DISARMED WARRIORS

Narratives with Youth Ex-Combatants in Colombia

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For Miguel,
in the hope that, by reading these pages,
his appreciation and respect
for those who are different will grow

Tristes guerras
si no es amor la empresa,
tristes, tristes.

Tristes armas,
si no son las palabras,
tristes, tristes.

Tristes hombres,
si no mueren de amores,
tristes, tristes.

Miguel Hernández

Sad wars
If love is not the aim
sad, sad.

Sad weapons
it they are not words,
sad, sad.

Sad men
if they do not die for love
sad, sad.

Miguel Hernández
(Trans. Ted Genoways)

But I'm not from there;
I come from deep in the jungle.
Adriana

I was born of the earth and air,
not of any person.
Daniela

I had to sleep there.
I slept well.
That's how I grew up.
Mariana

Keep an eye on
the little thread of life
that was barely hanging on.
Laura

Why do we
who are human beings
kill other human beings?
Mariana

And I ran out of there and didn't care
about tigers or snakes
or worms, or bombs, or anything.
Daniela

I don't tell anyone
who I am.
Cielo

The little plant
has only just been born.
Daniela

I have only just begun
to make a life for myself.
Mariana

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AUC   United Auto-Defenses of Colombia

BACRIM   Emerging Criminal Gangs

CEDAT   Caldas University's Center for Conflict, Violence and Cohabitation
            Studies

ELN   National Liberation Army

FARC-EP   Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army

ICBF   Colombian Family Welfare Institute

OIM   International Organization for Migration – (IOM in English)

PHT   Tutor Home Program

PNUD   United Nations Program for Development – (UNDP in English)

UNICEF   Programme of the United Nations Children's Fund

List of Illustrations

Page

Introduction

In Colombia, for over 50 years, we have experienced an armed conflict in which the armed forces, guerrilla groups (currently, the FARC-EP and ELN), and various paramilitary factions, grouped together in the AUC, have fought one another in the midst of civilian populations. The origins of this conflict are linked to enormous inequality and social injustice, political exclusion, and fierce ambition for control of the nation's diverse resources. These phenomena are constantly configuring the context of this armed conflict and its modification. A large part of the population has lived mired in poverty, with no access to these resources, while a small percentage of the elites has controlled politics, economics and land use for personal gain. The gap between these two groups is immense. Often in Colombian history, civilians have organized and taken up arms to clamor for what they do not have, defend what they have, as in the case of paramilitary groups that have defended the property of the elites or drug traffickers, or take by force what belongs to others, as in the dispossession of peasants' land.

According to Gómez, H., Roux, C. et al (2003), the difficulty in explaining the war in Colombia lies in its longevity, the way the actors involved have transformed, the multiplicity of interests involved, the diversity of reasons that gave rise to it, the involvement of multiple legal and illegal actors, its geographic expanse, its illegal means of financing, and its relationship with other violence such as drug trafficking. Of considerable importance is the irregularity of the conflict, in that it has never been an open civil war in which the entire nation has participated, but has instead taken place on the country's rural margins. Many Colombians could have never experienced the war or its effects. These rural areas are precisely the poorest and most neglected by the state (also the richest in natural resources), fertile ground for any armed organization seeking to take control by force. Besides, the conflict is irregular because it has exceeded the regulatory limits of all armed confrontation: it has impacted the civilian population more than the combatants.

Over the years, the guerrillas' ideals regarding social justice and equity have blurred and faded. The means became more important than the end; they benefited financially from the war, and have contributed to an increase in the breakdown of the

nation. Similarly, the Armed Forces have not been able to regain control of the State despite the billions invested in the war and exposing their men to death. Worse still are the paramilitary groups, who in standing up to the guerrillas to defend the assets and property of landowners, private business and multinationals, have employed the worst practices of war and used brutality to intimidate, with the connivance of State officials and the support of the political class. As for drug traffickers, their use of terrorism and corruption has had significant influence on all the players and helped blur political ideals.

Several studies have been done on the causes, dynamics, multiple forms and transformations of the violence in Colombia; these in-depth analyses exceed the scope of this dissertation.[1] Of the various findings, most relevant for the purposes of this inquiry is the anachronistic nature of the war in Colombia; all of the armed actors have failed in their purpose, one way or another, and their degrading and debasing practices have produced a humanitarian tragedy (Gómez, H., de Roux, C. & et al., 2003).

A recent research by the Historical Memory Group (2013) states that between 1958 and 2012, the armed conflict has been responsible for 220,000 deaths and close to 5,700,000 people have been displaced; we have seen massacres, targeted killings, forced disappearances, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, theft of property and land, arbitrary detention, torture, land mines and forced recruitment, for the most part, actions against civilian populations, in particular, poor, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, opponents and dissidents, women and children.

As can be seen, forced recruitment is associated with the armed conflict and has been defined as the use of anyone under the age of 18 by an armed group (in our case, Colombian guerrillas or paramilitaries) to fight and/or perform any work (cook, doorman, messenger, spy, etc.) and/or for sexual purposes (UNICEF, 2007, p. 7). This

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[1] For more on this analysis see: Guzman, G., Fals Borda, O. & Umana, E. (1963/2005). *La violencia en Colombia* [The Violence in Colombia]; Gómez, H., Roux, CV & Et al. (2003). *El conflicto, callejón con salida* [The Conflict: A Dead-End Street]; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica [National Center for Historical Memory]. (2013)*¡Basta ya!* [Enough!] *Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad* [Colombia: War Memoirs and Dignity]; Pecaut, D. (2013). *La experiencia de la violencia: los desafíos del relato y la memoria* [The Experience of Violence: Narrative Challenges and Memory].

phenomenon is not unique to Colombia: it is estimated that around 300,000 persons under eighteen are part of armed groups involved in conflicts, in forty one countries, in the world (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008). There are no reliable official statistics in Colombia about the number of children and young fighters belonging to armed groups outside the law (FARC-EP, ELN, and AUC).[2] However, it is considered to range between 7,000 and 14,000. In 2002, UNICEF reported an estimated 6,000 to 7,000. In 2004, Watch List valued the number between 11,000 and 14,000; Human Rights Watch (2004), as well as the United Nations Program for Development (PNUD, 2006), calculated the number of underage combatants in 14,000.

The following figures show the configuration of the phenomenon in Colombia. An estimated one in four irregular combatants is eighteen years old or younger: the equivalent of 25%. The average age of linkage is between twelve and fourteen years.[3] The medium age of disengaging is between fifteen and seventeen years (Watch List, 2012). The permanence in armed groups varies over a range of six months to three years, and there is one girl for every male child (Human Rights Watch, 2004). During the 1990s, armed groups carried out the most massive recruitment campaigns.

As concerns legality, in 1998, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court criminalized the recruitment of children under fifteen as a war crime; Colombia ratified this statute in 2002.[4] In 2000, the United Nations promulgated the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states: "The armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under eighteen".[5] In 2003, Colombia ratified this protocol, extending the same principles to armed groups of any kind.[6] The New Code for

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[2] Although Colombian and international laws consider everyone under the age of eighteen to be a child, in this research I will refer to both children and youth under the age of eighteen as I believe that socially, culturally and psychologically, the range covered by the legal definition is too wide.

[3] The average age of recruitment has decreased from 13.8 years in 2002 to 11.8 years in 2009, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia (International Crisis Group, 2010).

[4] Law 742, D.O. in 2002.

[5] Geneva Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000, entry into force 12 February 2002.

[6] Law 833, D.O. in 2003.

Children and Adolescents in Colombia (Law No. 1098 of 2006) acknowledges the fact that no child under the age of eighteen can have enlisted voluntarily in an armed group, but rather joined because of his or her *ignorance or coercion*. In 2011, Law 1448, commonly known as the Victims' Law, dictates protective measures, intervention and redress for victims of internal armed conflict, including children *disengaged* from illegal armed groups. Therefore, in Colombia, forced recruitment is a war crime, and covers any person under 18 and any (legal or illegal) armed group, and children and youth under eighteen *disengaged* from the war are considered victims.

International research on enlistment in armed groups began with the work of Graça Machel, commissioned by the United Nations in 1994, and Colombian research with the Defensoría del Pueblo's investigations (Ombudsman Office) in 1996. For nearly two decades, research has mainly focused on the description of socio-demographic and legal variables, and psychosocial intervention; recent studies have focused on gender, DDR (disarmed, demobilization & reintegration) processes, and more comprehensive approaches. International research has primarily focused on African countries (Cifuentes, Aguirre & Lugo, 2011).

Currently in Colombia, there are more and stronger initiatives from academia and victims' movements to restore the memory of the conflict, documenting the damage and impact in humans, environments, relationships, property and customs. We have also, in nascent form, begun to actively remember the dignity and resistance: the heroic acts, defense, courage and bravery, solidarity, demands, vindications, mobilization and, finally, the endless responses and actions of the survivors. I hope this dissertation will contribute to these efforts.

Coexisting in Colombia are those who believe that the solution to the conflict lies in weapons, and those who believe in a negotiated solution where, in addition to the relinquishment of arms, the State is capable of strengthening democracy and improving the way politics are practiced, overcoming poverty, building equality and social justice, in order to ensure a sustainable peace. In 2013, the government of President Juan Manuel Santos began negotiations with the FARC-EP guerrilla group in

Havana, Cuba. The dialogue has made progress on four of the five items on the agenda: agricultural development and political participation. Aspects related to the end of conflict, illegal drugs, and victims are still on the table. The signing of a peace agreement is still uncertain, but the more possible this seems, the greater polarization grows between those in favor and those against such an agreement. Forced recruitment is part of the last item on the agenda related to the victims. If a peace treaty is signed, child and youth ex-combatants would be among the first to demobilize and the country would face the enrollment of thousands of them in ICBF protection programs. From 1999-2011, 4,811 children and youth who escaped or were captured by the army have received care (Watch List, 2011). From the moment the demobilizations take effect, the structure and dynamics of the programs will require complete modification. I hope this inquiry can provide ideas concerning what can be done with children and young people separated from armed groups.

When children and youth have quit or been captured, they have been referred to as *disengaged* from the war. Even though *disengaged* from the war is the legal, official and common term, in this inquiry I will refer to them as *ex- combatants separated from the armed groups*, including those separated from the guerrilla or paramilitary groups. This denomination recognizes their status as fighters, which they consider a significant part of their identities. It avoids the use of disqualifying names such as terrorists, rebels or criminals. A combatant is someone who takes up arms as part of a group involved in an armed conflict and with social and political status in Colombia.

In this dissertation, I consider this separation to be only physical, since escape and, to a much lesser degree, capture for a youth ex-combatant do not implies a break with the emotional, social and existential ties that bound him or her to the armed group. I retake the concept of "transition to civilian life" posed by Castro (2001), because it better represents the transition from armed to civilian life than terms such as reintegration, reinstatement or reincorporation. Youth ex-combatants were not *integrated* into society before or during their passage through an armed group. They cannot, therefore, be re-integrated. At this point in their lives, they remain

marginalized and discriminated against so re-integration is a euphemism. Finally, we must all integrate, not just them, and the concept is therefore better applied to society as a whole than to them exclusively: a re-integrated society. It is however very clear that while they are in the process of building a civilian, unarmed life they remain at the same time warriors, continuing to fight for physical and social survival. Hence the title of this inquiry: Disarmed Warriors.

