sup>8</sup>

Before delving into the nuances of narrative inquiry and its applicability to the Colombian context, it is important to note that “narrative” is an ambiguous term. Narrative can refer to both the phenomenon or the method,<sup>9</sup> meaning that it can be used as a synonym of both “story” and “storytelling.” Similarly, narrative inquiry can be simultaneously defined as a relationship, a process,

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<sup>4</sup> Kerry R. McGannon and Brett Smith, “Centralizing Culture in Cultural Sport Psychology Research: The Potential of Narrative Inquiry and Discursive Psychology,” *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 17 (2015): 79–87.

<sup>5</sup> F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry,” *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Sigrun Gudmundsdottir, “The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (1996): 293–306.

<sup>9</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”

and a phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> To navigate the dual use of the word, Connelly and Clandinin suggest terming the phenomenon and the method “story” and “inquiry,” respectively.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Kohler distinguishes between narrative impulse, narrative data, and narrative analysis.<sup>12</sup> Narrative impulse refers to storytelling; narrative data are the materials or objects, that is, the stories themselves;<sup>13</sup> and narrative analysis is the systematic study of narrative data.<sup>14</sup> Narrative has therefore gained recognition as a way of thinking, as a social practice, as a literary genre, and as a research method.<sup>15</sup>

In what follows, “narrative” and “story” are used almost interchangeably, with a minor distinction between the two – narratives, unlike stories, necessarily attribute meaning to the events, thus setting narrative apart from other genres.<sup>16</sup> Narrative, the method, is referred to here as “narrative inquiry” or “narrative analysis.” The following section discusses the importance of narrative and its uses. Then, narrative as an object and its relation to identity is explored. A third section considers narrative inquiry as a method and discusses the main issues that arise from conducting a narrative study. The

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<sup>10</sup> Gail M. Lindsay and Jasna K. Schwind, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters,” *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 48, no. 1 (2016): 14–20, doi:10.1177/0844562116652230.

<sup>11</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”

<sup>12</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>13</sup> Using stories as data can be problematic. To Frank, Kohler treats narratives as objects, while other researchers understand narratives as teachers signaling something about the people and societies in which they are produced. See Arthur W. Frank, “Narrative Research from Inside and Outside,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 3 (2008): 689–92. Narrative data is naturally empirical, and can be in the form of field notes, journal records, interview transcripts, observations, documents, or even pictures. See Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”

<sup>14</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>15</sup> Adrián Serna Dimas, “Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010),” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 52 (2015): 147–57.

<sup>16</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”



following two sections discuss the role of narrative inquiry in post-conflict scenarios, and the place that narrative has traditionally had in Colombia, respectively.

### Why Narrative?

Contemporary research has drawn attention to personal stories, rather than to grand narratives, because stories disclose truths about human experience.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, to study narrative is to study the ways humans experience the world.<sup>18</sup> Narrative analysis then serves as a way to connect individual biographies, constructed through personal narratives, to society.<sup>19</sup> For example, if nationhood can in fact be understood as a grand tale,<sup>20</sup> then narrative allows the individual to introduce the history of the Self into the broader history of society.<sup>21</sup> Such processes of connection of the Self with grand narratives often take place in the field of education. Education is thus overwhelmed with forms of narrative. But these narratives ought to be critically studied, mainly because deciding whose narratives are privileged and how they are communicated to others is not a random process. In fact, “narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful.”<sup>22</sup>

With particular reference to accounts of past events, the interest in narrative inquiry could be though to be founded on the multiplicity of versions and its potential use in uncovering the truth.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>18</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”

<sup>19</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>20</sup> Leonor Arfuch, “Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación,” *Magis, Revista Internacional de Investigación En Educación* 9, no. 18 (2016): 227–44, doi:10.11144/Javeriana.m9-18.smmr.

<sup>21</sup> Serna Dimas, “Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010).”

<sup>22</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Editor’s Note: On Narrative,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 1–4.

Such an approach to narrative inquiry would be certainly incomplete, as collecting numerous narratives with the purpose of triangulating and attributing values of truth to them would imply that some narratives are more valuable than others. Rather, narrativity must be understood as a mode of making sense of reality.<sup>24</sup> Just as narratives can serve to impose order on reality or to unleash a healthy disorder,<sup>25</sup> narrative analysis is capable of rendering personal and social life experiences in relevant and meaningful ways.<sup>26</sup> After all, narrative inquiry as a form of studying experience rests on John Dewey's idea that experience is relational, temporal, and situational, and can therefore be educational.<sup>27</sup>

### Narrative, the Object

Naming, though extremely complex, is nothing more than to attribute meanings to history.<sup>28</sup> The same could be said about narrating. In fact, understanding language as a treasure of the experience of humankind, in which meanings and senses have been transformed by and through generations, stories are a window to human experience.<sup>29</sup> But the ways in which stories contribute to knowledge-building processes are much more complex. For instance, Frank advocates the idea of thinking *with* stories rather than *about* stories.<sup>30</sup> In thinking with stories, the thinker gets involved in a hermeneutic of mutual engagement in which stories do not belong to the teller, but rather exist amid complex

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry."

<sup>27</sup> Lindsay and Schwind, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters."

<sup>28</sup> Arfuch, "Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Arthur W. Frank, "Asking the Right Question about Pain: Narrative and Phronesis," *Literature and Medicine* 23, no. 2 (2004): 209–25, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2005.0003>.

relationships.<sup>31</sup> To Frank, stories should be studied for the sole purpose of “training oneself to constant self-awareness as a moral actor.”<sup>32</sup>

Studying self-narratives is the most relevant way of understanding identity, as self-identities are constructed through narratives.<sup>33</sup> In fact, narratives can be defined as processes of self-expression and self-creation.<sup>34</sup> For example, in his research with immigrants who had been educated in Britain, Kearney studies “the stories we tell each other about ourselves and the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves”<sup>35</sup> as identity-building factors in a multicultural context. It is important to note, however, that any kind of narrative action entails practicing a sense of who we are.<sup>36</sup> Personal narratives, as the person’s sense of self, evolve in time because identity is never predetermined.<sup>37</sup> Simply put, narrative inquiry serves as a useful tool to approach identity because “stories are attempts of a self to find identity in terms outside itself.”<sup>38</sup>

What is more, identity groups, such as nations and communities, construct stories of experience and preferred narratives about themselves in the same fashion persons do.<sup>39</sup> This means that narrative

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Bamberg and Carolin Demuth, “Narrative Inquiry: An Interview With Michael Bamberg,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2016): 14–28, doi:10.5964/ejop.v12i1.1128; McGannon and Smith, “Centralizing Culture in Cultural Sport Psychology Research: The Potential of Narrative Inquiry and Discursive Psychology.”

<sup>34</sup> Chris Kearney, *The Monkey’s Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>36</sup> Bamberg and Demuth, “Narrative Inquiry: An Interview With Michael Bamberg.”

<sup>37</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey’s Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur W. Frank, “Why Study People’s Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1, no. 1 (2002): 15.

<sup>39</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

inquiry, particularly if applied to historical narrative, can be used to study both personal and collective constructions of identity. But such analysis must be done with great care, as stories cannot be detached from the historical context in which they are told. Power relations and discourses of the moment inevitably frame storytelling.<sup>40</sup> In recent years, popular attention to the biographic space has increased, so that greater emphasis is now put on the testimony, in all of its variables, as a way of knowing.<sup>41</sup>

The increased interest in other people's lives consequently acts as a driving force of cohesion and social control.<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that narrative and its relation to identity-building processes has inspired several research efforts, each suggesting different perspectives to the meaning of identity. According to Kearney, identity-related literature can be roughly categorized into four groups.<sup>43</sup> First, bounded identities, or the idea that identity is fixed.<sup>44</sup> Second, socially constructed identities, according to which identity is a product of the social scheme in which the person develops.<sup>45</sup> Third, postmodern identities, characterized by the notion that identity is hybrid, diverse, and subject to conscious chance.<sup>46</sup> The last category, referring to storied identities, sees identity-building as a process determined by personal and collective narratives of the Self.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Arfuch, "Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## Narrative, the Method

Scholarly efforts to systematize narrative analysis point to two main considerations. First, narrative data should be constructed through *repeated* conversations in the interviewee's context, leading to an ongoing narrative record.<sup>48</sup> In his study of the history of the Idaho State Library, for example, Wilson conducted a series of three interviews with each of the participants.<sup>49</sup> The first interview was to establish their experience; the second was to give participants space to reconstruct the details; and the third was intended for participants to reflect on their experiences.<sup>50</sup> Second, researchers ought to offer a sincere and precise disclosure of interests and limitations.<sup>51</sup> This second consideration points to the most important fact about narrative inquiry as a methodology, namely, that it entails extensive ethical obligations.<sup>52</sup> As narrative research is ultimately collaborative, questions about the ownership of research and the role of power relationships in the construction of narratives appear as ethical issues.<sup>53</sup> In addition, determining the boundaries of narrative is difficult because most personal narratives, like most lives, are complex.<sup>54</sup>

Studies relying on narrative inquiry commonly navigate ethical issues by disclosing all possible limitations and underscoring the fact that results arising from narrative inquiry, unlike other forms of

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<sup>48</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*; Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry."

<sup>49</sup> Richard A. Wilson, "Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives," *The Qualitative Report* 12, no. 1 (2007): 20–39.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice.*

<sup>52</sup> Frank, "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis."

<sup>53</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice.*

<sup>54</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences.*

research, are not to be understood as answers. To be clear, when addressing a particular issue, narrative inquiry responds more to the search itself than to the attainment of answers, so that it serves the purpose of understanding much more than the purpose of asserting.<sup>55</sup> Studies relying on narrative inquiry often aim not at finding generalizable patterns, but at understanding personal experiences and echoing the voices<sup>56</sup> of the participants.<sup>57</sup> One reason is that “patterns tend to imply precise congruence.”<sup>58</sup>

To ensure that research is conducted in an appropriate way, narrative inquirers should critically examine their research tools, be open with the participants, and seek to limit the influence of power relationships and ethical dilemmas.<sup>59</sup> Narrative-based research thus requires the researcher to be an attentive listener.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the researcher should not only listen to the content of stories but to the modes of telling.<sup>61</sup> For example, to analyze participants’ development of identity through narrative, Kearney studies the content of narratives, how identities are structured within narratives, and the

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<sup>55</sup> Wilson, “Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives.”

<sup>56</sup> The concept of voice is of great importance when analyzing narratives. According to Britzman, “in its literal sense, voice represents the speech and perspectives of the speaker; metaphorically, voice spans inflection, tone, accent, style, and the qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker’s words; and politically, a commitment to voice ‘attests to the *right* of speaking and being represented.’” See Deborah P. Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice. A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Bermeo Osorio studies the narratives of Colombian teachers and students with the purpose of comprehending how collective memory is constructed. See Julián David Bermeo Osorio, “Reenmarcando La Producción Social de Memoria: La Experiencia de Docentes y Estudiantes En Dos Colegios de Bogotá,” *Revista Colombiana de Sociología* 40, no. 1 (2017): 65–82, doi:10.15446/rcs.v40n1.61953.