This inquiry was conducted in Manizales, Colombia and its main purpose was to understand the importance of social relations in the *transition to civilian life* currently faced by youth ex-combatants. To accomplish this purpose, we developed a dialogic, collaborative and narrative design, examined through the lens of Social Construction, which allowed us to recognize the resources and relational practices of these youth; render intelligible the micro-social scenarios where they construct their multiple forms of existence; narratively reconstruct their experiences before, during and after the war; explore relational alternatives; and experience new forms of collective action. The social relationships with and of this specific group of young people, at a particular moment of their lives (transitioning from military to civilian life), became the focus of interest, reflection and connection. The research question guiding this process was: How can we build a socio-relational process to facilitate the transition to civilian life of child and youth ex-combatants enrolled in the Tutor Home Program (PHT) in Manizales, Colombia?

Starring in this research were 20 youth from different parts of the country enrolled in the Tutor Home Program (hereinafter, PHT, for its acronym in Spanish). The program was created in 2006 by Caldas University's Center for Conflict, Violence and Cohabitation Studies (CEDAT, for its acronym in Spanish). Both the ICBF and Caldas University, through CEDAT, co-sponsored the program, which places ex-combatants in foster families to be cared for on a full-time basis by volunteers. The PHT spearheads activities in areas such as health, education, development, participation and protection.

As part of the inquiry, we created what I have called the *Green Zone,* a physical, emotional and relational space constructed collaboratively with the youth in which 40 narrative, audiovisual and corporal expression workshops took place. This collaborative and dialogic space demanded a permanent and prolonged commitment, which in turn produced changes in all participants. The transformations experienced by the youth, and by me, are widely documented in this dissertation.

The emerging, uncertain and continuous dialogue in the *Green Zone* allowed multiple voices to be heard and for those dialogues to resonate in the outside audiences closest to the youth, such as foster families, their families of origin, and the PHT group of professionals. I hope those who read this dissertation will recognize a good example of collective action, joint activity reaching beyond the individualist discourse and emerging from the characteristic deficits of State protection policies for these young people. Those with alternative proposals could benefit from an analysis of the process presented, in the same way that the PHT group of professionals benefited. The collaborative architecture is an example of inquiry that resists colonialism, although not necessarily seeking emancipation, and strives to carry out a process in which power circulates and transitions from subordination to creative and generative power are possible (De Sousa Santos, B., 2010). There is something innovative about this: most research published and reviewed has been performed by experts *about* youth ex-combatants and not *with* them.

As Social Construction has been the meta-narrative guiding this inquiry, it is likely that those in tune with this orientation will discover contributions in it to the current literature on relational processes. Specifically, that our relationships with others precede, maintain and sustain us. It is not specific people, but one's relationship with an Other that makes survival possible. The realization that our survival depends on others is more plainly assimilated in extreme situations where life is in constant danger. Various ethical reflections arising while participating in the war and afterwards might prove useful. Those familiar with dialogic orientations may be interested in how we coordinated the conversation and kept it going. I hope to have made it clear to

readers that the keys to our dialogic process were emergence, uncertainty, permanence and collaboration.

Readers interested in the narrative inquiry will have an opportunity to learn how the stories told facilitated the creation of new meanings for everyone involved, storytellers and audience alike. The youth were able to collect scattered pieces of their stories and gain some sense of continuity, while recognizing the movement that these stories bring with them. There is no single story, not even the most painful, and all stories are reconstructed in the telling. The stories show us the continuous movement between a present that speaks of the past, re-drawing it, and a future which is simultaneously anticipated. The resulting narratives were discursive productions among people in a specific cultural context. The others, those —like me— in the audience, understood that our lives are not so different from the lives of others, that we can see ourselves on the edges of their world and ours, and more importantly, that there is coherence and rationality in the stories and lives of others and, therefore, we need to find a way to coordinate our differences. The use of artistic methods to motivate the narrative and find other ways to communicate experience and capture what is difficult to put into words could be considered innovative.

This dissertation consists of eight chapters, plus the introduction, which can be read in any order; each chapter has its own internal structure and can be understood without reading previous chapters. Chapter One, *Social Construction, the Narrative and the Dialogical as Companions in the Mountains* is the theoretical argument guiding the research and is founded in Social Construction. I present the contributions made by this orientation to the work and to my academic training. I present a brief analysis of the history of Social Construction, such as postmodernism, and its linguistic, discursive, narrative and dialogic developments. I delve deeper into three key aspects for the research: social relations, the relational self, theoretical generativity. I say *companions in the mountains* because there is where we, ex-combatants and me, live now. Mountains, because there is where they survived the war, the jungle in the highest and most remote mountains, which they miss every day. Mountains, because we went up and down in life, this is not a straight line, where the uncertainty and the unexpected

are present, as in this inquiry. Mountains, because these kids' lives are like an emotional roller coaster, you must pull up in order to understand something about what is happening to them.

In Chapter Two, I narrate the inquiry process, its origin, the emergence of the question, the principles that connect the theory, methodology and epistemology to more concrete moments of action such as the structuring of the dialogic space, the manner in which the workshops were carried out, the narratives construction, dialogues with other audiences, and how the meaning and connection progressed. My interest lies in making sure readers understand the how, when and why of the methodological decisions that shaped this work.

Based on the stories narrated by the youth, their families and PHT professionals, as well as local, national and international research I became familiar with, I present, in Chapter Three, an analysis of the conditions that lead children and youth to enroll in and separate from armed groups. This reflection explores the logic of recruitment and the predictability of the phenomenon given the legacy of social bonding that exists in the areas where these children were born. I argue that joining an armed group is a form of earning a living, active resistance to structures of violence, and a way of finding life (recognition, belonging and identity). For women, in addition, it represents the desire to become warriors like men. At the end of this chapter, I reflect on their current condition after separating from the group.

Chapter Four is a reflection on the victim discourse. Here, I stress the legal, ethical and political importance of being considered a victim in Colombia as well as the implications of this discourse, given the way it can be manipulated to infantilize youth ex-combatants and its associations with paternalistic and deficit discourses and their consequent pathologization. Based on the real situations of youth ex-combatants and on Gergen's proposal (1994/2007), I analyze the possible consequences of the deficit discourse in our culture. To close, I offer an alternative view of these youth as survivors, not only of war, but of poverty and neglect as well.

The single life story *"The Commander's Daughter"* occupies the entire Fifth Chapter. The narrative begins by explaining the four-handed approach to writing the story, how Mariana's life began in the midst of war and the jungle, how her relationship with the Commander, the man who raised her, developed, the Commander's various attempts to free her, the ethics of war, Mariana's capture, and her new start in life. It is an amazing, human and moving story and besides constitutes an ethical and political argument against war.

Chapter Six deals with the process and is titled *The Green Zone: Dialogic Practice on the Margins*. In the first section, I analyze dialogue as an emerging, uncertain, and continuous process based on three contradictions: stability/change, integration/separation and expression/non-expression. In the second section, I delve deeper into the collaborative architecture of dialogic practice, including my position as a researcher in relation to the way I see youth ex-combatants, listening and response, dialogic time, the future, and the proximity of this practice to their everyday lives. I spend the final pages presenting the *Green Zone* as a restorative process: the youth gained appreciation for what they are and what they can become, they enriched their perspective of the time they have lived and that remains to be lived, and they rebuilt a sense of "we" that acts jointly, remains present in the conversation, and is based on respect and solidarity.

I could not have ended this thesis without giving the youth a direct voice. Chapter Seven, *Memories of Resistance*, is a compilation of the youth's skills, strategies, knowledge, learning, and reactions and of their actions to defend and protect themselves and to resist, illustrated in the stories, pictures and drawings constructed during the inquiry. At the end, I include the poem *Daniela's Voice*, based on the story she told, *Looking for a Dad*. In the chapter dedicated to final reflections, I set forth more general implications of this work and point out some alternative action.

I made the decision to use a dialogical/narrative style, meaning that both dialogues and stories would have a prominent place and that, while telling the stories, I wanted to establish dialogue between them, between the protagonists, with the

authors and the readers. This decision is consistent with the way the research was developed and with its theoretical Social Construction orientation. It grew out of my interest in encouraging readers to look closer at the multiple and complex realities of youth ex-combatants and at the process we all share in when attempting to reconstruct relationships, which is the primary purpose of this research. A narrative style encourages reflexivity and makes the text more accessible to readers taking part in different *language games*. Both first-order and second-order narratives have been included. First-order narratives consist of the stories, transcribed verbatim and told by the protagonists, the youth ex-combatants, their families, and professionals. Second-order narratives consist of the stories I wrote about other people, stories by and about other people, or collective stories written by several different people which cannot easily be said to have a single authorship. I hope that readers will be able to construct third-order narratives from the participants' narratives and those of the researcher.

I decided to write in the first person to honestly and thoroughly identify myself as an author, with all my questions, frustrations and decisions. This increased my sense of responsibility for what I wrote and seemed more consistent with the aforementioned ethical, theoretical and methodological ideas. Writing in the first person allows readers to place themselves inside the research, in a more evocative and relational manner. Writing, in any case, means entering into a relationship with the reader: writing with an audience in mind and not in the abstract. I hoped, therefore, to produce a more informal text, more accessible to different audiences, not only to academics, but to professionals and people interested in understanding the experience of these youth ex-combatants. This style of writing aims at achieving openness that allows readers to creatively complete their own process of understanding.

1

The social construction,
The narrative and the dialogical as
companions in the mountains

We have almost no choice: we must begin with copies.
We cannot represent meanings in our lives without putting
our experience within some story. And these stories are,
before anything, something given to us.
However, the relative indefiniteness
-the ambiguity and uncertainty - of all the stories
can only be negotiated through reference to
our experience and our imagination.
And this requires our commitment to a process of "origination."

Clifford Geertz

I feel relieved to hear that we have no other choice than to start writing with copies. At last, as Bakhtin (1986) says, our voice is not entirely ours. Our voice is the voice of all those who have spoken to us. Our words are our parents' words, our teachers and friends, the authors we have read, the conversations we have had. Our words are not fully ours but nor are they totally alien, they are our copy. At best, inside the interstices of that copy, inside ambiguities and numerous possibilities for presenting that copy, appears the newness, which is becoming increasingly elusive in these postmodern times.[7] Let's say that what is left, rather than offer a compendium about Social Construction[8], is my experience and my imagination, to produce a version of what has generated in my academic life, in the ideas and reflections about the world and ourselves, as human beings, and how these ideas have accompanied the inquiry and the relation with young ex-combatants, the protagonists of this work.

When I was 17 years old, I started studying Civil Engineering. It was particularly suspicious that the subject I liked most was Sociology and not Math or Geometry. I remember my colleagues, all of them men, hated reading the book by Frederick Engels, *The place of work in the transformation from mono into human*, which I read with enthusiasm because I believed the author was revealing the truth of a story that no one before had told me at the Franciscan sisters' school for young ladies, where I cursed high school. Quickly, I realized I did not want to be an engineer but to study the *social of human being* and the closest professional career to that purpose in my city,

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[7] Sheila McNamee, my advisor, had a lot of reason, when in the middle of the frustration I felt not able to start writing this chapter, she said to me: "Anyone who is writing about Social Construction is paraphrasing Ken, Harlene, myself, others .... That's what it is. Don't try to make it brand new..... "

[8] For this, see the excellent texts by Gergen, K: "Realities and relationships" and "An invitation to social construction."

which was hard for me to leave at that time, was Psychology. Thus, I became a psychologist, after the dream to understand the *social of human being*.

As a student and later as a professional I felt that Psychology was silent in the face of social issues dealt with in other disciplines. Later as a professor, I created with other colleagues and friends, a course called "The subject's social context," which, the name suggests, had a distinctly sociological orientation (although we tried really hard to be an interdisciplinary group). We remember two texts that left a trace on us: *The social construction of reality* by Berger & Luckmann (1968/1999) and *The saturated self* by K. Gergen (1991/2006). This was our first contact with Social Construction, and finally, I could see that Psychology had something to say about the *social of human being* like other social sciences.

I understood that this is not resolved in a singular discipline but the conjugation of ideas from various sources, including Psychology. However, it would have to be a different Psychology as Shotter (1993/2001) says, not a natural science but a moral one. That is to say, Psychology needs to study the way in which we actually treat each other as participants in communicative activities of our daily life, to develop new ways of speaking in Psychology. This will contribute to reconstruct the discipline according to more ethical and social guidelines and, therefore, to establish a new argumentative tradition. This work is an attempt to recreate Psychological discourses about who we are, particularly who the young ex-combatants are.

Today, Social Construction represents liberation for me. Liberation, because it lets me think with any requirement to subscribe a t*ruth* without criticism or doubt. Sometimes theories are like religions: you must believe in them and defend them with devotion. Liberation, because I could understand that concepts derived from theories are creations of human beings', made of flesh and bone, which create dynamic realities. Liberation, because it is a movement without any requirement to enroll in a singular discipline or an ideology, which lets me incorporate various aspects of my life in an orientation toward the world. Liberation, because, despite the fact the authors are foreigners, Social Construction has helped me reflect on a colonialist and

submissive attitude toward knowledge. Liberation, because it has allowed me to go beyond the weariness caused by critics in my life. Liberation, because it has given me hope to create other realities in a country where we have lost hope. Social Construction has made me more flexible and closer to people who are different.

From the question that has guided this inquiry ¿How might the creation of relationally- centered processes facilitate the passage into civilian life of children and young ex-combatants belonging to the Tutor Home Program (PHT) in Manizales, Colombia? I began searching for conceptual and practical tools, related to Social Construction, especially when I realized that constructionist inquiry is understood as an intervention process too. I found dialogical, narrative and collaborative practices as related guidelines, which gave also birth to this process. In this chapter, I show the different connections among these movements, taking Social Construction as the network's center.

The following are the contributions made by Social Construction to this inquiry. Social Construction allowed a different attitude toward young ex-combatants; it transformed my discourse about them which was mostly based on descriptions of deficit and trauma. As Sheila McNamee said to me, on the way to her house in Durham, in 2010, "these kids are more than guerrillas or murderers." These words rang out during the entire inquiry process, and at last, all this work is to share the *much more* of these kids. The war narrative is a fundamental story and therefore, it cannot be forgotten or buried. But at the same time, this is one of various narratives they lived. In the same way, Social Construction challenges the victim discourse inserted in protection programs and other academic ones. Paradoxically, opposing discourses coexist in Colombian society: common people, church, conservative and military mainly, see ex-combatants as perpetrators, and care programs see them as helpless victims unable to survive by themselves. Both discourses are harmful and put them in positions of exclusion or subordination.[9]

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[9] Reflections about these issues are going to be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Another valuable contribution made by Social Construction to this work is the relational orientation. It seems that the understanding of what happens is reduced to the pathology of combatant. That is to say, if we change the kids one by one, then the issue is resolved. Most analyses about the situation and especially about the intervention are proposed from an individualistic point of view, including the more progressive, systemic, hermeneutic, narrative or psychoanalytic approaches. Other analyses are made from the structural objectivism. Thus, the focus is on the individual`s essences or the structure`s essences, one or another does not function properly. Herein, little has been tried around the relational metaphor, inside the indeterminate space of what transpires between us. Few inquiries about the war in Colombia have been carried out within a constructionist orientation. Social Construction makes an innovative contribution, providing another territory for understanding what happens to us in this society - and it includes all of us – providing options for change.

Perhaps the following is the most significant contribution, seen from my own training process: the understanding that constructionist inquiry is an engaged unfolding process *with* the people, in a joint, collaborative and dialogical relation. I needed to transform the relational space with the kids for accomplishing our goal: contribute to a better passage to a civilian life. Likewise, I became a better person during this process. I had to lay hold old, new and revised clinical, social, esthetic and research practices. I needed to apply skills learned as a teacher and mother to engage with their stories, they, who are defined by law as *disengaged.* We had to make real and palpable the way to go on together; they, I and others in a collaborative and creative space. We had to dance and explore the margins together.

Finally, change and transformation were possible when I realized from Social Construction that we shape ourselves and reality in our relations. This has given me hope and strength for attempting a change process with the youth ex-combatants. This hope was also shared with the program's staff and kids. In Colombia, as Martín-Baró, I. (1987) stated, we traditionally live, most of the times, with hopelessness and fatalism, due to multiple unending violence cycles, repeated for decades. We feel trapped by a

distant and recent past full of deceit, lies and deaths, coming from all sides or actors in conflict. This work within a constructionist orientation opens up possibilities for transformation, action and hope.

Social Construction as a Postmodern Orientation toward the World

Social Construction cannot be regarded as a completely new orientation. Even Pearce (2009) reminds us that some ideas argued by Social Constructionists were proposed in ancient Greece. The sophists defended notions such as the world is in a constant flow or at least, it is susceptible to several descriptions; knowledge is contextual, and language is constitutive, not only representational. According to the author, the Cartesian voice introduced a social amnesia about these ideas, through the premise "I think, therefore I am." New emerging voices began to be heard after the Second World War following the critiques to capitalism, modernism and their unfulfilled promises.

Social Construction recognizes itself as a set of dialogs (Gergen, 2009a), a movement, an umbrella (Anderson, 2007) and a discourse (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) that allows us to have an attitude, a philosophical orientation, a position or even a tone called as postmodern. Postmodernism had its initial appearance in art, architecture, literature and cultural studies, and later in social and human sciences, particularly in cultural anthropology, ethnography, cybernetics, feminism, hermeneutics, literary criticism, social psychology among others. This movement has questioned the idea that the world can be understood through great theories or meta-narratives and emphasizes the existence of a variety and diversity of forms of life, that is to say, structures and universal truths are giving way to a plethora of ideas about the world. Anderson (2009) suggests that postmodernism is characterized by these following features: maintaining skepticism, circumventing the generalization of meta-narrative, assuming knowledge as a social, interactive and creative process, favoring local knowledge and understanding knowledge and language as transformers. Denzin (1991) meanwhile argues that postmodernism is marked by the linguistic turn and the image's significance. In a broader sense, postmodernism has shaped a dramaturgical

society where image has tragically replaced reality. Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996) characterize postmodernism through these three changes: from individual rationality to the communal, from the empirical method to Social Construction and from language as representation to language as social action constitutive of the world. Further on, I will connect all these ideas to Social Construction.

I agree with McNamee and Hosking's (2012) clarification about claims that postmodernism is appropriate or better than modernism. Rather, both are regarded as discursive resources. The postmodern point of view not only changes presumptions but mainly questions, interests, and practices to the extent that different possibilities for action are opened. As a result, postmodernism could be seen as another discursive territory distinct from modernism, another "language game" as Wittgenstein (1953/2008) would say.

Gergen (2009a) suggests that Social Construction has its origins in three critical lines of dialog.[10] The first of these, ideological critique is aimed at objectivity and science neutrality. Advanced primarily by Marxist critical theory, it has been argued that knowledge favors certain political and economic objectives above others; in other words, science is concerned and carries with it an ideology. Currently, the critical movement has expanded its questioning to any reality within a dominant culture that is taken for granted and shows how these realities support the dominant group interest and perpetuate injustice. This movement has given a new voice to minorities in the contemporary society as critical race theory and the post-colonialist critique.

The second critical line is located in linguistics and semiotics. It began with the contribution of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1974) who made a distinction between the signifier and the signified. The signifier refers to a word or any other sign and the signified to what we think is indicated by the word. As a result, the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. He proposed that the sign systems are

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[10] In Psychology, emergence of Social Construction is attributed to Kenneth Gergen after the publication of a paper entitled "Social psychology as history" in 1973, where he argued that all knowledge, including psychological knowledge, is historically and culturally situated.

governed by their own internal logic, that is to say, our language can be described by grammar or syntax rules. As Wittgenstein (1953/2008) also would say, meaning-making is a matter of following the rules of language. Vygotsky (1962/1986) distinguishes between words as they are in a dictionary (where have meaning) and its use in a context (where they make sense). A word takes its meaning from the context in which it is used, in different contexts, their meaning changes. "The meaning a word has in the dictionary is not more than a stone in the building of the meaning; it is nothing more than a potentiality that finds in the discourse various achievements" (1962/1986, p. 245).

The third critique challenged the foundations of scientific knowledge and incorporated most proposals from the other two critiques mentioned earlier. Unlike any other authorities - religious, political or ethical- scientific authority has remained virtually unquestioned. Social Construction aims to question science's authority and place it as an available to be scrutinized. The understanding of science as social construction started with the work of Karl Mannheim (1936/2000), who wrote that scientific theories do not arise out of observation but within the scientist's social group. Scientific groups are often organized around certain theories; therefore, theoretical disagreements are matters of group conflict and what we assume as scientific knowledge is a co-product of a social process.

These ideas were developed later in the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962/2006), which represents a challenge to the notion that scientific knowledge is cumulative, that is as we continue our research we will be increasingly closer to the truth. Kuhn (1962/2006) argues that our propositions about the world are inlaid within paradigms, a network of interrelated compromises with a theory, concepts about phenomena and methodological practices. Objective accuracy is only achieved within the paradigm. The findings in an alternative paradigm are incommensurate with the dominant one, then, as new problems are explored, new alternative paradigms are created.

As can be seen, Social Construction has multiple roots emerging in a variety of dialogs within social and human sciences (Philosophy, Sociology and Linguistics).

Currently, constructionist ideas continue to be a dialog deployed with participants from different visions, for example Critical Psychology, Discursive Psychology, Critical discourse analysis, Deconstructivism, Dialogism, Constructivism and Post-structuralism. These dialogs remain in motion. As Pearce says (2009) to articulate the ultimate truth, founding a singular logic or a code of values, would be antithetical to the flow of the dialog itself.

The World Veers and Veers: The Linguistic Turn and Other Turns

When I imagine a turn, inevitably I think in the rotation and translation motion of the earth around the sun and even more, in the shift from believing the sun rotates around the earth, to believing the earth rotates around the sun. It seems simple, but it is not. A turning point in an interpretation of reality implies a shift at times contrary to what the common sense tells us -unless it is 360 degrees rotation which places us in the same starting point, which is particularly common in certain ideas proposed as new-. For this shift, it is necessary to focus on another direction which apparently is not so comfortable or safe. These turns challenge myths we have created to understand our worlds.