<sup>58</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey’s Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey’s Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*.

<sup>60</sup> Arfuch, “Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

concept of voice.<sup>62</sup> In this study, participants' narratives were sorted in a triad of elements, namely others for self, self for others, and self for self.<sup>63</sup>

Aside from the intricate issues of ethics and analysis, which will be more thoroughly examined in the next section, narrative inquiry is a relatively flexible method. The participants can be both acquaintances of the researcher or persons previously unknown by the inquirer, and interviews can be held in small groups or with one participant at a time.<sup>64</sup> In some cases, researchers send each participant a list of questions in advance of the interview.<sup>65</sup> Then, in semi-structured and open interviews, researchers and their informants engage in a process of mutual inquiry to explore the meaning of concepts, categories, and events together.<sup>66</sup> In the analytical phase of a narrative inquiry study, there usually are three cycles of analysis.<sup>67</sup> First, the reading and re-reading of participants' stories sparks the researcher's personal reflection; second, the inquirer searches for narrative patterns through the observation of threads within and across stories; third, the researcher attempts to understand participants' stories through scholarly literature.<sup>68</sup> Finally, narrative research reports are commonly made up of observational data, stories the informants tell, stories researchers hear, and theoretical models.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Lindsay and Schwind, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters."

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*.

<sup>66</sup> Gudmundsdottir, "The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview."

<sup>67</sup> Lindsay and Schwind, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters."

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Gudmundsdottir, "The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview."

## *Issues*

An important limitation to narrative inquiry is that its research instruments, such as the interview, are human constructions, unescapably imprinted with symbols and meanings specific to the culture in which they are immersed.<sup>70</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the primary instrument for data collection and analysis is not a document or experience, but the researcher.<sup>71</sup> As a result, the researcher's presence and influence on the data comes to the front in narrative analysis. Through interviewing, transcription, and translation practices, researchers play a major role in the building of narrative data.<sup>72</sup> In the end, narrative data is co-constructed as the researcher's position shifts from collector to co-constructor.<sup>73</sup> Narrative inquiry is thus a collaborative process that involves mutually telling and retelling stories.<sup>74</sup>

More specifically, interviewers influence the construction of narrative data through their selection of questions, answers, and non-verbal responses to the storyteller's narrative.<sup>75</sup> Narrative data is further shaped by the process of transcribing interviews, as "transcription is deeply interpretive."<sup>76</sup> Because transcribing is a fundamentally analytical activity, writing can be regarded as research.<sup>77</sup> Processes of collection, transcription, and interpretation of narratives are consequently problematic

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, "Combining Historical Research and Narrative Inquiry to Create Chronicles and Narratives."

<sup>72</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>73</sup> Marco Gemignani, "Memory, Remembering, and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (2014): 127–35, doi:10.1177/1077800413510271.

<sup>74</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry."

<sup>75</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>77</sup> Jorgen Jeppesen and Helle Ploug Hansen, "Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry," *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 98–117.



and must be done with the utmost care. When translation is needed, narrative inquiry opens up even greater ambiguities.<sup>78</sup>

With regards to the analytical stage of research, Connelly and Clandinin caution against hastily accepting causal links, a practice that usually arises from the misinterpretation of the tendency to explain through stories.<sup>79</sup> Unlike traditional qualitative research, narrative inquiry does not rely on validity, reliability, or generalizability, but rather on verisimilitude, transferability, and apparenity.<sup>80</sup> This is partly explained by the fact that “narrative truths are always partial.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, defining clear criteria for narrative data is extremely complex. As people express their lives through stories, delimiting the admissible narrative data is as problematic as delimiting the admissible forms of living and understanding life.<sup>82</sup>

On a different note, dealing with people’s stories requires balancing proximity and distance.<sup>83</sup> The interviewer must get close enough to understand in depth, but not so much as to pity or admire.<sup>84</sup> Once the collection phase is over, the researcher may fall into the very problematic, though natural, issue of desiring fiction. In other words, “[narrative tradition] can make narrative truth replace

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<sup>78</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>79</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Frank, “Narrative Research from Inside and Outside,” 691.

<sup>82</sup> As an example of the issues that emerge when trying to define appropriate narratives, Kohler Riessman cites a school activity in which students were asked to use the pronoun “I” when writing a personal story. According to Kohler Riessman, this requirement points to how Western narrative conventions privilege the individual over family and community. See Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>83</sup> Frank, “Asking the Right Question about Pain: Narrative and Phronesis.”

<sup>84</sup> Jeppesen and Hansen, “Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry.”

historical truth if the story is good.”<sup>85</sup> Here, a true narrative would be somewhat equivalent to a good story.<sup>86</sup> Finally, it would be unreasonable to expect narrative inquiry to result in the perfect description of the past. As Jeppesen and Hansen suggest, exhaustive description is not only impossible but undesirable, as something must remain untold for the listener to relate to that which he or she does not understand.<sup>87</sup>

### Narrative in Post-Conflict Scenarios

Attention to narrative is paramount in situations where social change is needed, as mobilization towards social change is a function of stories.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, people’s experiences can be transformed into politics only when their stories are “narratable.”<sup>89</sup> In addition, because narrative inquiry “makes transparent how assumptions, values, and beliefs inform our worldviews,”<sup>90</sup> it can be educative and transformative. Narrative appears in post-traumatic scenarios as an attempt to organize chaos and give meaning to painful events. When placing past events in narrative form, each event seems to belong exactly where it is.<sup>91</sup> Narrative is thus defined by having order and meaning, so that “chaos stories are antinarratives.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Gudmundsdottir, “The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview,” 300.

<sup>86</sup> Gudmundsdottir, “The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview.”

<sup>87</sup> Jeppesen and Hansen, “Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry.”

<sup>88</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>89</sup> Frank, “Why Study People’s Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis.”

<sup>90</sup> Lindsay and Schwind, “Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters,” 18.

<sup>91</sup> Frank, “Asking the Right Question about Pain: Narrative and Phronesis.”

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

Moreover, as silencing voices imposes a symbolic limit impossible to surpass, admitting the voice of the Other is the first necessary gesture for the recognition of difference and the overcoming of discrimination in the aftermath of violence.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, narratives of victimhood commonly gain attention in post-conflict situations. It is in contexts of conflict and violence that pedagogies of memory are mostly reclaimed.<sup>94</sup> A growing interest in victims' experiences is not only deserved but important to reconciliation because sustainable peace in the absence of social justice is unthinkable.<sup>95</sup> The relevance of narrative inquiry is thus even greater in post-traumatic scenarios. However, gathering narrative data in post-conflict situations can be challenging because "words do not come easily for victims."<sup>96</sup>

Just as history of conflict is commonly put in service of a peaceful future, narrative of trauma aids reconciliation in a number of ways. The most important is related to the preventive role of stories. Through the use of narrative, people participate in meaning-making processes, thus contributing to mutual understanding.<sup>97</sup> More generally, there seems to be a current consensus around the preventive potential of memory, namely, that knowledge is fundamental to avoid tragic scenarios.<sup>98</sup> In addition, interviews conducted as part of narrative inquiry studies sometimes prove to be therapeutic for the interviewee.<sup>99</sup> For instance, in their journalistic research on ill persons, Jeppesen and Hansen found

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<sup>93</sup> Arfuch, "Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación."

<sup>94</sup> Serna Dimas, "Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010)."

<sup>95</sup> Arfuch, "Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación."

<sup>96</sup> Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, 26.

<sup>97</sup> Bamberg and Demuth, "Narrative Inquiry: An Interview With Michael Bamberg."

<sup>98</sup> Bermeo Osorio, "Reenmarcando La Producción Social de Memoria: La Experiencia de Docentes y Estudiantes En Dos Colegios de Bogotá."

<sup>99</sup> Gemignani, "Memory, Remembering, and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing."

that “when the memory of the incident became a story, present reality is reformed.”<sup>100</sup> Storytelling thus serves the purpose of mitigating traumatizing events.

Narrative is the only genre that accomplishes the navigation of past, present, and different times in the past, when people attempt to make changes or underscore constancy.<sup>101</sup> As Arfuch puts it, being able to talk about oneself is utterly valuable to collective creation and learning.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, knowledge of mutual stories at an early age can contribute to the ethical recognition of ethnic, religious, cultural, and gender differences.<sup>103</sup> When dealing with efforts to educate younger generations about the past, it is imperative to find representations, words, or images to name past sufferings.<sup>104</sup> Not only is it essential to study who appear as defined characters in victims’ stories because “naming humanizes fear,”<sup>105</sup> but naming violence can constrain and define it so that it can be seen from an outside perspective.<sup>106</sup>

The erosion of the past as a source of exemplary content has led to the dismissal of a hero-centered history.<sup>107</sup> The always forgotten figure of the victim has thus resurfaced in the history of violence.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Jeppesen and Hansen, “Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry,” 107.

<sup>101</sup> Bamberg and Demuth, “Narrative Inquiry: An Interview With Michael Bamberg.”

<sup>102</sup> Arfuch, “Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación.”

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Verónica Vázquez-Cangas, “De Imágenes, Sentido y Paz. Una Esperanza Llamada Colombia,” *Pensamiento, Palabra y Obra* 17 (2017): 6–17.

<sup>105</sup> Frank, “Asking the Right Question about Pain: Narrative and Phronesis,” 215.

<sup>106</sup> Vázquez-Cangas, “De Imágenes, Sentido y Paz. Una Esperanza Llamada Colombia.”

<sup>107</sup> Serna Dimas, “Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010).”

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Due to such development in forms of history, it is somewhat common for post-conflict societies to benefit from narrative research. For example, with regards to the Northern Ireland peace process, Dawson analyzes how the desire for justice, understood as the demand for redress, articulates with politics of memory and discourses of victimhood.<sup>109</sup> According to Dawson, this desire is intrinsically linked to memory and voice.<sup>110</sup> In a similar case study, Gemignani studies the how refugees from Kosovo and Nepal adapt to the United States.<sup>111</sup> This study found that remembering her home country in a negative way helped one of the refugees adjust to her new life.<sup>112</sup> Going back gave her the chance to construct a counter-narrative to her own memory.<sup>113</sup> As this example demonstrates, when dealing with narratives of difficult events, it is imperative to notice what the interviewee chooses to forget.