According to Rorty (1980), the *linguistic turn* consisted in taking over language as formative and not only as representational, in other words, language constructs, organizes and creates meaning and direction. In this sense, language has more functions than traditionally assigned. In accordance with Shotter (1993/2001), language not only consists of codes already established to represent reality, but it is a creative or formative process in which we construct the situation or our communication context when we communicate.

This idea puts into question one of the great myths of our time, a myth that has been part of one or another form of western tradition since ancient times. In this myth words are supposed to symbolize things placed in the outside world or things internally located in the mind. Gergen (2001) refers to this myth as the belief that our descriptions are external expressions of an interior mirror of the mind, external reports

coming from private observations or perceptions. Following Wittgenstein's work (1953/2008), language does not acquire its meaning from a subjective or mental basis, rather by its use in action. To emphasize the prominent place of human relations, language gains its meaning within continuous forms of interaction, from our relations - between us and the world-, within *language games* as he called the local conventions to describe and explain realities. Language is inherently a human interchange product, or to put it in another way, words are activated, earn their sense to the extent that we use them to relate with others. Language games, according to Wittgenstein (1953/2008), are included in more comprehensive forms of activity, which he called forms of life. Words unite these forms of life, and in turn, these forms of life give meaning to words. At the same time, these forms of life are those that make up the limits of our world.

In this way, we can understand language as a social formative process, social action, world construction and *performative*. There are several theories, in addition to Social Construction, which have developed and incorporated these ideas: speech act theory (Austin, 1962/1991), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1968/2006), Cultural historical Psychology (Vygotsky, 1962/1986) and Philosophy of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986 and Volosinov, 1973) among others.

Gergen (1994) and Ibáñez (2006) summarized the influences from linguistic revolution in social and human sciences, and in Social Construction as well:

- The deep critique to the representational and designative conception of language opened the doors to reconsider the nature of knowledge, both scientific and everyday knowledge, reformulating the relationship between knowledge and reality, the very notion of reality and, questioning the criteria of truth in which the representative conceptions of knowledge are based.
- The explanations and descriptions are not derived from the world as it is, or from the inner individual mind. Words acquire meaning only in contexts of relations in motion or in a broader sense, within a tradition.

- Consider language in terms of activity (language makes things, not just represents them) contributed to Social Construction development. Language does not describe action but is in itself a form of coordinated action, an action upon the world. Our ability to create meanings together is supported by traditions but is not determined entirely by them.

- The language we use to account the world and ourselves is a social artifact; it is a product of historic and culturally located exchanges and occurs between people.

- As an action on the world, language is also an action on the other, which has aroused interest again in sociopolitical and psychological effects that have various discursive practices.

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The linguistic turn gave way to discursive and narrative turns, which are crucial for Social Construction. The discursive turn goes back to the linguistic turn and leads it to the microsocial (Discursive Psychology) and macrosocial analysis (Foucault's Theory), putting the discourse concept at the center of analysis. Harré referred to a second cognitive revolution: "Of course, there are cognitive processes, but these are immanent to discursive practices placed just in front of our noses" (1992, p.6). Thus, the cognitive is an expression of some more complex processes of a social character, called discursive. The "second cognitive revolution" will be the discursive revolution.

Discursive Psychology has been interested in how different constructions about people and events become reality.[11] Discursive psychology is interested in how we use spoken language in interactions, the "located use of language", that is to say, how people actively construct discourses to create legitimized identities for others within interactions. Discursive Psychology is based on the theory of speech acts (Austin, 1962/1991) and the ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1968/2006). Speech act theory called attention to language as a social, human practice. Here, language is viewed as functional rather than descriptive. This is also the case in ethnomethodology, which is

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[11] According to Potter (1998, p.150), Discursive Psychology aims to discover how the events are constructed, putting the focus on the everyday interaction, in speech and discourse, in activities that people do when they give meaning to social world and resources (systems of categories, vocabularies, notions of people, etc.) which depend on these activities (...) Discursive Psychology changes the emphasis from the static nature of individual toward the practice dynamics of interaction.

the study of methods used daily by people to making meaning in everyday life. Another important concept in discursive Psychology is interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Interpretative repertoires are a way to understand linguistic resources used by *individuals* in the construction of their world. These resources may be discernible groups of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled in metaphors or vivid images. In consequence, interpretative repertoires can be seen as a variety of shared cultural tools used to justify particular versions of events, excuse or validate their own behavior, criticize or maintain the status quo. Different repertories can fabricate different versions of events. These repertories do not belong to individuals and are not located inside their heads. They are social resources, available for anyone who shares a language and culture.

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I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture, as into all the others I shall be delivering, perhaps over the years ahead. I would have preferred to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices as if it had paused an instant, in suspense, to beckon to me. There would have been no beginnings: instead, speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path - a slender gap - the point of its possible disappearance.

Behind me, I should like to have heard (having been at it long enough already, repeating in advance what I am about to tell you) the voice of Molloy, beginning to speak thus: 'I must go on; I cannot go on; I must go on; I must say words as long as there are words, I must say them until they find me, until they say me - heavy burden, heavy sin; I must go on; maybe it's been done already; maybe they've already said me; maybe they've already borne me to the threshold of my story, right to the door opening onto my story; I'd be surprised if it opened'.

Michael Foucault (1972, p.215)[12]

I also would have preferred to see myself enveloped by words and not having to take them to say what others have already said so properly, but well… let's continue expanding the lagoon…

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[12] This was the opening lesson pronounced by Foucault at the College de France on December 2th 1970.

For Foucault (1972), discourse is a set of practices which form the objects to which they relate. In other words, discourse is a group of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, sentences that somehow together, produce a specific version of events. Each discourse draws attention to different aspects, which brings with it different implications of what we can do. For example, the discourse of gender, education, health, religion, discipline, etc. Therefore, discourses construct the phenomenon of our world for us. Each discourse attempts to say what the object really is and aims to be true. These truth pretentions underlie the heart of the discussion about identity, power and change.

Discourses make it possible for us to see the world in a certain way. They produce our knowledge of the world. For Foucault (1972), then, knowledge and power always go together. Where there is knowledge, there is power. Foucault argues that, in relatively recent history, there has been a change from "subjugated power" to "disciplinary power", in which the population is effectively controlled through their own self-monitoring process. This form of power is so efficient because we entered into the process on a voluntary basis. Herein, Psychiatry and Psychology are involved because they have provided various forms of accompaniment and classification used to create standards of what is considered a healthy and well balanced personality.

Understood in this way, power is not a property of any person or group, but it is something, in theory, we can all exercise through discourse. This means that power does not reside in a particular group of people or an institution such as middle class, men or States. Power is vested in all parties. In fact, Foucault (1972) opposed Marxism, which considers power as located in the capitalist employer's hands. To make such a generalization tends to mask the vast collection of differences between people and their situations, and the different power relations in which we are involved. In this way, we are leaving multiple struggles of anonymous people to one side by what he calls "totalizing discourses." It is possible to exercise some power by each one of us and we might use this power in our effort to change ourselves and our lives. Thus, power and resistance are always together for Foucault (1972). Dominant discourses are under threat from implicit alternatives which can dislocate these discourses from

their position as true. In effect, we could say that if it were not for resistance, there would be no need to constantly reaffirm dominant truth status.

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Somos voces en un coro que transforma la vida vivida en vida narrada, y después devuelve la narración a la vida, no para reflejar la vida sino más bien para agregarle algo; no una copia, sino una nueva dimensión; para agregar a cada novela algo nuevo. Carlos Fuentes

[We are voices in a chorus that transforms lived life in narrated life and then returns story to life, not to reflect life but rather to add something; not a copy, but a new dimension; to add with each novel something new, something more to life]. Carlos Fuentes

The *narrative turn* emphasizes the temporary and symbolic dimension of discourse where voices and actors are articulated. Narratives are particularly useful to address identity configurations and to approximate experiences and memories. A narrative is a kind of discourse that allows us to organize, give an account and meaning, structure and consistency to circumstances and events of our lives, experiences and identities. The *narrative turn* possibly began in the Chicago School, when sociologists and anthropologists used life stories and documents to examine experiences of a variety of groups. According to Langellier & Peterson (2004) four movements shaped the narrative turn: a) criticisms about positivism and realist epistemology; (b) the "memory boom" in literature and popular culture; (c) new social movements of racial identity, gender, social orientation and other marginalized groups; and (d) the flourishing culture of therapy.

From a narrative point of view, our descriptions, vocabularies and stories are our understanding of what we are. Our stories form, inform, and reform our sources of knowledge and our visions of reality. Narrative take up all proposals made in the linguistic and discursive turns and confined them to a particular form of discourse: narrative. As a form of discourse, stories are not only a way to represent our lives or to relate our experiences to others, but these stories model our lives and relations. In consequence, each time we create a story, a new interpretation of life emerges, which depends not only on the narrator but on the audience, whether real or imaginary. To

understand our lives and to express ourselves to others, the experience must be told, and it is precisely the fact of relating that determines the meaning to be attributed to the experience. In our effort to give meaning to our lives, people are faced with the task of organizing experiences in temporary streams, in order to obtain a coherent account of themselves and the world around them.

> When I was younger, I had to make a decision to travel out of my country for a long time knowing that my father was very heart sick. To help me make this decision and as part of his traditionalist vision about marriage, my father told me: "Daughter, don´t worry because your place is with your husband". Let's say that I did not entirely share this appreciation, but I felt reassured knowing that, for him, my trip had this sense, and he didn´t understand it as abandonment. Still far from, he died and each time I think about this, I remember his words, and I calm down; this is a story that gives meaning to my absence and I feel forgiven today and always, every time when I remember it.

Epston, White & Murray (1992/1996) defined narration as a meaning unit which provides a framework for lived experience. Stories interpret lived experience and make it possible for both continuity and change. In relation to continuity, stories give order to experience, set out beginnings and endings. They give a coherent sense to the flow of events. Therefore, stories help us to have a perception of continuity. But at the same time, narratives allow us to recognize a story's flow and project a future which could be different from the present.

> Our lives are constantly intertwined with narrative, with stories we tell and we hear, with which we dream or imagined, or with which we would like to tell. All of them are brought into a story of our own lives ... We are immersed in narrative, re-tallying and re-evaluating the meaning of our past actions, anticipating our future projects outcomes, putting us at the intersection of various stories still unfinished (Brooks, 1984, p.3).

White & Epston (1980/1993) argue that the textual analogy allows us to consider people as readers or writers of texts. Each new text reading is a new interpretation, and therefore, a new form of writing. The textual analogy introduces us to an intertextual world: first, in the sense in which our lives are located within texts and second, each time we tell a story, a new story arises which includes and expands the previous. Gergen, cited by Lax (1992/1996), says that text and new narrations of our

lives always emerge through interaction. That is to say, for Social Construction, narration is not an individual mental act as it is for other authors, but a discursive production of an interpersonal nature. The unfolding text is something that always happens between people, and as such, is inseparable from the cultural context in which it occurs. Therefore, Gergen calls into question the act of seeking underlying intentions in human interactions because understanding does not arise from an analysis of the deep structure, the latent or unconscious material, but from interaction. Consequently, the challenge is to separate understanding from the individual and take it to the interaction: toward a process of co-construction.

According to Limón Arce (2005), Social Construction stresses the social functions of narrations, the presence of other, those who are not mere spectators of our stories, but who are involved in them. This is the "screw turning" made by constructionists: others have an active role in the narrative and the social acceptance of a storytelling inevitably will rest in dialog. In the same way, Anderson, H. (1997) says our narratives are intertwined with other narratives. Our narratives are constantly changing, and multi-created; we are always embedded in social, political and cultural contexts, which shape our narrative production. In a broader sense, the self is an autobiography in course (Rorty, 1980). It is a multifaceted biography, I-other constantly writes and edits. The self is an expression of our ever-changing narratives, is always involved in conversational becoming. Summarizing, we live our narratives and our narratives become our life; our realities are converted in our stories and our stories become our realities.

McNamee (2004) suggests understanding narrative as a performance. Internal and private thoughts can be viewed as internal conversations we carry with us, stories involving the other. Even these conversations, actual, imagined or virtual, are relational since they require other's voices; no story is told in a vacuum. When we speak about our beliefs, thoughts or private meanings, we are actually giving voice to our internal dialog, a dialog populated with others, polyphonic. The co-ordination highlights our interdependence with others, where we need the other to construct a narrative which plays with multiplicity of voices. With these stories, we inhabit our

rationalities (how you give meaning to our world); we populate them with people, events, context, history, culture, family, etc. Narrative therefore, is an embodied and coordinated action among people, a performance.

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It is common to hear that humanities took a *dialogical turn* (Linell, 2009). This means a meta-theoretical framework that allows us to understand the way in which human beings construct meaning with a language and body oriented toward an Other. The dialog field has been influenced by diverse disciplines such as Philosophy, Linguistics, Political science, Theory of organizations, Psychology, Sociology, Education, Social work, Public relations, Conflict resolution and, of course, Communication sciences. Buber, Bathkin, Gadamer, Freire and Bohm are usually identified as most influential dialog philosophers.

Sampson (1993/2008) understands the *dialogical turn* as the "celebration of the other". To celebrate the other is not just to find a place for her/him in a theoretical model. It is to analyze the speech role in all aspects of human being. Celebrating the other is to recognize the degree to which the dialogical turn is a genuinely revolutionary transformation. What remains when you look at what people do together is the language as communication in action. Usually, we do not see what is right in front of us, a dominant feature of our lives with others: conversation. Then, according to Sampson, "It is time to take conversations seriously" (1993/2008, p. 97), or as said Harré (1984), the primary reality is human conversation, or the central metaphor moves to the conversation, or the twenty-first century is the conversation century (Anderson, 1997). Even, some modern painters have called attention to "the art of conversation."

Figure 1. Magritte, R. (1950). The art of conversation.

In this painting we do not know what the tiny characters are talking about. However, the superimposed and assemblies stone blocks allow us to differentiate, despite the mess, the word *reve*, which means dream. Perhaps, this is a good illustration of how complex it is to fabricate meaning in the middle of a building of words, signs, gestures and so on.

Sampson (1993/2008) distinguishes four fundamental features for conversation. First, it occurs between people. Even when we are alone, our thinking occurs in the form of internal conversation or dialog. Second, conversation is open to public (we could also say social) because it includes signs shared by a particular community. Third, conversation involves addressing another, it is an action. And finally, conversation includes verbal and non-verbal aspects, material and symbolic writing. According to Anderson & Goolishian (1992/1996), conversation can be understood as interaction among people who shared some space, in which there is sense-making, a new generation of meanings between participants.

Perhaps most prominent authors of the so-called *dialogical turn* are Bakhtin and Volosinov. As well as Wittgenstein (1953/2008), these authors position language

not in an abstract system made by linguistic forms but in the social fact of verbal interaction, this is the fundamental reality of language. Both authors challenge the language notion as a system, and for this purpose they change the basic unit of analysis from sentence to utterance. For Bakhtin (1986), an utterance is never a reflexion or expression of something that already exists. An utterance always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable. As a result, this type of intelligible continuous creativity, always unpredictable and unrepeatable, characterizes dialogical space and social thought (McNamee & Shotter, 2004).

Any utterance is inserted into an utterances' chain; it is a link in the chain of communication, and in other words, it is a response to preceding utterances. This is the responsivity of communication. No language could be attributed to a single speaker. It is the product of interlocutors' interactions and in a broad sense the product of a socially complex situation in which it has been produced. Every word expresses the One in relation to the Other. It creates a verbal configuration from the point of view of the other; ultimately, from the community`s point of view to which we belong (Volosinov, 1973). The words then cannot be attributed to a single speaker. The author has his own right, but the listener and those voices preceding the author have also the right over the word. The polyphony is about these multiple voices constructing living utterances and although, it is a singular speaker, there are also present invisible speakers and silent listeners, whose voices transform the utterances.

Bakhtin (1981) argues that dialog is a responsive and multivocal activity. When we are responsive, our words and actions are not entirely ours; they carry our relational stories, beliefs and values created inside these relations. In dialog, we are saturated with uncertainty, incompleteness and multiplicity. This might seem an awkward space to occupy; after all, we attach much value to the opposite: certainty, completeness, uniqueness. Dialog is not about successfully transmitting our meanings, knowledge or information to others. On the contrary, dialog is a process of firmly holding a position while maintaining the curiosity and respect for the different other position. This is what Bakhtin is referred to as responsiveness.

Bakhtin (1981) rejects the notion of an "individualistic and private I"; the "I" is essentially social. Each person is constituted as a collective of many "I's" assimilated throughout his/her life, in contact with different voices heard which shape our ideology. We will never be without ideology because we talk through our ideology, for which Bakhtin means our languages are charged with values. Therefore, it is the social subject who produces a text which is, quite rightly, the crossroads between the ideological and linguistic system. In this same way, "truth is not found within any individual head, rather, born among people… in the process of its dialogic interaction" (1981, p. 45).

As can be seen, it is difficult to establish limits and implications for each one of these turns. Changes in language conception, the complex concept of discourse, emphasis on narrative and its interrelations with dialogue, are all backgrounds, displacements and parallel developments for Social Construction. Possibly, what changes within this group of ontological and epistemological related movements, within these voices, is the focus of analysis on what is considered the center and the margins. Anyway, the margins remain attractive for me; there resides the power to go unnoticed, or becoming invisible. There is the charm of the alternative dissidence, the resistance, a low voice speaking and the subtle.

Metaphor of Dance: Relations from the Margins to the Center [13]

> In the end, all that is meaningful grows from relationships,
> And it is within this vortex that the future will be forged.
> Kenneth Gergen (1994, preface ix)

Metaphor is useful to communicate meaning. If we look at dance, we could say that what defines it is the *coordinated nature of the joint action.* Dancers must agree, not necessarily with words, but also with gestures, signs or movements, about how they should move according to music, and display an aesthetic or artistic image also pleasant for observers. The result does not belong to one or the other, but both. It is

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[13] The metaphor of dance is used by Kenneth Gergen in his book "Relational being" (2009b).

difficult to separate action, to divide movements because ultimately there is joint movement which belongs to the territory of "us."

Many Social Constructionist ideas emerged from linguistic, discursive, narrative and dialogical turns. One of them is the following: in our daily relations with others, we construct the realities in which we live. To put it another way, as we communicate with each other, we construct the world in which we live and we construct ourselves. Then, the central concern for Social Construction is about what people do together and what this action produces. This interest in the coordination of action, in dance, moves from the margins to the center. This means a radical separation from the modernist tradition whose main interest, the center, is located inside individuals and their private characteristics. Even, when speaking about relations, modernism refers to the relation between individuals, how individuals relate. Social Construction invites us to move from a focus on the individual to the relation. Different ways in which we describe and explain the world are results of our relations: understandings about the world are achieved through coordination among people -negotiations, agreements, comparison, etc. From this point of view, relations are prior to everything intelligible. There is nothing to us as an intelligible world of objects and people until there are relations.

McNamee & Hosking (2012) prefer to speak about Social Construction as Relational Construction because the center of attention is the relational process, as opposed to pre-existing structures (individual or social) and its influence on how we construct the world. Three fundamental characteristics would have these relational processes: a) both, human and non-humans actors, contribute to and are products of the process of reality construction; b) construction of reality is described as an inter-action process - relations between actors, not as individual action and c) "textuality" refers to all relational realities and not only about written or spoken texts.

Shotter (1993/2001) has called this coordinated activity "joint action", which unfolds in a gray area, an area of uncertainty producing unexpected and unpredictable results. These make up a situation or a practical and moral framework which comprises

all those who take part in it. People create an ever-changing sea of coercion and moral possibilities, privileges and rights, obligations and penalties: in summary, an ethos; others call this a relational reality, conversational or communal, relational territory. McName explains it through the metaphor of fluorescent energy which flows between two poles of energy producers. If we faced these two power producers to exchange energy between them, at the end, we would only see waves of energy in motion and not singular producers.[14] This contingent flow of continuing communicative interaction is the Social Construction interest, or as Sampson said (1993/2008, p. 98), "the most important thing about people is not what is contained within them, but what transpires between them", the flow of fluorescent energy, the dance, the performance. Shotter (1993/2001) proposes a rhetorical-respondent version of Social Construction, based on the assumption that all remaining socially significant dimensions originate and form through joint action. Joint action and socially constituted situation establish an otherness which is "ours", which is our peculiar form of otherness.

As posed by McNamee & Hosking (2012), Social Construction opens what Latour (1987) called the black box of relations. Constructionist ideas assume that inter-simultaneous actions continuously contribute to constructing reality. Relational processes construct and re-construct local ontologies as a way of life. According to Shotter (1993/2001), we used to conceive reality as homogeneous, the same everywhere and for all. In contrast, it is time to see reality as distinct, heterogeneous, as a turbulent flow of continuous social activity which has a few relatively stable activity centers and other, more disordered, inexplicable and chaotic ones. McNamee & Hosking (2012) expose this same idea. They claim that reality presents changing and stabilizing constructs, which in any way should be understood as local. Both, stability and change are achieved through ongoing processes.

Multiple realities are co-constructed in relational processes. As Hosking (2011) said, this invites us to a comprehensive inclusion of various ways in which relationships

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[14] McNamee, S. Conferences about Social Construction. Universidad de Caldas. Manizales, Colombia. June 2013.

go, such as non-verbal gestures, posture, movement and tone and includes what some call natural objects along with artifacts produced by human activity. In other words, relational space includes not only relationships with other human beings but also with other living beings and objects. The interest for Social Constructionists is located in relation to any act or artifact which can be coordinated in some way, and with whom we can establish communication.

Inter-actions vary on the scale of their interconnections including cultural and historical issues. History is not assumed as a linear and unidirectional process where the present is a time between past and future. The quality of historical processes is understood as relational; actions always supplement actions or previous texts and have implications for how the process will continue; as well as supplement prior actions, and are made available for possible future supplements. Then, inter-actions and, in particular those which were repeated, make history. That is to say, the story is constantly re-constructed. Relational processes possess a local, historical and cultural quality such that discourses about the past and future are constructed and reconstructed in the present.