#### Narrative in Colombia

With the approval of the Peace Accord with FARC in late 2016 and the progress of the current negotiations with ELN, Colombia flatters itself of being a post-conflict society. Yet the common use of the “post” prefix is problematic because, in Colombia, violence is not a thing of the past.<sup>114</sup> Beyond the actual armed conflict, González argues, Colombia faces another battle against violence –

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<sup>109</sup> Graham Dawson, “The Desire for Justice, Psychic Reparation and the Politics of Memory in ‘Post-Conflict’ Northern Ireland,” *Rethinking History* 18, no. 2 (2014): 265–88, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2013.858450>.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Gemignani, “Memory, Remembering, and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing.”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Bermeo Osorio, “Reenmarcando La Producción Social de Memoria: La Experiencia de Docentes y Estudiantes En Dos Colegios de Bogotá.”

that which naturalizes violence as a valid way of relating to the world.<sup>115</sup> Constructing the Self and the Other is further complicated in this case by the fact that the Other is not recognizably different from the Self.<sup>116</sup> With regards to narrative, the case of the Colombian armed conflict poses important challenges, as understanding violence in Colombia entails studying both history and identity. Giving violence a significant place in Colombians' identity, González suggests that, having been exposed to constant and apparently never-ending acts of violence for decades, the Colombian population has grown accustomed to violence, thus turning violence into its existential paradigm.<sup>117</sup>

But Colombia has somehow managed to sustain its economy, institutions, and creative drive amid an appalling armed conflict.<sup>118</sup> This points to one of Colombia's deepest contradictions: some argue that the Colombian population has become fundamentally violent,<sup>119</sup> while others state that Colombians have a remarkable ability to adapt to violence.<sup>120</sup> To González, the production of television shows related to drug-trafficking is an example of what he terms "cult of violence."<sup>121</sup> It could be stressed that the tendency to associate Colombia with violent events is reinforced both from within the country and from abroad, as the American-produced show "Narcos" suggests. Such normalization of violence is similarly evident in other sites of mass-media, as well as in public speech

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<sup>115</sup> William Almonacid González, "Colombia: El Paradigma Existencial de La Violencia," *Pensamiento, Palabra y Obra* 17 (2017): 68–77.

<sup>116</sup> Vázquez-Cangas expresses this thought by asserting that the enemy is a fellow countryman. See Vázquez-Cangas, "De Imágenes, Sentido y Paz. Una Esperanza Llamada Colombia."

<sup>117</sup> González, "Colombia: El Paradigma Existencial de La Violencia."

<sup>118</sup> Vázquez-Cangas, "De Imágenes, Sentido y Paz. Una Esperanza Llamada Colombia."

<sup>119</sup> González, "Colombia: El Paradigma Existencial de La Violencia."

<sup>120</sup> David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia. A Nation in Spite of Itself* (University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>121</sup> González, "Colombia: El Paradigma Existencial de La Violencia."

and school environments. González further suggests that, in general, the Colombian society chooses to relate to the world through violence.<sup>122</sup> Whether or not such generalization is admissible, the normalization of violence, which can refer to both the acceptance of violent acts as normal or to the idea that Colombia is a naturally violent country, must be eradicated if Colombia wants to honestly adopt the “post” prefix and establish itself as a true post-conflict society.

### ***Memory in Colombia***

In 1948, when an angry crowd took over Bogotá, stoning and burning down edifications in a dreadful turn of events following the assassination of a political leader and presidential candidate, the Museum of National History was not exempt from the looting.<sup>123</sup> The fact that the civil population was willing to attack a significant place of historical memory stroke the leaders of the time as a signal of the need to intensify the teaching of monumental history in Colombia.<sup>124</sup> Mid-twentieth-century reforms thus privileged a form of commemorative history aimed at enforcing collective unity.<sup>125</sup> More recently, Colombia has seen an increasing interest in memory as a militant response to impunity.<sup>126</sup> Memory has consequently gained an important place in educational spaces.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, this contrasts with the place of memory in education reform. Recent reforms have placed history as a complementary subject in the broader study of social sciences, thus giving it

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Serna Dimas, “Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010).”

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Bermeo Osorio, “Reenmarcando La Producción Social de Memoria: La Experiencia de Docentes y Estudiantes En Dos Colegios de Bogotá.”

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

limited curricular space.<sup>128</sup> Colombian spaces for the preservation of memory, both physical and abstract, have been neglected and even attacked. This fact begs the question of what the place of memory is in Colombia.

### *Narratives and Narrative Research in Colombia*

Previous research on accounts of violence in Colombia has generally focused on the act of sharing stories. For example, in his research on peace-building activities conducted in public schools in Bogotá, Bermeo Osorio focuses on teachers' and students' narratives of peace-building activities.<sup>129</sup> This study found that knowledge of the past only makes sense when transformative actions are carried out in the present.<sup>130</sup> When confronted with the possible use of personal narratives, some of the teachers who participated in Bermeo's study suggest their willingness to open spaces for students who are victims of conflict to share their experiences.<sup>131</sup> Although they insist that these narratives would certainly be beneficial to their classmates' learning, teachers usually refrain from "using" students' testimonies for fear of causing harm.<sup>132</sup>

Narrative has also gained a place in non-academic sources. For instance, testimonial literature of kidnapping reached high levels of popularity in Colombia during the late 2000s.<sup>133</sup> Most of the testimonies came from what Romero Leal calls the "exchangeables" – public figures who were

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Karen Lorena Romero Leal, "Condiciones de La Producción de Un Boom de Literatura Testimonial Del Secuestro En Colombia," *Revista Colombiana de Sociología* 40, no. 1 (2017): 161–86, doi:10.15446/rcs.v40n1.61957.



abducted by guerrilla groups with the hopes of reaching a humanitarian exchange agreement, in which imprisoned guerrilla leaders could be liberated.<sup>134</sup> The experience of kidnapping was thus introduced into the Colombian common knowledge through the popularization of testimonies in books, articles, television shows, and movies.<sup>135</sup> John Frank Pinchao's extraordinary escape from his kidnapping in the jungle; Gustavo Moncayo's impressive walk for the liberation of his son; Clara Rojas's pregnancy while kidnapped, along with the birth of her son, Emmanuel; and the startling Operación Jaque of 2008, in which the National Army managed to trick guerrilla combatants and liberate 15 hostages without causing any deaths, all attracted the attention of Colombians with impressive success. In Romero's words, Colombia faced during this period a certain "fictionalization of reality."<sup>136</sup>

According to Romero, the boom in testimonial literature was a consequence of the ideological climate at the time.<sup>137</sup> Through mass media and national policies, the FARC guerrilla came to be recognized as the internal enemy of the nation.<sup>138</sup> Around the same time, in 2011, the Colombian government established the National Center for Historical Memory, created with the purpose of meeting the victims' and the society's "right to truth."<sup>139</sup> In accordance with the Center's mission, it is essential to clarify the facts, actors, and conditions of the Colombian armed conflict to redress and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Romero argues that the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (president 2002-2010) contributed to the conception of FARC as a public enemy. To Romero, Uribe's policy of eradicating FARC by means of the arms was ideologically aided by the presentation of a coherent, homogeneous, comprehensible, and repetitive discourse. See Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, "¿Qué Es El Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica?," 2014, 10.15446/rcs.v40n1.61957.

dignify the victims.<sup>140</sup> It is thus clear that memory is automatically accepted as an essential element to the construction of peace in Colombia.<sup>141</sup> Both the interest in testimonial literature and the establishment of the Center for Historical Memory point to the fact that the importance of recognizing the victims' narratives has already been accepted in the country. Indeed, the production of testimonial and relational narratives of conflict in Latin America has traditionally followed periods of transition to democracy and the outbreak of the intention of giving voice to historically subordinated groups.<sup>142</sup>

However, the boom of testimonial literature proved not to serve as a vehicle for long-lasting memory, as victims were placed in the country's immediate memory.<sup>143</sup> By the same token, it is reasonable to expect that the approval of the Peace Accord will result in the boom of testimonial literature and filmography of victims and former combatants. But it is imperative to ensure that these testimonies will not be placed in the Colombian immediate memory. In this sense, narrative must be valued so as not to fall into what Romero calls "commodification of memory."<sup>144</sup> The duty to guarantee that personal narratives of the Colombian conflict and its termination will be truly valued befalls present-day Colombians. Indeed, Dewey cautioned that "memory is selective,"<sup>145</sup> so that the public present at a historical moment has a relevant place in the selection of facts that will then contribute to the construction of historical knowledge.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Romero Leal, "Condiciones de La Producción de Un Boom de Literatura Testimonial Del Secuestro En Colombia."

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> John Dewey, *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 235.

As part of its commitment to recovering victims' narratives of the past, the National Center for Historical Memory published the *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de guerra y dignidad* [Enough! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity] report in 2013.<sup>146</sup> This report aims at explicitly incorporating differences, contradictions, postures, and responsibilities, thus contributing to the construction of a legitimate, non-consensual memory of the past.<sup>147</sup> To do so, the Group for Historical Memory collected victims' testimonies, along with secondary literature and documentation.<sup>148</sup> Despite its focus on countering a single, grand narrative of the past, the *¡Basta Ya!* report relies on testimonies from what the Group for Historical Memory terms "emblematic cases."<sup>149</sup> These are defined as sites where multiple processes are condensed, so that emblematic cases stand out for their explicative force.<sup>150</sup> Thus, the selective process of memory in this case privileges the narratives of milestone events and very representative victims.

Truth-seeking undertakings are not new to Colombia. For instance, there is a widespread consensus that the take and re-take of the National Palace of Justice in November, 1985, is one of the most disgraceful occurrences in the history of Colombia.<sup>151</sup> These events are now referred to as the holocaust of the Palace of Justice.<sup>152</sup> In this tragic assault, the M-19 guerrilla, now demobilized, took

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<sup>146</sup> Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad*.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Jorge Aníbal Gómez Gallego, José Roberto Herrera Vergara, and Nilson Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe Final. Comisión de La Verdad Sobre Los Hechos Del Palacio de Justicia* (Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario, 2010).