McNamee explains the configuration of local, cultural and historical realities, as follow: people coordinate activities with others. From inter-actions and repetition emerges a pattern. Those patterns create standards and expectations which participants use to assess their own and others' actions. These practices lead to future inter-actions where they will be confirmed and sustained, questioned or processed. Through this coordination process, we create local cultural norms, values and patterns of influence, which are converted in the justification of the *common sense* for future coordination. Participants in each community, then develop their own practices, rituals or relational patterns, or to put it another way, local ontologies, which give support to what the community feels as real, true and good life. This leads us to think that within a community, values and forms of practice will change with respect to other communities, depending on participants' coordination.[15]

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[15] McNamee, S. Constructionist Research Conference. Calgary, Canada. May 2012.

From the metaphor of the dance emerges one of the main constructionist ideas: "Everything we consider real is socially constructed. Or more dramatically, nothing is real unless people agree that it is" (Gergen & Gergen, 2008, p. 13). Social Construction does not pose that there is nothing, or there is no reality. In contrast, the aim is to stress that whenever someone defines reality, this definition is invariably speaking from the perspective of a cultural tradition, it has been represented from a specific point of view, and it is a byproduct of the communal construction. It is not only about what it is, but what it is for us. More recently, Gergen (2009b) would pose that all meaning is generated from collaborative action or co-action or in more general terms, we develop significant realities, rationalities and moralities from co-action.

Burr (2003) argues that Social Construction challenges the *naive realism*, which maintains an unquestioning faith in reality as we perceived it. Rather, it is proposed that, as culture and society, we construct versions of reality among us. Constructionist ideas, as Gergen says, do not deny "the world out there" as it is called by realism. Instead, Social Construction is calling our attention to, when attempting to articulate what "there is", we are entering into a discursive world:

> … At that moment starts the construction process and this effort is inextricably intertwined with social exchange processes and with history and culture. And when these processes are being implemented, in general, tend to move toward the reification of language. Adequacy of any word or arrangements of words for 'capture reality as it is' is a matter of social convention" (Gergen, 1994, p. 91).

The central idea is: what we have taken for granted as given and immutable, is socially derived and maintained. All this has been created and perpetuated by human beings who create meanings to be members of a society and culture. This is what Social Construction deals with.

In accordance to Hosking (2005), instead of focusing the mind as a mental reality, Social Construction focuses on language and discursive practices, understood as relationally constructed realities, including what we think constitutes a person. There is no mention of subjective interpretations. That is, Social Construction is not

adopting idealism in replacement of realism, rather the dualisms objective- subjective and realism-relativism are not relevant any more, this discussion goes to the margins. Or we can see realism and Social Construction as two different discursive forms available for us in different circumstances.

From Individual to Relational Self

> The man is not more than a knot of relations;
> relations are the only thing that counts for man.
> Merleau Ponty (1966, p. 463)

Social Construction replaces the individual with relations as its locus of knowledge. There is a substitution from an individualized oriented understanding to an action with a relational valence. Gergen (1994) criticizes modernist and individualistic discourse present in our western culture from the seventeenth century. He says, in the first place, individualism has isolated us. If what is most valuable for us is what there is inside of each one, the other appears as a strange who exists separate from me. Self is understood as fundamentally lonely, and no one can know or understand entirely the private world of the other. Consequently, this world is not available or revealed as a whole. Others' feelings cannot be known completely which causes mistrust among people and makes any attempt to cooperate difficult.

Secondly, individualist discourse feeds a narcissistic position in relation to the other and the world. If we are the center of existence and we can hardly know the other, our primary mission will continue to be better than others. Therefore, we find useful all the discourses about personal improvement, self-esteem, competitiveness, self-efficacy and so. The position of the "me-first" drives us to see others as instrumental to achieving our own aims, a utilitarian discourse which puts our affective relationships, sexual rights and, in general, all our actions in the world, to the service of our self-gratification. This narcissism easily leads to the discourse of competition, "all against all" and to the exploitation of nature because nature is evaluated in terms of benefits for individuals.

Thirdly, relations are assumed as artificial. If we believe in the self as primary, then relationships must be constructed, made, worked or repaired. Relations then are artificial and temporary and as a result, we would need institutions which generate policies and procedures to control these relations. Gergen (1994) said that valuing individual subjectivity is the center of individualist ideology, and this ideology addresses the detriment of our future. As long as we sustain individual subjectivity as the essential ingredient for humanity, we are building a world of isolated individuals, each one locked in his private world, what Sampson (1993/2008) called "self-content individuals". At last, selfishness is the obvious choice under such conditions; others can be seen as potential enemies.

McNamee (2004) suggests that if we focus on what people do together, we are taking as starting point relations, as opposed to individuals. More than explore an individual in his/her context, Social Construction explores relational configurations (contexts of many classes with historical, cultural and situational traditions) which give rise to any sense of individuality or privacy we could have. Rather than start by considering the individuals to understand what is relational, Social Construction proposes starting with the relational construction process of meaning in which we construct any sense of individuality. This means overcoming a monologic perspective, either based on individualist subjectivism or abstract objectivism. The challenge is that it is easy to focus on self-contained individuals due to our defined bodies that are distinct and non-contiguous with others' bodies. However, if we could see the flow of energy moving between physical objects (bodies), we could see our bodies co-mingled with other, and it would be difficult to determine when an entity ends and another begins. The unquestionable belief about a self-content individual is an illusion fostered by our limited visual capabilities.

At this point, it is necessary to establish the difference between constructivism and Social Construction. According to McNamee (2004), both orientations are interrelated since they focus on meaning-making processes. They emphasize the constructed nature of knowledge. However, constructivism focuses on individual and

internal cognitive processes while Social Construction is interested in discourses or joint actions that transpire between people, as mentioned earlier.

Social Construction locates essentialist perspectives at the margins, whether individual or structural essentialism. Burr (2003) proposes that, from a constructionist standpoint, if we consider the social world, including ourselves as individuals, as product of social processes, there can be nothing given which determines the world. There are no essences within things or people that make them whom they are. Meanwhile, essentialism understands the world, including human beings as having a particular or natural essence that explains behavior. One might think that there is a human nature alienated by a repression (ideology to Marxism or unconscious in psychoanalysis) and then, what is required is to break this repression and discover its true nature. This supports the archaeological myth where, through deep excavation, it is possible to unveil the truth of human essence.

White & Epston (1980/1993) criticizes humanism as an essentialist theory because it supports the repressive hypothesis, which argues that repression hides our true essence, inhibits our growth, and induces disease because our real wishes and needs are frustrated. Thereby, humanism also supports the emancipatory narrative where a theory or a professional practice is intended to liberate the self from repression. Post-structuralism also criticizes humanism due to supporting the idea that the person is a unified, coherent and rational agent, author of his/her own experience and meaning (individualistic discourse). The humanist maintains that there is an essence in the center of the individual that is single, consistent and unchanging. Social Construction departs from the idea of a consistent and unified self because, if we are an inter-active byproduct, the self will be a constant flow in multiple realities. It replaces coherence and unity, with fragmentation and multiplicity. In consequence, for Social Construction, a human nature that transcends time and space does not exist. For this reason, it is better to talk about ontology of becoming more than ontology of being. Social Construction removes the focus from psychological life inside the individual head and locates it in an indeterminate space of social relation.

From the anti-essentialist discourse, the individual mind not only loses its ontological substantiation but all its traditional constituents such as emotions and rational thinking, motives, personality, intentions, memory and so on. All of these become historically contingent constructions of culture, or to put it another way, we are facing the emergence of Gergen´s "relational being." For example, we can challenge the idea that the personality exists within us. Most words used to talk about personality completely lose their meaning if the person described is living alone on a deserted island. Once the person is removed from their relationships with others, the words lose their sense; meaning exists only in the relationship between people (Burr, 2003). More than personality, Social Construction refers to multiple identities.

The constructionist view does not consider identity as an achievement of mind, but of relations (Gergen, 1994). We remain in changing relationships and people can see themselves in a variety of ways, depending on relational contexts. Therefore, we do not acquire a profound and lasting "true self," but a potential to communicate and display a self. The identity notion prevents essentialist connotations of personality and implicitly is a social concept, because it is built within discourses culturally available for us which we use in our communication with other people. In turn, Butler (1990) has argued that identity is a contingent construction, which in spite of its multiple forms, presents itself as unique and stable, challenging the essential quality of identity. Gender identities in particular are constructs and processes that occur in a culture. They are both, *performative* and mimetic, in the sense that there is no original genre but the illusion of one who is possible due to action and repetition of specific gender roles.

Even more, Gergen (1994) proposes a vision about self-concept, where self is not a cognitive, private and personal structure, but a discourse about me, a narrative which becomes intelligible within relations. We have not only a discourse about me, but also we tell our life as stories, and we live relations with others in a narrative form. These stories are not an individual's property, but the byproduct of relations, of social interchange. Likewise, there is no single story to tell about us. We have stories available already told before and we can construct others. Multiplicity of stories is

facilitated by the wide range of relationships where people are immersed and demands made from these relationships. This multiplicity of stories is enriched by the polysemy of the narrative mode as Bruner (1986/2004) points out. Instead of preferring the use of unambiguous words, the narrative mode promotes more than one line of interpretation and widens the range of possible realities by increasing our linguistic resources. It favors the extraordinary character of colloquial descriptions, poetics or pictures that enrich the multiplicity of stories to tell.

These are the central points for Social Construction in relation to self-ontology, according to Hosking (2005):

- Instead of talking about individual self, mental operations and individual knowledge, Social Construction gives way to discourses of relational processes, assumed as language-based inter-actions.
- Relational processes are seen as processes that re-construct self-other realities as local ontologies or as a way of life (person-world construction) and re-construct mind metaphorically, for example, as an imagined space in which self-other relations are discursive.
- The unified concept of self is replaced by a dialogic conception as multiple self-other relations, which include the body, which is not assumed as external.

Hoffman (1992/1996, p. 28) presents a beautiful story to illustrate the Social Construction of self:

> I came to think about self like the Australian aborigines think about their "songs." The songs are musical route maps which indicate the paths from one place to another in the territory inhabited by each one. A person can be born in one of those songs but know only a part of it, only a few lines. The aboriginal expand their knowledge of a particular song by performing regular "walks" which allow them to meet other individuals who live too far away and, so to say, know other songs strophes. Therefore, the exchange of song lines is an exchange of important knowledge. In addition, these songs would be linked to the spirits of different ancestors - animals, plants or places – whose came out in 'the times of the dream", before man existence. Thus, a person could share an ancestor with people who live in another place, in the territory.

The beauty of this myth lies in the fact that presents an image of individual identity, which is not within a person or another unity. Identity is composed by temporary flows, which can be simple - as a segmented way - or complex - as a design in wallpaper-, but it will be understood by singing and walking. The mixture of ecological and social understanding this practice provides is impressive. I offer as a poetic example of social construction of the self.