<sup>152</sup> Redacción Judicial, "El Levantamiento y Entrega de Las Víctimas Del Palacio de Justicia, Un Caos Que Nunca Se Investigó," *El Espectador*, 2017, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/el-levantamiento-y-entrega-de-las-victimas-del-palacio-de-justicia-un-caos-que-nunca-se-investigó-artículo-711908>.

over the Palace of Justice by force.<sup>153</sup> The Colombian army then took back the Palace in a military operation.<sup>154</sup> Eleven of the Supreme Court's magistrates were assassinated, the Palace was burned down, and hundreds of people were held captive.<sup>155</sup> To this date, the remains of only five of the eleven people who were seen leaving the Palace alive and who then went missing have been found.<sup>156</sup> In the 20th anniversary of the tragic assault of the National Palace of Justice, the Supreme Court established a Commission of Truth with the purpose of building and preserving the historical memory of this incident.<sup>157</sup> The Commission's report, published in 2010, presents an ample overview of the events with the goal of helping future generations learn about the past.<sup>158</sup>

Other efforts to add narratives to the sphere of historical memory in Colombia come from the mainstream literary world. For example, *La Tormenta* [The Storm], by the Colombian journalist Germán Castro Caycedo, offers one chapter to each of four women who have lived the war from different locations and perspectives.<sup>159</sup> In Castro's words, this book is formed by the voices of truly heroic women who faced cruelty.<sup>160</sup> First, the story of an unnamed woman whose family was

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<sup>153</sup> Gómez Gallego, Herrera Vergara, and Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe Final. Comisión de La Verdad Sobre Los Hechos Del Palacio de Justicia*.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> On September 1, 2017, 32 years after the holocaust of the Palace of Justice, the remains of Bernardo Beltrán, who worked in the Palace's cafeteria, were found in Manizales. Redacción Judicial, "El Levantamiento y Entrega de Las Víctimas Del Palacio de Justicia, Un Caos Que Nunca Se Investigó."

<sup>157</sup> Gómez Gallego, Herrera Vergara, and Pinilla Pinilla, *Informe Final. Comisión de La Verdad Sobre Los Hechos Del Palacio de Justicia*.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Germán Castro Caycedo, *La Tormenta* (Bogotá: Planeta, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

extorted by FARC and who cannot hide her partial approval of paramilitary actions.<sup>161</sup> Second, the story of Loreta Kalaila, an indigenous woman from the Wayuu tribe, who condemns the unjustified acts of violence against women perpetuated by paramilitary groups in La Guajira.<sup>162</sup> Third, the story of María Margarita, former mayor of Cúcuta, who was kidnapped by the ELN guerrilla and whose children were forced to publicly slander her while the ELN summoned a plebiscite to decide whether or not to kill her.<sup>163</sup> Fourth, the story of Andrómaca, mother of an army lieutenant who was disappeared and executed by his fellow servicemen.<sup>164</sup> The four stories are visceral accounts of traumatic events, and serve as examples of the sense-making outlet that storytelling offers victims.

To contribute to children's understandings of the peace negotiations, the Colombian Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, aided by USAID, conducted a broad study with 614 children in several locations of the country in late 2014.<sup>165</sup> The participants of these study were invited to discuss the obstacles they perceived the negotiations would face.<sup>166</sup> Colombian children aged 9 through 14 engaged in debates, developed proposals and created works of art that were then brought to the negotiations table with FARC in Havana.<sup>167</sup> The collection of drawings and observations does not

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, *Yo Quiero Paz, Reconciliación y Un País Lleno de Amor* (Bogotá: Asociación Fuente de Paz, 2015).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

only show children's willingness to participate in peace-building efforts, but also provides evidence of their understanding of the conflict's underlying causes.<sup>168</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

If Colombia is to rebuild itself as a peaceful country after centuries of constant violence, stories need to be told and heard. It is essential to focus on populations whose stories are unlikely to be told because "narratability means that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living."<sup>169</sup> Returning to unheard stories is critical to overcome symbolic violence, understood as the idea that what matters to some is inferior.<sup>170</sup> It could be argued that omitting a person or community from a story is a form of dehumanization. To this point, Freire cautions that dehumanization, understood as a distortion happening within history, is not a predetermined destiny.<sup>171</sup> In this sense, the oppressed ought to struggle against the violence-engendering unjust order in order to counter dehumanization.<sup>172</sup> In the context of storytelling, giving a voice to those who have been traditionally deprived of it would contribute to counter such injustice. This is achieved by allowing someone to build and share personal narratives of past events. According to Lindsay and Schvail, narrative inquirers present reconstructed narratives in a relevant form, such as prose or film, with the purpose of illustrating the knowledge gained from a process of narrative inquiry.<sup>173</sup> It is through the presentation of recollected and reconstructed narratives that participants are given voice.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Frank, "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis," 5.

<sup>170</sup> Frank, "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis."

<sup>171</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder New York, 1970).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Lindsay and Schwind, "Narrative Inquiry: Experience Matters."

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

Finally, it is evident that popular perception in Colombia points to the importance of collecting victims' stories of war. But most of the narratives that are currently available were developed prior to the endorsement of the Peace Accord with FARC and the beginning of the negotiation process with ELN. As a result, narratives of peace have been scarcely studied. In addition, narrative tradition in Colombia has mainly focused either on grand, official narratives, or in victims' narratives of war. The stories of indirect victims, those who have been subject to structural, though not necessarily physical, forms of violence emerging from the conflict, are often overlooked.<sup>175</sup>

## Methods

### Setting

Tumaco is the second city in the Colombian Pacific Coast. It comprises almost 70% of the marine species in the country and “is one of the richest biodiversity arias worldwide.”<sup>176</sup> Tumaco has an estimated population of 199,659.<sup>177</sup> Nearly 90% of Tumaco's population identify as Afro-Colombian or black, 4% identify as indigenous, and the remaining 6% do not recognize themselves as part of any ethnic group.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> According to Galtung, violence can be defined as “the difference between the potential and the actual,” meaning that violence is present whenever a person fails to attain its potential due to preventable causes. The definition of violence is thus extended to accommodate both structural and personal forms of violence. Structural violence is closely related to social injustice, while personal violence indicates that a person's potential realization is not sufficiently protected. Personal violence shows, and its manifestation necessarily points to the existence of latent structural violence. Such an extended definition of violence leads to an extended definition of peace, so that peace can mean both the absence of structural or personal violence. See Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.

<sup>176</sup> Herbert Giraldo and Leonardo Álvarez, *Tumaco Pacífico Campus* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2015), 27.

<sup>177</sup> Giraldo and Álvarez, *Tumaco Pacífico Campus*.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

## Participants

The eight participants of this study are first-year college students in the National University's Tumaco campus. Three of the participants are female, the remaining five are male. Two participants are African-Colombian, one is indigenous, one considers himself both African-Colombian and indigenous, and the remaining four did not mention a racial identity.

## Instruments

Participants volunteered to participate in two individual, semi-structured interviews in March, 2018. All interviews were conducted at the National University's campus and were carried out in Spanish. The purpose of the first interview was to get to know the participants, thoroughly explain the purposes of this study, and start collecting their personal narratives of the Colombian war and how it has affected their lives. In the second interview, participants were invited to reflect and expand on the events they had previously mentioned. This process is consistent with accepted methods for conducting narrative inquiry analyses.<sup>179</sup>

## Findings: Stories Told

What follows is an effort to create a space for the voice of indirect victims. Through the collection and recount of the personal narratives of young people from the Colombian Pacific Coast, this section provides a parallel perspective on the Colombian armed conflict. The voices of eight first-year college students in Tumaco are intended to offer alternatives to the official narrative summarized in textbooks. By connecting their lives to the broader history of the country, these eight students push back traditional preconceptions about possible ways to relate to conflict.

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<sup>179</sup> See Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.



The participants of this study are not direct victims of the conflict, but their lives have been inevitably shaped by their proximity to violence. As they reflect on their everyday experiences, these eight students defy traditional conceptions on the ways in which people can relate to conflict. Sounds, rumors, and emotions materialize in their stories as features of an indirect victimization. In addition, participants present a “one-by-one” narrative, in which conflict is not understood through historical developments or political movements, but through the daily decisions of individual persons. Such understanding guides these eight students’ views on the future, ultimately suggesting a paradoxical approach to peace; namely, that peace is impossible, yet there is hope of achieving it.

The following sections thematically describe participants’ personal narratives. In finding commonalities and salient features of the narratives, this analysis aims at adding to the understanding of the Colombian armed conflict by echoing the voices of eight young Colombians whose lives have been disturbed by war. Each participant’s relationship with conflict is unique as it is shaped by specific physical settings, their childhood, and their ethnicity. But participants’ overarching modes of telling<sup>180</sup> unveil commonalities essential to the understanding of indirect victims’ experiences. The first section introduces the participants and provides a brief context. The following section revolves around identity, identifying issues of rurality, responsibility, and victimhood. Then, participants’ descriptions of conflict are introduced and categorized. The next section outlines salient features of their overall narratives, discussing emotion, spaces of knowledge, shades of normality, the embodiment of violence, and the perpetuation of conflict. The final section recounts relevant findings.

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<sup>180</sup> Arfuch argues that, beyond content, people’s *modes* of telling stories are essential to their narrative. See Arfuch, “Subjetividad, Memoria y Narrativas: Una Reflexión Teórica y Política En El Campo de La Educación.”

## Eight difficult stories

Participants come from a range of backgrounds. Sandra<sup>181</sup> is an 18-year-old indigenous woman from the Awá community. As a child, she lived in a rural area near Tumaco. She is eager to pursue a college degree with the goal of serving her community as a teacher.

Julio is an African-Colombian student in his first semester at the National University. He has lived his whole life in Tumaco, where he says he has lived “a poor man’s life.”<sup>182</sup> He feels identified with the lively music and dances of the region.

Jorge is half Awá and half African-Colombian. He first introduced himself saying he belongs to an indigenous community, but he later used third person plural to refer to indigenous peoples. One of the most salient features of his identity is being a peasant in the vicinities of Tumaco.

Angélica was born in Ecuador, but her family moved to Colombia shortly after her birth. Her father is a teacher, which in some ways shielded Angélica’s family from war, as teachers were respected by most participants in the armed conflict. Being 26, Angélica is the oldest of all the participants. She applied to college many times before being admitted.

Martín recently moved to Tumaco from a small town located two hours away from campus to study. Martín seems to be much more pessimistic than other participants, but he said he was very grateful to have a chance to talk about his experiences with violence. He heard most of the stories he shared with me from his mother.

Danilo was born in Cali, but he moved to a small town close to Tumaco at a young age. He lived with his grandmother until she passed away in 2014. He is full of life and likes to express himself

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<sup>181</sup> All the names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

<sup>182</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

through art. Before starting college, Danilo worked as a dance instructor and participated in a theater group.

Faustino was born in Cali and he lived half his life in Ecuador. When he was in seventh grade, he asked his mother to send him back to Colombia. He then went to live with his grandmother in a small village separated from Tumaco by a five-hour boat ride.

Alejandra was born in the Department of Huila, but her family later moved to Putumayo, where she was bullied in school for her clear skin and blue eyes. When we talked, it had been less than a month since she had moved away from her family's farm in Putumayo to study in Tumaco. She has always lived in the country side, far away from cities. Alejandra's family lost its farm in a natural disaster in Mocoa, in March 2017. Alejandra was happy to talk about her identity, but she did not want to talk about the armed conflict.

#### Background: Tumaco in March, 2018

These interviews were conducted in March, 2018, in the city of Tumaco, located in the southwestern endpoint of Colombia. A coastal city limiting with the Pacific Ocean, Tumaco serves as a port city. The surrounding areas of the city concentrate the highest level of coca plantations in the country<sup>183</sup> and have been home to a number of armed groups in the past decades. Because of its location, the whole city of Tumaco is under permanent risk of tsunamis. Signs all around the city instruct people on evacuation routes to follow in case of a natural disaster.

When I visited Tumaco, less than two weeks before elections for Senate and the House of Representatives, and a few months before the presidential elections, the city was covered in political

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<sup>183</sup> The United Nations and the Colombian Government estimated that, in 2016, Tumaco concentrated 23,148 hectares of coca plantations, representing 16% of the total number of coca plantations in the country. See Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito, "Colombia: Monitoreo de Territorios Afectados Por Cultivos Ilícitos 2016," 2017, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/colombia/2017/julio/CENSO\\_2017\\_WEB\\_baja.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/colombia/2017/julio/CENSO_2017_WEB_baja.pdf).

advertisements. Along billboards and posters presenting candidates, numerous advertisements, sponsored by the Police, invited people not to pay extortions. Vans labeled with the symbols of international relief and human rights organizations drove through the city regularly. The walls of a school showcased a mural, painted by children, celebrating the “week for peace.”

At the time of the interviews, the peace accords of 2016 were being strongly criticized on the national scene. The presidential campaign had opened up the debate on each aspect of the Peace Accord with FARC, while the apparent failure of the peace negotiations with ELN was causing Colombians to lose faith on a negotiated end to war. On January 29, 2018, following a series of deadly attacks, the Colombian Government decided to suspend the negotiations. On February 10, ELN combatants staged a 72-hour-long “armed strike,” during which numerous attacks were registered. On March 5, while I conducted the first round of interviews, Tumaco’s mayor was deposed for corruption.

Participants expressed their concern about the return of violence to their region. According to one of the participants, gossip and news about murders and attacks had decreased significantly after 2013 but were growing common again.<sup>184</sup> Several participants mentioned the armed strike. The most alarming form of violence, mentioned with concern by several participants, was an attack to a passenger bus. Days before the interview, ELN had stopped a bus in between downtown Tumaco and the National University’s campus. All passengers had been forced to get off the bus, leaving their belongings behind. The bus, along with all the passengers’ possessions, was then set on fire. As she told me the story with angst, Angélica said she had missed that bus for just a few minutes.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>185</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

## Identity

***The rural and the urban***

Each of the participants identifies with non-urban spaces. They generally show a relevant knowledge of agriculture and a deep connection to nature. Alejandra, for example, explained that she dreams of living in the mountains.<sup>186</sup> In turn, the city emerges as an alien space. As a teenager taking part in a successful musical group, Julio traveled to Cali and to Medellín. In his description, “it was like going to a different world ... a much more urbanized world, with buildings and all those types of things you do not see here.”<sup>187</sup>

The rurality of their space signified a distinctly different way of approaching the armed conflict. The discrepancy between the rural and the urban is better explained through the plebiscite for peace. Jorge highlighted that almost all people from rural areas in the Pacific region voted yes. “It was a resounding ‘yes’ because they are people who have first-handedly lived the conflict ... but in the cities, I do not know, I thought they [people in the cities] were going to be more understanding.”<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Martín argues that people in the cities know about war, but that they cannot understand it. In his words, “you can say ‘I can imagine what a shooting is like,’ but it is very different to think and imagine than to live it ... in fact, they [people in the cities] have no idea that the rest of us did live a war; they did not.”<sup>189</sup>

In this sense, understanding war entails *feeling* fear and desperation. In an attempt to help the non-war-affected “other,” Danilo worked with his theater group to create a play that would raise

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<sup>186</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>187</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>188</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>189</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

awareness on how it felt to lose a child, a spouse, or a parent to war.<sup>190</sup> Along with grieve, the most salient emotion that participants attach to their relationship with conflict is fear. As Julio expressed, having grown up fearing stray bullets, what he feels for the Colombian armed conflict is nothing but caution.<sup>191</sup>

### *The concept of victim*

Defining victimhood is a challenging task. Even though none of the participants identified as direct victims, some told stories of displacement and loss. This ambiguity strongly challenges the notion of “victim.” Sandra’s uncles disappeared seven years ago and, according to her, it is likely that they were either murdered or forcefully recruited.<sup>192</sup> Julio’s family had to move to urban Tumaco because of the murders and attacks that took place in the rural area.<sup>193</sup> And Jorge has moved several times trying to escape war.<sup>194</sup> Although most participants recognize that, compared to others, they “have not lived such a critical life,”<sup>195</sup> they have relatives who have been victims of different acts of violence. For example, Sandra’s grandfather was compelled to leave his farm because combatants continuously stole his cattle and crops, in Sandra’s words, “because they [combatants] had nothing to eat.”<sup>196</sup> In a dreadful case of violence, Angélica’s 16-year-old cousin was raped and thrown in the river because her boyfriend was involved with an armed group.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>191</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>192</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>193</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>194</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>195</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>196</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>197</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

Victimhood is also reshaped by ethnicity. Most participants, whether indigenous themselves or not, recognized that indigenous communities are severely affected by conflict.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, the indigenous populations of the Pacific region had to endure all even more complex dimensions of war than other communities. Not only do they have to continuously reclaim their territory, but their cultural and religious beliefs have been affected by war. As Jorge explained, numerous fields are cleared out for the purpose of growing coca without regards for the religious and traditional meanings of those trees. In this process, the concentration of a type of plant that is believed to drive away evil spirits has decreased, thus leaving the social space unprotected.<sup>199</sup>

Overall, in spite of not identifying as direct victims, it could be argued that participants were indirectly victimized by the suffering of their families and communities. Looking back on their experiences, participants generally locate themselves as being in the middle of a conflict they do not fully understand. As bystanders, these young students have been consistently subjected to instances of loss, fear, and, above all, helplessness. As an example of how telling stories of traumatic events can be therapeutic for interviewees,<sup>200</sup> several participants expressed feeling liberated after sharing their experiences.<sup>201</sup> As Martín explained, the only other buffer people usually had for telling their stories was social media.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>199</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>200</sup> Gemignani, “Memory, Remembering, and Oblivion in Active Narrative Interviewing”; Jeppesen and Hansen, “Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry.”

<sup>201</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018; Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>202</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

*Identity and responsibility*

“Despite all the problems in Colombia, if God gave me the chance of being born again, I would choose Colombia again.”<sup>203</sup>

Having accepted the existence of violence, participants hope to work for the improvement of their region amid war. Indeed, a salient feature of participants’ relationship with the Pacific region is a sense of responsibility. As they had the opportunity of pursuing a higher degree, most participants expressed feeling like they owed something to their communities. For that reason, several participants want to go back to their hometowns after studying in a big city. With dreams of teaching<sup>204</sup> or helping use the natural resources of the region for the benefit of its population,<sup>205</sup> these young students hope to act against war by attacking the social-based motives of war.

Participants also feel responsible for changing foreigners’ views on Colombia. For example, Alejandra thinks that foreigners assume all Colombians carry drugs.<sup>206</sup> As regards to this problem, Jorge argues that changing outsiders’ perspectives on Colombia and Colombians is part of the responsibilities that every young Colombian should have.<sup>207</sup> Through this argument, participants detach their Colombian identity from the armed conflict, ultimately understanding war as an event that does not define them, but rather empowers them to act against injustice. In Angélica’s words, seeing war should inspire people to ask themselves what they can contribute to peace.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>204</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>205</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>206</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>207</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>208</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.



All but one of the participants have a positive perspective on their Colombian identity, and neither of them mentioned the armed conflict when asked about what it meant to be Colombian.<sup>209</sup> For Sandra, “being Colombian is the most beautiful thing.”<sup>210</sup> For Angélica, Colombia is “a little piece of passion.”<sup>211</sup> Participants underscored that Colombians are joyful, hard-working, and perseverant.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, they argued that, compared to the rest of the country, people from the Pacific region are more cheerful and “have more flavor.”<sup>213</sup> In addition, most participants highlighted biodiversity and environmental wealth as essential features of their national identity.<sup>214</sup>

## Conflict

### *Blurred actors of conflict*

“No idea which guerrilla. People with boots and guns.”<sup>215</sup>

In their accounts of the motives of conflict, participants recognize three main actors of conflict – the government, “the guerrilla,” which comprehends FARC and ELN, and the paramilitary.

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<sup>209</sup> Martín explained that he did not really feel Colombian and, therefore, he was not qualified to explain what the Colombian identity meant. To him, his identity was not linked to the place where he was born. He simply felt part of the world. Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>210</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>211</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>212</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Faustino (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>213</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>214</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018; Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>215</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

Concretely, Julio argued, the problem is that the guerrilla does not agree with the laws enforced by the government.<sup>216</sup>

Only two participants mentioned paramilitary groups.<sup>217</sup> Jorge explained that he had learned about the paramilitary as a child, when he lived with his family in Putumayo. According to Jorge, the paramilitary's actions were simply unjustifiable, as they were "a war against peasantry."<sup>218</sup> To illustrate his point, Jorge mentioned the numerous massacres he had heard about because he lived close to one of the paramilitary's "casas de pique" [chopping houses], where bodies were quartered. The circumstances had forced his family to move back to Tumaco's proximities. But "if it was raining there [in Putumayo], it was pouring here."<sup>219</sup>

Moreover, participants generally conceive guerrillas as single blurred actor. As Danilo expressed, "in Tumaco, I do not know who is acting, I cannot say it is one or the other."<sup>220</sup> The blurred nature of guerrillas is evident in participants' telling of past events. In sharing their stories, participants often revealed not knowing who perpetrated the actions that they remembered so distinctly. For example, with an impressive narrative skill, Sandra shared details of how two of her classmates had joined the guerrilla at a young age. But when asked about which guerrilla, Sandra said that she did not know if it was FARC or ELN, but that it was probably FARC because they were the ones present at that time.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>218</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>221</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

Sandra's reasoning suggests an essential factor of the overall narrative, that is, that participants attempt to link actions to actors by remembering the time at which the events took place. This does not only imply that the nature of the actions is not sufficient to reveal the actors, but that actors generally appear, without intersections, in the region's timeline. For example, Angélica distinctly remembers having to come along with her father to pull dead bodies out of the river after a massacre. In her words, "I am not sure which group was there, but I think it was around the *time of the paramilitary*."<sup>222</sup> In short, the history of the region can be divided in periods of domination during which specific actors were "in charge" and, therefore, responsible for acts of war.

### ***Absence and domination***

"FARC dominated the town. You get used to it."<sup>223</sup>

State institutions are not entirely present in Tumaco's context. According to Julio, Tumaco and its surroundings have been grossly forgotten by the State.<sup>224</sup> This is particularly evident in the case of defense institutions. In Jorge's words, "in 2003, the paramilitaries walked like they owned the place ... where was the army, the police? It disappeared from the face of the earth."<sup>225</sup>

In many instances, the apparent absence of State institutions is said to result from the high levels of corruption in the region, because the resources that should be spent on security and social initiatives are misdirected.<sup>226</sup> As an outstanding example of corruption, Danilo shared the story of a police

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<sup>222</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018. Emphasis added.