Social Construction as a Generative Theory

> What is, therefore, the truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms ... which after a prolonged use appear to be strong, canonical and mandatory for people; truths are illusions we have forgotten that are illusions.
> Nietzsche (1873/1990, p. 174)

If we accept the multiple forms of historical and cultural knowledge, then what follows is that the notion of *Truth* becomes problematic. From a constructionist point of view, there are no objective facts. All knowledge is derived from a perspective and is at the service of some interest. According to Gergen (1994), if meaning emerges from interaction with our objects of investigation, meaning and the truth will not be disclosed but will be constructed from our co-actions. If what we take by real is derived from a community agreement, then truth claims must be located within these relationships. Truth is found only within the community. In this sense, Social Construction does not adopt universal truths, or the Truth with a capital letter; instead it adopts a radical pluralism (Gergen & Gergen, 2008).

Both, empiricism and rationalism argue that knowledge is an individual possession while Social Construction assumes knowledge as a resulting byproduct of community relations. This position is based on postempiricism, poststructuralist and postmodern critiques to the notion that language can represent, reflect, contain, transmit or store objective knowledge. For constructionists, knowledge is a social action. That is to say, we can understand the world in a variety of ways, but each construction invites us into a different form of action. Therefore, research questions are no longer about structures or the nature of people and society, but about how certain phenomena or forms of knowledge are *achieved* by people in interaction. As a result, there is an emphasis on the process or dynamics of social interaction.

Knowledge therefore is not something a person has but something people do together (it is *performative*).

Knowledge embedded in culture, history and language, is a product of social discourse. Thus, the creation of knowledge (theories, ideas, truths, beliefs) is an interactive, interpretive process in which all parties contribute to its creation, sustainability and change. In fact, knowledge is not essential or definitive; it is not managed or discovered, rather is fluid and changing. Knowledge transforms itself as we share it with others, in our interactions. Consequently, it is through daily interactions among people in the course of social life, that our versions of knowledge are produced. From a constructionist perspective, knowledge is not acquired in a passive way, it is not there to be discovered, but is created in the link with the world and with each other.

> If we consider knowledge, not as possession of an essence that has to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right to believe, according to the current criteria, we are then on the way to see in conversation the context in which it must be understood knowledge. (Rorty, 1980, p. 38)

Gergen (2001) points out that, theoretical and literary semiotics sees language as a system itself, a system which at the same time precedes and survives individual. Therefore, to speak as a rational agent is to participate in a system already established; it is drawing upon existing genres, or appropriating forms of talk already in place. The individual scientist is only "rational" if s/he adopts the codes of the common discourse of the particular scientific community. In fact, scientific rationality is obtained through privileged local uses of language.

Social Construction favors local knowledge, such as expertise, values, truths, conventions and narratives created within a community of people, who have first-hand knowledge of themselves and their situations. If knowledge is formulated from inside of the community, it will have greater relevance. It will be more pragmatic and more sustainable. Shotter (1993/2001) calls this a "Third kind knowledge", a special form of knowledge created in the conversational space, a collaborative knowledge in practice,

sustained in common with the other, created from inside a situation, institution or society. If all forms of knowledge are historically and culturally situated, this includes knowledge generated by social sciences. In effect, Social Construction criticizes traditional disciplines such as Psychology, which are viewed as adopting a form of imperialism and colonialism implicit or explicit in the ways in which a western view of the world is automatically assumed to be true and is imposed over any other type of knowledge.

According to Gergen (1994), Social Construction offers professionals and scientists a basis to challenge realities and dominant forms of life associated with them. The three major challenges are culture critique, internal critique and the scholarship of dislodgement. The first refers to value neutrality as chimerical desire: professionals and scientists inevitably affect social life, for better or worse. Then, instead of "operating as passive minions to the mirror of nature", scientists and professionals may legitimate and responsibly extend their values to make intelligible the political and moral issues linked to our domain. Secondly, given that social and human sciences use languages and practices which affect social life, they also require a critical internal valuation. It is crucial to monitor, analyze and classify doubts in the use of their own constructions of reality and practices associated with them. An important question is, who benefits and who does not? In this sense truth claims are replaced by an analysis of utility. The constructionist question is not whether this or that is true but if we act as if this is truth, what happens to us as a culture or a civilization if we enter into one of these discursive spaces and live within their realities, logics and values?

When reality becomes objective or is taken for granted, relations are frozen, alternatives are limited and divergent voices ignored. Gergen (1994) proposes the "scholarship of dislodgement", one that relaxes the dominance of conventional, makes local what is universal and makes multiple what is unitary. This "scholarship" suspects about any dominant discourse, meta-narrative or universal truth intends to be generalized and applied to all people, cultures, situations or problems. Prescriptive thinking may create categories, types, and classes that inhibit our ability to learn about

the newness in each personal relation or group. Social Construction does not devalue scientific knowledge but doubts about this knowledge is the only one to reveal the Truth. That is to say, all traditions of knowledge, scientific, religious or communitarian have their own ways to construct the world, defending certain values and in favor of certain forms of life. Social Construction is located in the position of "both-and", where we are invited to explore positive and negative consequences that all these rationalities have on us.[16]

For example, Shotter (1993/2001), analyzing the myths of mind, makes a critique to scientific practice. He argues that, from the Ancient Greeks, the west has believed that reality must be behind appearances. Because of that, society in general has accepted that certain specific groups of people (called clerics, scholars, philosophers, scientists or simply intellectuals) are in charge to declare the nature of that deeper order. On the other hand, to fulfill our responsibilities as competent academics and professionals, we must write systematic texts and we use a closed set of intralinguistic references, which nobody, out of the scientific community, understands. The problem is that once academics are inside of these systems, is extremely difficult to get out of them; that is, the trap into which we have fallen in our academic life. We have dedicated our time to investigating myths created by ourselves and myths not comprehensible or useful to people about whom they purport to be (Shotter, 1993/2001).

Criticism is necessary and useful to Social Construction, as is the use of "deconstruction" proposed by Derrida (1971/2005). According to this author, language is a sign system which does not have a positive or negative inherent value. Instead, it is our meaning-making which provides different values. The world's existence automatically includes all distinctions within the same word and within relations with other words not present. Thus, there is what is said and what is not said, and the tension between both creates emergent possibilities of new understanding. There is

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[16] This position usually called as skeptical, shared the suspicion with other circles of thought located in social, literary, rhetorical and cultural studies of science. Kuhn, for example, removed foundations of progress in empirical knowledge; Derrida deconstructed the concept of rationality and Foucault, the idea of knowledge free from ideology, to name just a few examples (Gergen & Gergen, 2008).

always the chance of another position or perspective not yet identified with this interaction between what is said and not said, what is present and not. Derrida (1971/2005) argues that it is precisely this other position which we are continually looking for: there is always another possible vision for us, and we must always try to deconstruct our world as we know it, looking for the unexpected which could replace our common vision.

Gergen highlights this generative perspective in knowledge construction (during an interview with Cisneros-Puebla, 2007). He claims that there are two phases in the constructionist movement: the first is deconstructive or liberatory, which has been dominant in the past 30 years. The second is the reconstructive phase or generative, which is an invitation to create new ideas and practices for more promising conditions of life. Gergen suggests that it might be useful, then, to consider theoretical explanations in terms of their generative capacity. Theories could challenge cultural assumptions, ask fundamental questions about contemporary social life, promote reviews on what has been "taken for granted" and thus provide new alternatives for social action (Cisneros-Puebla, 2007).

Modern views of science draw a strong and hierarchical distinction between creation and application of knowledge to practice. For the postmodern vision, this distinction is removed. Theoretical explanations of the world are not reflections in a mirror, but discursive actions within a community. In effect, theory is itself a form of practice. This is an invitation to act in certain ways as opposed to others; in this sense, theories may be constitutive of cultural life, create intelligibility which promotes worlds to come (Gergen, 2001).

Gergen (2001) proposes the idea of generative theory which openly contradicts the commonly accepted culture assumptions opening new ways to perceive intelligibility. Human sciences have a significant potential for either sustaining cultural institutions or putting them in reflexive doubt. If our conceptions of what is real and good are cultural constructs, then the greater part of our cultural practices may also be considered as contingent. All that is natural, normal, rational, obvious and necessary is

open to modification. A constructionist orientation substantially extends innovation to deconstruction, in which all assumptions regarding truth, rationality and the good remain under suspicion. Social Construction also extends democratization, in which the range of voices involved in dialogs resulting from science is amplified. Finally, Social Construction extends reconstruction, in which new realities and practices are modeled for cultural transformation (Gergen, 1994).

2

The journey:
An Account of the
Inquiry Process

This chapter will show how the inquiry was conducted, drawing attention to the various moments in the process, its participants, the decisions made and the guidelines for both constructing the relationship and reflecting on the dialogues, narratives or resulting images. My intent is to provide readers with an understanding of how and why the decisions relating to the process were made.

The Origin

The emergence of this inquiry is closely linked to my personal and professional live and to the social and political conditions of the country where I live, and represented a quest, a responsibility, and an opportunity for me. A quest for what Psychology could contribute to the discourse of the social sciences. As stated in the theoretical chapter, Social Construction provided at least a temporary response to this exploration, and this research represents the way I integrated theory, a practice-oriented theory focused on utility. This inquiry is also a way of expressing the social responsibility I feel for what is occurring in the society I belong to. In other words, it would be difficult for me to ignore the national reality and should be focused on understanding what is happening to and affecting Colombians. Besides, it was an opportunity for personal and professional development and a chance to contribute to the consolidation of a local academic community: the CEDAT research group at the University of Caldas. This inquiry grew out of this framework.[17] The diagram below shows the different moments in the process:

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[17] I would like, first of all, to thank Fanny Osorio for her invitation and motivation to become part of the CEDAT research group, and Angela María Estrada for information provided on the Doctoral Program in Social Sciences led by Taos Institute and Tilburg Univerity. Manizales, 2009.

Figure 2. Diagram of the Inquiry Process

Recording
Reflecting
Writing

Quest
Responsibility
Opportunity

Families of Origin
Program Professionals

Location in Context
Exploration of Social Construction
Knowing the Constructionist inquiry

Meaning and connection

Origin

Dialogues with other audiences

Emergence of questions

Performative
Visual
Performative/Oral
Written
Visual/Oral
Life Stories

Workshops & Narratives

Defining principles and guidelines for action

Structuring the dialogic space

Knowledge production
Positioning
Methods

Collaborative Group
Secure and Available Space
Consolidation of the Youth Group

The Question Emerges

Given these interests, purposes and motivations, I embarked on the challenge of constructing the research question. This required three processes: location in the context, an exploration of Social Construction, and an inquiry into constructionist research.

I began locating the context by initiating an *association with the* PHT, participating in the case studies they performed. I came to two conclusions regarding my work: a) of crucial importance was the breakdown of trust these youth seemed to be experiencing, which made it difficult to work with them; and b) the difficulties arising from this situation hindered the construction of relationships with and among them. Our association resulted in an initial inquiry proposal based on the following question: How is trust broken and rebuilt in the psychic and social lives of child and youth *disengaged* from Colombia's armed conflict?