<sup>223</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>224</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>225</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>226</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

officer who “sold” the information of those who denounced extortion.<sup>227</sup> Conscious of the high levels of corruption and of the absence of the State, several participants stressed that the future of Colombia depended heavily on the results of the presidential elections.<sup>228</sup>

In the absence of a State, armed groups dominate towns and regions in very distinctive ways. “Owning” a space in this context means to *be* the State in the face of statelessness. In the participants’ views, guerrilla groups established something akin to a legal system, where people from the region would be judged for their actions. Sandra’s mother, an indigenous leader in charge of administering part of the community’s financial resources, received several subpoenas from FARC because she was accused of malfeasance. In Sandra’s words, “someone sued her before FARC.”<sup>229</sup> In the end, guerrilla leaders found Sandra’s mother innocent after hearing her explanations. Describing the evolution of domination in this sense, Sandra argued that, in recent years, the guerrilla at least tries to be well informed before killing someone.<sup>230</sup>

Participants also address extortion with terms related to State institutions. In Jorge’s and Danilo’s narratives, extortions are “taxes” that landowners have to pay to the guerrilla or to drug cartels.<sup>231</sup> This conception allowed Jorge to better understand the emergence of the paramilitary. In his words, ranchers’ associations had found it more affordable to conform an army than to continue paying

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<sup>227</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>228</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>229</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

“FARC taxes.”<sup>232</sup> Similarly, Danilo clarifies that, currently, “the situation is terrible because they are killing a lot due to the drug taxes.”<sup>233</sup>

#### The form of domination

Armed actors are generally described not for their actions but for their dominating presence. In Alejandra’s words, “all I knew [as a child] was that they were the ones who dominated and fought with others. No idea why.”<sup>234</sup> Further explaining *how* domination occurred, Martín points out how armed groups mark houses with graffiti to signal their “territory.”<sup>235</sup> In this sense, he says, Colombian armed groups are not that different from animals, because “it is the same that a human being or a lion fights over territory.”<sup>236</sup> When explaining why 2012 was such a “dark time” for Tumaco, Julio argued that that was the time when FARC started to “reign” and to “play the tough guys.”<sup>237</sup> Like Julio, Martín describes combatants with a hint of mockery that suggests defiance. In his words, “just because they have a gun, they think they are God.”<sup>238</sup>

Under a state of lawless domination, most participants highlighted the restrictions to which they are subjected. For instance, dominant groups in the past have dictated the times at which people were allowed out of their homes.<sup>239</sup> And, even without an imposed restriction, people living close to the

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<sup>232</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>233</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>234</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>235</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>238</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>239</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

battlefield have to choose their everyday routes with extreme care. Julio's mother forbade him from walking through certain streets or going near a police station, because guerrilla groups target the police.<sup>240</sup> Danilo prefers not to go out unless he has to go to class to avoid being mistaken for someone else or being caught by a stray bullet.<sup>241</sup> Martín has to comply with his mother's restrictions on where he can and cannot go, which he obeys without hesitation because he knows she is always alert to security warnings, which are often posted in social media.<sup>242</sup>

### ***Drug trafficking***

“Ever since the white powder arrived, everything broke down here.”<sup>243</sup>

Cocaine production has permeated the lives of most participants. Some of the interviewees showed relevant knowledge of the drug process, even though they distanced themselves from the world of drugs. For example, Sandra shared that, in the region where her family's farm is located, everyone plants coca except for her grandfather.<sup>244</sup> He worries about what people will eat once the cocaine business expires.<sup>245</sup> Outstandingly detailed in his description, Jorge explained how coca is planted, how much time is necessary for the crops to harvest, and how little the producers get from each kilogram of fully-processed cocaine.<sup>246</sup> Seeing my surprise at his deep knowledge on the subject, he said “any kid from around here, who grew up in this region, can grow it [coca].”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>241</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>242</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>243</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>244</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>247</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

Drugs are linked to conflict within the narrative of absence and domination in two ways. First, the absence of the State has resulted in the lack of infrastructure and security that would allow for a more diverse agroindustry. Indeed, a compelling explanation for the ubiquity of cocaine in the region is the difficulty of commercializing other products due to the shortage of investors and the insufficient transportation infrastructure.<sup>248</sup> After all, “why would a farmer cultivate plantain or yucca if there is no person or company that will buy it immediately? That is the difference with coca. They buy coca.”<sup>249</sup>

Second, armed groups’ domination translates into drug trafficking. According to participants, armed groups dominate and control the drug business.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, “cocaine has been monopolized ... as in any market, whoever is in power controls the price, and in this case, who has the power? The armed groups.”<sup>251</sup> This, in Julio’s perspective, is the reason why armed groups are interested in controlling the rural areas where coca is produced.<sup>252</sup> In this sense, drug lords have “enslaved the peasants.”<sup>253</sup>

Showing a more radical understanding of the relationship between money, drugs, and conflict, Jorge coins the term “capitalist guerrilla.”<sup>254</sup> In his view, because of their interest in enriching

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<sup>248</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>251</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>252</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>253</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>254</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

themselves without regards for people's wellbeing, guerrillas "are a disgrace to revolution."<sup>255</sup>

Jorge's perspective thus suggest that the actions and domination of the armed groups cannot find a reasonable justification in the realm of politics. Rather, the Colombian conflict ought to be understood through an angle of heartless economics.

### Peace and the plebiscite

Overall, participants mentioned that the peace negotiations reduced the presence of FARC in the region. For example, Sandra said that there had been no more attacks or battles after the negotiations, and that some people who had apparently vanished were returning to their villages.<sup>256</sup> She hopes that her uncles, who she thinks were forcefully recruited, will come back.<sup>257</sup> Other participants, however, argued that the decreasing presence of FARC had allowed for the ELN to reappear in the region.

Participants shared mixed perceptions on the peace process. While some had placed considerable hope on the plebiscite for peace,<sup>258</sup> others expressed partial disagreement with the Peace Accord.<sup>259</sup> For Sandra, the rejection of the initial Peace Accord signals the normalization of violence. In her words, "I think we are used to violence. They [Colombians] voted no."<sup>260</sup> Like Sandra, most participants conceive the plebiscite as a window to Colombia's public opinion. Reading people's comments on social media, Jorge had reached the conclusion that "they complain if they are not firing bullets, but they complain if they are."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid; Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>259</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>260</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>261</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.



## Overall Narrative

***To feel war: indirect victims' relationship with conflict***

The presence of war for non-victims takes the form of sounds and stories. Most participants referred to their experiences with conflict in terms of what they had to hear during their childhood. For Martín, for example, the most striking memory was curling up in the kitchen, embracing his mother and siblings, listening to a battle.<sup>262</sup> The need to hide is also a salient feature of participants' personal narratives. For example, Sandra explained that, as a child, "you have to hide where bombs will not get you."<sup>263</sup> She distinctly remembers having slept in the mountains one night when she was about four years old, as her mother insisted they would be safer there.<sup>264</sup> Alejandra's first memory of war is to be forced to stay quiet while hiding from a combat.<sup>265</sup>

Objects and spaces emerge as a relevant piece of participants' stories. For example, Martín explains that, whenever they heard a shooting, he and his family would build a sort of fort with furniture and wait in the kitchen.<sup>266</sup> Angélica remembers how, as a child, she had to hide underneath her bed and cover herself with the mattress whenever she heard gunshots.<sup>267</sup> The mattress also appears as a symbol of protection in Martín's and Danilo's memories.<sup>268</sup> Danilo looks back at this

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<sup>262</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>263</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Alejandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>266</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>267</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>268</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

symbol with humor, remembering that he hid underneath his mattress “as if a mattress could stop a bullet!”<sup>269</sup>

The geography of the region also plays an interesting role in participant’s narratives. According to Sandra, her town lays in the valley between two mountains, each of which was home to a different armed actor. This configuration meant that she, along with her town, were literally in the middle of war.<sup>270</sup> Martín, who grew up in the same town, confirmed Sandra’s description.<sup>271</sup>

In some cases, participants’ feelings and perspectives on war had taken a turn at some point. Thinking back about the battles he heard as a child, Martín remembers being naïve. In his words, “back then I thought it was like the games I played with my brothers.”<sup>272</sup> Then, when he first heard the “ghost plane,” an airplane that would drop bombs at night, when it could not be seen, Martín realized people were dying, and no longer felt it was a game.<sup>273</sup> Similarly, Danilo remembers that, as a child, he thought the shootings were funny, because he had to run and hide. Then, when a cylinder bomb killed a woman he knew, his perspective changed. Only then he realized that “those red things that lit up [in the sky]” could take people away forever.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>271</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>272</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

### *Learning about violence*

Knowledge of conflict generally comes from the media, from people's stories, or from rumors.<sup>275</sup> But participants insisted that mainstream media was shortsighted and only reported on certain aspects of conflict, making it misleading.<sup>276</sup> For example, Jorge highlighted, in Putumayo “one could see the pile of shoes from people, hundreds of shoes, from people [the paramilitary] had killed. And the media does not even mention that.”<sup>277</sup> In some cases, media reports on war and conflict had an overdose effect. For Martín, for example, the constant reporting of assassinations, rapes, and attacks, had caused him not to be surprised at the horrors of war.<sup>278</sup> He reasoned he was better off ignoring the media altogether.<sup>279</sup>

Participants' eagerness to understand conflict varies. Jorge expressed his desire to understand more about the origins and evolution of the guerrillas, and to explore the untold stories of these organizations.<sup>280</sup> In contrast, Angélica explained that she wanted to remain as far away from conflict as possible, even conceptually.<sup>281</sup> Martín explained that, growing up, he always wanted to understand the motives behind the battles he saw.<sup>282</sup> But all his mother ever told him was “in the world, there are

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<sup>275</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>276</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>277</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>278</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>281</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>282</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

wars.”<sup>283</sup> Similarly, Faustino continuously asked his family what was behind all the violence he heard about. In his words, “I asked, but they never answered.”<sup>284</sup>

***Micro-narrative of conflict: the person-by-person explanation***

Being surrounded by war, some of the participants’ former classmates and friends had joined the armed groups, even as child soldiers. Two of Sandra’s classmates, both female, had voluntarily joined the guerrilla at around age 12 and had decided to escape after a few weeks. They escaped the campsite and reached Sandra’s house, where they hid for a few hours until they heard the commanders approaching with open fire.<sup>285</sup> One of Angélica’s childhood friends is now an ELN fighter, who she greets in the street “because of fear or friendship.”<sup>286</sup>

Getting to know others who chose to join the groups had forced participants to formulate arguments as to why people would choose “that path.”<sup>287</sup> In her reflection about why her classmates would join the guerrilla, Sandra reasoned that it had to do with their families, as one of them did not have a mother. The other, in Sandra’s words, probably joined for money, because “she had it all” when it came to family.<sup>288</sup> In general, she thought, people joined the armed groups because they had no other opportunities and the armed groups convinced them with false information.<sup>289</sup> In addition to

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Faustino (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>285</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>286</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>287</sup> I borrow the term “path” in this context from Danilo and Julio, who explained both the overall nature of conflict and individuals’ decisions within war in terms of “the bad path” and “the correct path.”

<sup>288</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

the lack of opportunities, Julio mentioned revenge as a plausible reason for joining armed groups.<sup>290</sup>

Other participants formulated recruitment in terms of injustice. In Angélica's words, her friends had been confronted with the same injustices she had faced as a child, but, "maybe they thought the only solution was to fight from there [from the guerrilla]."<sup>291</sup>

Participants thus understand conflict through individual stories. To make sense of war, these eight students do not generally refer to the history of violence in Colombia or to the current political landscape. Rather, they question why individuals join armed groups or why they work in the drug trafficking business. Approaching the conflict in terms of choosing the "bad path" reshapes the underpinnings of war, extending the problem to families and schools. For Julio, for example, the reason behind all violence is "the wrong upbringing of the person, who follows the bad path [and is] forced to perpetrate criminal acts."<sup>292</sup> For Danilo, if families and teachers guide children through the "correct path" and the government provides sufficient opportunities, then there is no reason to expect any more Colombians to choose violence.<sup>293</sup>

Being dependent on each individual's upbringing, violence can be reversed with education. In participants' perspectives, if people join armed groups because they struggle to imagine a different way of life, then access to quality education could prevent young Colombians from going to war. Having reached that opportunity by getting into college, most participants underscore the importance

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<sup>290</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>291</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>292</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>293</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

of schooling.<sup>294</sup> Moreover, in Angélica's words, education can teach people to feel empathy and help to construct "a more human society, one that feels."<sup>295</sup>

Young people in the Tumaco's neighboring towns are confronted with conflicting perspectives on conflict as they are surrounded by guerrilla combatants. As a child, Julio lived close to a number of combatants who often asked to use his phone. His brother had explained to him that those people, who belonged to the guerrilla, were "the killers."<sup>296</sup> As he grew older, Julio heard the news report about the guerrilla kidnapping children, forcefully recruiting minors, and attacking populations. His reasoning was the guerrilla combatants he knew, who he saw as "normal" people, were not those mentioned on the news. "They," the violent fighters, had to be somewhere else.<sup>297</sup>

#### Consequences to the possibility of peace

Understanding the conflict from the perspective of singular armed actors allows for a different perspective on peace. For example, Sandra explained that her mother opposed the Peace Accord because former combatants would get paid. But, in Sandra's understanding, because some guerrilla members were forcefully recruited and could therefore be conceived as victims, it is reasonable that they would need subsidies to "make their lives again."<sup>298</sup> The person-by-person narrative also challenges the homogenization that peace negotiations presuppose because "the guerrilla" can no longer be treated as a singular actor. As an example of such problematic, Jorge explained that "some

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<sup>294</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018; Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018; Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>295</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>296</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

people from FARC who did not believe in the [peace] process went to the ELN, and the situation continues ... they are attacking again.”<sup>299</sup>

In the participants’ perspective, because conflict ultimately boils down to individual decisions, the end to war also depends on individual actions. Julio suggests that “it is our responsibility to overcome ourselves and respect each other ... we all want a future that has nothing to do with violence.”<sup>300</sup> To Jorge, “if we want to achieve some peace, we need to build it all together ... [and] think like human beings, not like money-making machines.”<sup>301</sup>

### *Shades of normality and violence*

Some participants suggested the notion of magnitudes of violence and normality. “Small” violence is domestic violence, which can lead to a “bigger” violence, represented in the armed conflict.<sup>302</sup> Much like violence, the normal takes different shades. For Jorge, combats were normal and so they did not generate much concern, but antipersonnel mines and bombs were abnormal and terrifying.<sup>303</sup> For Martín, the sound of gunshots was normal. Talking about the improvised trench his family built in the kitchen whenever there was a battle, Martín explained that “it happened almost every night ... to me, it was something normal. I mean, I knew I would go to bed and I knew that later that night I

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<sup>299</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>300</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>301</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>302</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018; Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>303</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

would have to get up and go to that place [in the kitchen].”<sup>304</sup> In contrast, cylinder bombs and the “ghost plane” were abnormal.<sup>305</sup>

*The cycle of violence and the impossibility of peace*

“There will never be peace. Humankind is made to fight ... if they ever solve a problem with an armed group, there will not be long before a new one is created. And so on, until the end of time.”<sup>306</sup>

As participants’ stories focus on domination and oppression rather than acts of violence, they understand armed actors as dynasties, a term I borrow from Julio. He explained that the armed conflict is repetitive and, in his perspective, conflict “is never going to end, because one dynasty [of warlords] passes and the next one starts.”<sup>307</sup> Julio’s definition fits perfectly with participants’ overall narrative about waves of domination. For example, Jorge described how the ELN took over his town, mobilizing 4,000 soldiers to banish the paramilitary in a battle over territory.<sup>308</sup> Martín suggested a narrative of conquest. In his perspective, violence “moves” as the armed groups relocate. When asked about insecurity in his town and his expectations for the future, Martín argued “it is safe up to a certain point ... in about 20 years, I imagine that it [the insecurity] will be further downhill.”<sup>309</sup>

Understanding conflict in terms of an endless chain of domination, participants find peace unattainable. As Jorge puts it, “what difference does it make to Colombians that Colombia signs a Peace Accord with ELN, or with any group, if a new one [group] will arise?”<sup>310</sup> Angélica shares this

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<sup>304</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>305</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>306</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>307</sup> Julio (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>308</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>309</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>310</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.



idea, arguing that, because every armed group is followed by another, the conflict will never end.<sup>311</sup>

This perspective is not surprising when taking into account that peace is an unknown notion to each of the participants. In Danilo's words, "when I was born, this conflict was already here."<sup>312</sup> In the end, the impossibility of peace is entrenched in the inescapable existence of something to dominate.

Despite having such dispiriting view on the nature of conflict, participants are generally hopeful and eager to work for peace. Angélica thinks that, even if the Peace Accord cannot fix violence, "it is worth the try."<sup>313</sup> Danilo considers it is his responsibility to do whatever is in his hands to help appease war.<sup>314</sup> Sandra suggests that, as more opportunities arise for young people, things will be different in the region.<sup>315</sup> And Jorge argues that education is the most promissory chance for Pacific youth to choose a non-violent path, as it can advance people's rejection of violence as a solution to injustice by promoting critical thinking.<sup>316</sup>

The apparent paradox of wanting to work for peace while finding it unattainable challenges the concept of normalization. For most participants, violence is normal and perpetual, but it can be reduced. Given the notion of an almost quantifiable range of normality and violence, participants are able to frame their conception of violence in a way that allows for both the impossibility of peace and

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<sup>311</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>312</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>313</sup> Angélica (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>314</sup> Danilo (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>315</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 5, 2018.

<sup>316</sup> Jorge (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

the necessity of working towards peace with the hopes of shrinking violence to its “normal” state. In Faustino’s words, Colombians have not gotten used to violence. They have accepted it.<sup>317</sup>

### **Discussion: The Voice of Emotion**

Studying the stories of indirect victims of war is crucial because they represent the voice of an emotional relationship with war informed by proximity to violence, a voice that is unlikely to be heard. But these stories need to be told in order to counter the idea that some stories – and the understanding of violence that comes from them – is less valuable.<sup>318</sup> The narratives of these eight students differ from those of victims. For example, none of the participants mentioned an interest in uncovering the truth about specific events. Rather, they underscore the recognition of their emotional, sensorial relationship with war.

Personal stories disclose truths about the human experience, further connecting individuals to society.<sup>319</sup> In the case of the participants of this study, narratives of war and peace reveal the relevance of emotion when hearing, seeing, and fearing war. Such narratives imply objecting the official narrative insofar as it marginalizes their experience by omitting or downplaying the role of dominance and presence of the armed groups as acts of war. In turn, when introducing the story of the Self within the broader history of society,<sup>320</sup> usually expressed in mass media and school classes, participants locate themselves at the borderlines of conflict.

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<sup>317</sup> Faustino (student), in discussion with the author. March 6, 2018.

<sup>318</sup> Frank uses the term “symbolic violence” to describe this notion. Frank, “Why Study People’s Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis.”

<sup>319</sup> Connelly and Clandinin, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry”; Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*.

<sup>320</sup> Serna Dimas, “Ciencias Sociales, Pensamiento Histórico y Ciudadanía: Entre Lo Alegórico y Lo Virtual (Colombia, 1910-2010).”

Echoing the voice of indirect victims can aid in the process of reconciliation because narrative contributes to mutual understanding.<sup>321</sup> Indeed, these narratives are not only liberating to the narrators,<sup>322</sup> but if introduced – or at least recognized – in more extensive narrative efforts, they could be helpful for understanding particular features of the armed conflict. For example, participants' narratives can help clarify the relationship of drug trafficking with armed groups. Moreover, the recognition of such stories can contribute to building a more relatable narrative space. This can enable urban populations to better understand what it means for an armed group to be present at a particular location.

Participants' stories are examples of identity-building literature. Following Kearney's categorization,<sup>323</sup> these narratives can be classified as storied identities because, in this case, identity-building is determined by personal and collective narratives of the Self. Indeed, participants referred to their own emotions and experiences to define their identity, while quoting collective identities either to oppose or embrace them.

Finally, the person-by-person form of narrative that surfaces from participants' narratives ultimately entails an embodiment of violence. The actors of war are represented as actual individuals who live violent lives. Through the concept of embodied violence, participants' narrative structures provide a means for making sense of reality.<sup>324</sup> In this meaning-making process, the eight students

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<sup>321</sup> Bamberg and Demuth, "Narrative Inquiry: An Interview With Michael Bamberg."

<sup>322</sup> Jeppesen and Hansen, "Narrative Journalism as Complementary Inquiry."

<sup>323</sup> Kearney, *The Monkey's Mask. Identity, Memory, Narrative and Voice*.

<sup>324</sup> Gudmundsdottir, "The Teller, the Tale, and the One Being Told: The Narrative Nature of the Research Interview"; Mitchell, "Editor's Note: On Narrative."

who participated in this study attempt to understand their realities, particularly their childhood realities.

An important feature of participants' memories is the intersection of the victim "us" and the victimizing "them." Those who live violent lives, that is, those who join armed groups or are immersed in the world of drug trafficking, are addressed by these students as "others" who are not so different from themselves. In fact, they are neighbors, classmates, or even relatives who partially share their backgrounds and experiences, but who turned to violence as a way of living. To make sense of this intersection, participants coin the notion of the two paths and add "small" forms of violence to the narrative of other people's stories, so as to explain why someone like "us" turns into one of "them."

### **Narrative Inquiry: Concluding Remarks**

The eight students whose personal narratives of war and conflict are presented above describe their relationship with conflict through emotions, sounds, and other people's stories. Experiencing fear and having to hide are vivid elements of their memories. Looking back at their experiences, participants approach war through their senses – seeing funerals and weapons; hearing bombs and rumors. Having sensed war from an early age and being forced to endure the consequences of corruption, injustice, and insecurity, these students challenge the concept of victim by defining themselves as non-victims whose lives have been undoubtedly shaped by war. Further, participants challenge traditional notions of violence and of "the normal," as they conceive these terms as almost quantifiable variables.

In general terms, participants' narratives speak of waves of domination and oppression informed by personal circumstances. In their perspective, the absence of the State left the Pacific region vulnerable to the establishment of a lawless regime in which the armed groups act as "dynasties" of

subjugation. In this sense, Tumaco and its surroundings were left at the mercy of violent actors who took turns at oppressing the population. The timeline of the region is thus relevant to pin down the perpetrators of acts of war, as the groups “in control” of a space are those who enact violence, and different groups follow each other in the cycle of domination. The youth of the region, in turn, is confronted with two possible paths: joining the world of violence or seeking opportunities amid hardship.

Conceptualizing violence as belonging to an armed group and conceiving it as a “choice” for individuals who face numerous difficulties, participants manage to construct a person-by-person narrative that detaches conflict from identity. Indeed, these eight students define themselves in terms that are not grounded in the Colombian armed conflict. Most participants distance themselves from those involved in conflict by connecting their identity to their families, their education, or the folklore of the region. The conflict does inform their identity, however, as they distance their rural Self from the urban Other. In participants’ reflections, people in the cities do not know nor understand conflict insofar as they have not felt it.

Finally, the intersection of the narrative of domination and the understanding of war as a person-by-person experience guides participants to the paradox of peace. Because dynasties of domination will continue to exist and reproduce, the oppressive presence of violence is likely to prevail. Yet working towards peace is essential because, while the war will certainly persist, Colombia can get slightly closer to peace as the number of individuals in the “bad path” decreases.

## CHAPTER 3

### BETWEEN TEACHING AND TELLING. RECONCILING NARRATIVES

The personal narratives of Sandra, Julio, Jorge, Angélica, Martín, Danilo, Faustino, and Alejandra are important examples of counternarratives to the official account of Colombia's war and peace. The social sciences textbooks analyzed in the first phase of this study go back decades into the history of Colombia. Textbooks tell the story of a political, senseless war that has mutated into a cycle of violence that permeates all dimensions of Colombia's national life. In contrast, the life stories of eight students from the Pacific region tell the story of a wave of dominating actors constituted by diverse individuals. Official and non-official narratives intersect in the general features of war, but they approach actors, actions, motives, and peace in profoundly distinct ways.

These narratives are in conversation with each other, as the students interviewed in Tumaco are familiar with the official narrative of war. Although none of the participants mentioned having learned about conflict through the use of textbooks, several of them remembered their classes in school. For Sandra, her eleventh-grade social studies classes had helped her make sense of the conflict she had known for decades. In her perspective, learning about how the guerrillas had emerged helped her see the logic behind guerrillas' acts of burning down towns and killing entire families. Nonetheless, even if they had a "logical" explanation, guerrillas' actions did not strike her as

justifiable, especially in recent years.<sup>1</sup> For Martín, classes did not resonate with the actual conflict because they never talked about how people are actually affected.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the conversation between official and non-official narratives is significantly slanted. Victims' experiences are only occasionally cited in textbooks, and indirect victims are entirely overlooked. Alternative accounts of war find their way into textbooks only through news reports, videos, and a few testimonies. As a result, the thousands of people who, like these eight students, grew up in the middle of war but do not identify themselves as victims, are factually dismissed. However, their stories offer a relevant insight into the reality of conflict. As they challenge actors, actions, causes, and consequences, the participants of this study stand in partial opposition to textbooks' official narrative.

The differences between official and non-official narratives of violence deepen the gap between urban and rural Colombia, as textbooks deliver an essentially urban narrative. This is evident in that textbooks redirect students to city-based mass media and underscore instances where the war has reached the city, such as the M-19's attacks in urban spaces.<sup>3</sup>

### **Actions**

To a certain extent, both textbooks and students who participated in the interviews mention the same type of actions of war, albeit from different perspectives. Textbooks generally list a number of actions, such as disappearances, attacks, antipersonnel mines, recruitment of minors, sexual violence, homicides, and displacement. Each of these actions appears in participants' narratives. Not

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Martín (student), in discussion with the author. March 7, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Pérez Pérez et al., *Proyecto Saber Es Ser Hacer. Sociales 11*, 83; Aristizábal Castrillón, Castaño Pachón, and Maraboli Salazar, *Aplica 11. Ciencias Sociales*, 116, 118; Martínez Camacho et al., *Avanza Sociales 11*, 97, 113.

surprisingly, textbooks generally link actions to particular armed groups or note statistics, while participants share the stories of flesh-and-bone people who were subjected to these violations. As a result of the disparity between textbooks' generality and participants' specificity, textbooks embrace a political narrative that contrasts with participants' emotional approach. This is not to say that textbooks are unemotional and personal narratives are apolitical. But just as politics are not the central focus of participants' stories, emotions are only occasionally mentioned in textbooks' narratives.

The sounds of war, essential to participants' understanding, are fully omitted in textbooks. Memories of hearing gunshots, bombs, and other people's stories are the most salient features of participants' relationship with conflict. By omitting the sounds of war, the official narrative fails to fully recognize the ways in which war has affected those who have lived in the middle of the battlefield. As indirect victims' stories are unlikely to be told, the stories of people whose lives have been shaped by conflict, but who do not consider themselves victims, are marginalized.

### **Actors**

While textbooks recognize State forces, illegal armed groups, and drug trafficking as the main actors of conflict, participants conceive the actors of war as individual persons. The people making up "the guerrilla," the paramilitary, and the drug business are, in participants' perspectives, regular individuals who found a questionable life path in violence. The notion of personified violence pushes the armed conflict beyond the realm of politics, thus complementing textbooks' legal and political narrative.

Both the official narrative and the alternative narratives explored here group armed actors in a blurred manner. Participants put FARC, ELN, and the world of drugs together in a category that signifies the "bad path." Textbooks, for their part, group together all guerrilla groups – past and



present – to indicate illegal armed groups with a communist ideology that time and drugs have deteriorated.

The defining object of actors differs greatly from official to individual narratives. In textbooks, actors are defined by actions. For example, the paramilitary is linked to massacres, guerrillas are linked to attacks, and State forces are linked to “false positives.” By contrast, in participants’ narratives actors are defined by periods of time. The type of actions attributed to armed groups does not differ from one group to another, but groups are linked to the time at which acts of war were perpetrated.

### **Motives**

The general causes of conflict stand out as the most dissimilar feature of official and non-official narratives. Textbooks underscore the relevance of past violence for understanding the development of conflict. In sharp contrast, none of the participants mentioned the history of war or the age of violence that came before it. Rather, participants explain the perpetration of violence through a multiplicity of “violences.” Introducing the notion of a “small” type violence coming from people’s home life, students in Tumaco locate violence not in Colombia’s national timeline, but on individuals’ personal development.

Inequality and the absence of the State are relevant motives of conflict in both personal and official narratives. While textbooks underscore Colombia’s historical inequality in land ownership, participants articulate injustice in terms of systemic inequality. Moreover, textbooks mention the absence of the State but leave specific descriptions of what absence entails unaddressed. For participants, in contrast, the absence of the State is the utmost cause of violence. In fact, it is the concept of an absent State that allows participants to construct a narrative of lawless domination.

## Peace

Both textbooks and participants approach peace with suspicion. Participants explicitly state that peace is impossible because the cycle of domination is unbreakable. Textbooks, while less radical, address peace as a way of teaching critical thinking, thus insisting on the importance of examining peace negotiations. In addition, participants frame peace within the person-by-person narrative, in which violence is embodied in actual individuals. Textbooks use an array of legal and political concepts to explain the notion of peace.

Almost paradoxically, participants' assertion that peace is impossible is articulated with much more hope than textbooks' suggestion that peace is difficult to sustain. Through a thorough examination of the failure of each of the peace process in the history of Colombia, textbooks can leave the reader with a sense of helplessness in the face of conflict. By marking a clear distinction between accepting and normalizing violence, participants find a way to be hopeful for the future while accepting the perpetual nature of violence. In their understanding, violence will always remain, but can be reduced by "working around conflict" to guide more and more potential armed actors away from the path of guns and drugs.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

Students in Tumaco coincide with textbooks in that the Colombian armed conflict is continuous, complex, pervasive, and unlikely to end. But textbooks underscore cycles of violence, political reasoning, and a rational understanding of war. In contrast, participants stress the notion of dynasties of domination, personal reasoning, and an emotional understanding of violence. Textbooks foster an overarching narrative that highlights political developments and legal concepts, while personal narratives understand conflict from a discourse of life paths and injustice.

Both official and non-official narratives arrive at the conclusion that the Colombian war will prevail, in new and transformed ways, despite efforts at negotiating peace. Thus, these narratives suggest that Colombia complies with Bourdieu's "law of the conservation of violence," that is, that all violence is paid for.<sup>1</sup> In their understanding of how violence is conserved, students in Tumaco connect armed violence to "smaller" forms of violence, which ultimately boil down to social injustice and personal background. To participants, as long as the social, economic, regional, and personal injustices that guide people to violence are not addressed, violence will remain. Textbooks, for their part, argue that the cycle of violence is too complex to break by referencing historical developments. However, as they narrate what Bellino calls "agentless stories,"<sup>2</sup> textbooks fail to connect the

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Bellino, "Learning through Silence in 'Postwar' Guatemala."

prevalence of violence with specific circumstances. As a result, textbooks' narrative can leave the reader feeling powerless.

Although official narratives underscore that violence permeates all dimensions of the national life, counternarratives *accept* violence as a fact that does neither necessarily relate to the Colombian identity nor to Colombians' views for the future. By accepting violence, participants partially normalize war. But, by disconnecting violence from their identity and defining violence in a dynamic manner, these eight students manage to dream of ways to “work around” violence to build a better future for themselves and their region. In short, textbooks suggest that violence will never vanish. The participants of this study agree with this statement, but they also argue that violence can decrease, and they feel responsible for contributing to the reduction of violence.

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