From this moment on I began the process of *reviewing literature* on the subject through local, national and international research. I developed a database and wrote down initial reflections on discourses focused on children and youth ex-combatants in Colombia. Concurrently, I established several *conversations with colleagues, practitioners and researchers,* which allowed me to broaden my perspective on this population and on current academic discourses. Out of these dialogues arose the initiative to write and publish the collaborative article titled: Cifuentes, M. R., Aguirre, N. & Lugo, N. V. (2011). *Niñas, niños y jóvenes excombatientes: revisión de tema [Girls, Boys and Youth Ex-Combatants: A Review of the Subject*].[18]

At the same time I began the process of exploring Social Construction, thanks to my *formal association with the Doctoral Program in Social Sciences* led by the Taos Institute (USA) and Tilburg University (Netherlands). Thus began a process of *dialogue*

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[18] I am thankful for contributions made by Rocío Cifuentes and Nathalia Aguirre at this point in the process; their research with youth ex-combatants was useful in locating the context and I used certain of their ideas and testimonies.

with authors, through a reading of their texts and face to face interviews with teachers, fellow doctoral students, and participants in program workshops. My dialogues with Sheila McNamee, Ken Gergen, Harlene Anderson, John Shotter and John Rijsman proved fundamental. At this stage of the process I reframed the research question as follows: How is it possible to rebuild relationships within the many forms of life for the children and youth ex-combatants enrolled in the PHT?

A third process was the initial exploration of constructionist inquiry. My consultancies with Sheila McNamee, Dian Marie Hosking, Sally St. George and Dan Wulff were fundamental. I presented the *research project* several times in the course of our meetings and, based on ensuing conversations, made the following decisions: a) to restate the research question; b) to expand the study's potential contributions; c) to define new theoretical categories and the relationships between them; d) to incorporate literature on narrative and collaborative therapy; and e) to elaborate on action research, the dialogic and the narrative. Thus, the new research question, which remained unchanged until the end of the process, became: How can we construct a socio-relational process to facilitate the transition to civilian lives of children and youth ex-combatants enrolled in the PHT in Manizales, Colombia? Clearly, this question presents a collaborative, constructionist and action-oriented approach to understanding a situated social reality.

Defining Principles that Connect Theory, Methodology and Epistemology

Understanding Knowledge Production

Relational processes became the focus of this inquiry, rather than individual or pre-existing social structures and their influence on the way we construct the world. The *unit of analysis* was to be the relationship with the youth ex-combatants – my relationship with them and their relationships with each other and with other people in their lives. Knowledge production was to be based on shared experience and dialogue. The results, therefore, would be constructions among participants; all

understood as active agents in the process, each of us involved, along with our belongings, stories and bodies. What we were capable of understanding together would be neither objective nor subjective, but relational in itself, neither theirs nor mine, but a co-production of the relationship. The knowledge produced would belong to us as a community and would be guided by our particular assumptions, beliefs and values; in other words, it would be knowledge set in a specific time and space.

The inquiry would be carried out as an implication in the flow of our social life, as an activity that would locate each of the participants in a specific world that we would seek to make visible. At this point, I assumed this research as a political act, socially just and conscious, with no separation between process and product. In fact, I would focus on process rather outcome. I made clear my intention to go beyond any colonialist approach that might be construed as authoritarian access to the youth ex-combatants or their culture. Rather, I wanted to produce meaningful, accessible and evocative research to increase the readers' sensitivity and promote other forms of representation of a world unknown to many. To do so, instead of suggesting any definitive condition, I would have to make evident the complexity of this world, the distinct nuances inherent in our relationships, the multiple and far-from-stable realities that developed and were constantly being constructed, as well as the connections between them.

I realized that from a constructionist perspective, the distinction between research and intervention was unnecessary because all processes actively construct realities. Participation in research inevitably reconstructs the lives of the participants to some degree and involves everyone, including the researcher. In any case, I was explicitly, from this moment on, deeply committed to ensuring that the welfare of the youth came before any other consideration and to protecting them from any possible form of injury or re-traumatization, and to providing all of us with an opportunity for learning and transformation. In other words, there was an explicit interest in making sure the youth benefited from their participation and in contributing to the development of relationships within the group.

Understanding the Positioning of the Researcher and Other Participants

In order to comply with these intentions and presuppositions it was essential to reflect on my positioning as a researcher. When I speak of *positioning* I refer to an understanding of the power relationships that would circulate among the youth ex-combatants and other participants, the place from which we would speak, my representation and that of the youth, and the possibilities and limitations of a particular discourse. The transition from power *over* to power *with* was critical; in other words, recognizing that power would inevitably circulate in relationships but that it could be generative and result in multiple forms of participation. This in turn paved the way for knowledge production *with* instead of knowledge production *about*. Thought had to be given to relativizing my voice as unique while including multiple voices in the process, especially those of the youth. I tried to go beyond the researcher's position as someone who knows all about them and therefore guides their liberation or emancipation. This meant that decisions would be made in the relational context and not previously, making space for multiple, local and community-based rationales, allowing the relationship to be defined as collaborative, and establishing a subject/subject dialogue that would recognize differences in position within the group.

It was essential from this moment on to develop reflexivity, which I understood as the critical capacity to look closely at myself and my relationship with the youth. This meant deconstructing what I thought was rational or true within this community of meaning, remaining open to suspicion, allowing for emergence of the participants' new identities, and including reflections on power and, in general, all pragmatic and ethical issues. This reflexivity was expressed later in the various dialogues with participants, in the reflections recorded in my field diary and throughout the writing of this dissertation, more extensively in the chapter on the *Green Zone*.

Understanding the Methods

There is no constructionist research method *per se*. Social Construction is a discourse, a meta-narrative that provides a general approach to relational processes. This orientation was previously discussed in the theoretical chapter. At this point in the research process I was better able to understand that methods are neither neutral nor attached to any discourse; they are toolboxes that can be useful for a particular purpose in a specific community and relationship. Only from inside the community and the relationship is it possible to clearly determine which of these resources are suitable to a specific end or means. This is why I understood the method as a *performance* in context; only by interacting with the youth ex-combatants was I able to make the appropriate methodological decisions. However, before my association with the youth, and guided by constructionist principles, I made the decision to frame my research in three *methods*: the collaborative, the dialogic and the narrative. The methodological architecture was subsequently developed during the *Green Zone* and with the youth ex-combatants.

Structuring the Dialogic Space

Formation of the Collaborative Group

Together with graphic design department professor and performing arts student and dancer formulated the Corporal, Narrative and Audiovisual Expression workshop with the youth ex-combatants in mind. I decided to link my research to this training program for the following reasons: a) to ensure that the youth developed expression and communication skills, which from the beginning had been targeted as one of their main needs; b) to offer the youth an extremely attractive proposal; and c) to make the workshop serve as a *laboratory* for social relations, where we wouldn't only talk about relationships but live them together, as a shared reality.

After establishing certain minimal agreements, we proceeded to institutionalize the project. It was publicly presented to the ICBF and the PHT, and explicit written

authorization was granted to begin the workshops. The youth pose a security risk, and each of them is legally represented by a family defender. It was agreed that the group of PHT social workers would be part of the collaborative group and perform the following functions: provide the youth with constant invitations and motivation; provide key information regarding each participant's current condition; monitor attendance; communicate with the foster homes, and attend certain workshops, especially when I could not. The group would then consist of the two aforementioned teachers, PHT social workers, lab assistants (handling cameras and equipment), students (of graphic design and cultural administration), and later, social sciences graduate student Sandra Vallejo, who joined the group as part of her Master thesis on the body and corporeality linked to this research. Before the workshops with the youth began, we developed a process for preparing the whole group.

Creating a Safe, Available Space for the Youth

To ensure confidentiality, students, teachers and lab assistants, all signed an agreement to refrain from disclosing verbally, visually, or in writing any information made available to us during our participation in the workshops. This included commenting to others about what happened in the workshops, posting photos or videos, and extracting information from the Mobile Image Lab computers. We also agreed to respect the privacy and anonymity of the youth who attended the workshops, using pseudonyms in written texts, captions and credits, altering any photos or videos that would be published so that no one could be identified, and avoiding anything that might constitute a risk to their safety. Similarly, participating youth signed a consent form with basic information regarding the research, those responsible for it and the other participants, the fact that audio and video would be constantly recorded, the steps taken to protect their identities (those contained in the confidentiality agreement), and their privacy and right to voluntary participation. Their only commitment was to attend and be on time for scheduled sessions.

The social workers from the PHT then proceeded to extend an invitation to the youth. We hosted three motivational sessions that included dance presentations,

images prepared by students and teachers, group games and activities, registration, and signing of consent forms. Due to difficulties with the participants' schedules, we had to establish two work groups, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Each of the sessions would meet for three hours, once a week.

Consolidating the Group of Youth Ex-Combatants

The group included a total of 20 youth ex-combatants, 9 women and 11 men from the States of Antioquia (5), Valle del Cauca (4), Bolivar (2), Chocó (2), Nariño (2) Cesar (1), Arauca (1), Norte de Santander (1), Tolima (1) and Guaviare (1). Eleven youth (55%) had demobilized from the FARC-EP, seven (35%) from the ELN, and two (10%) from paramilitary groups. The map below includes the participants' places of origin and a table with general information.

Figure 3. Participants´ Places of Origin: Armed Conflict Zones in Colombia

Table 1. General information on youth ex-combatants participating in the research

Pseudonym	Age at start of the workshops	Age at time of enlistment in armed group	Time spent in the armed group	Age at separation from armed group	Form of separation	Time in the program until 2012	Schooling level when entering program	Schooling level at start of workshops
JAIME	23 (1989)	No Information	No Information	16 (2005)	Captured by Army	6 years 2006-2011	No schooling	3
ADRIANA LUCIA	21 (1991)	11 (2002)	3 years and 6 months	14 (2006)	Voluntary	7 years 2006 - 2011	2	10
ALEX	21 (1991)	No Information	No Information	No Information	No Information	1 year 2011-2011	5	7
DANIELA	19 (1992)	10 (2003)	7 years	17 (2010)	Voluntary	2 years 2010-2011	2	7
JULIO	19 (1992)	13 (2005)	17 months	14 years (2006)	Voluntary	5 years 2007- 2011	No schooling	10
LUCY[19]	19 (1992)	12 (2004)	5 years	17 years (2010)	Voluntary	1 year 2011	No schooling	2
MARIANA[20]	19 (1992)	2 (1994)	13 years	15 years (2007)	Involuntary	4 years 2008-2011	2	9
SOFIA[21]	19 (1992)	10 (2001)	4 years	14 (2005)	Captured by Army	4 years 2007-2011	No schooling	3
EDUARDO	18 (1993)	17 (2010)	9 months	17 (2010)	Captured by Army	1 year 2011-2011	No schooling	3

[19] Pregnant when enrolled in program; at the start of the workshops her child was 9 months old.
[20] Mother of a 2 year-old daughter at start of the workshop.
[21] Sofia was in other programs before enrolling in the PHT. Pregnant at the time she enrolled in the program; decided to give the child up for adoption.

Pseudonym	Age at start of the workshops	Age at time of enlistment in armed group	Time spent in the armed group	Age at demobilization from armed group	Form of demobilization	Time in the program until 2012	Level of education when entering	Level of education at start of workshops
ALEXANDER	17 (1995)	No Information	1 month	No Information	No Information	2 years 2010-2011	3	7
CIELO	17 (1995)	No Information	No Information	15 (2010)	Voluntary	2 years 2010-2011	6	9
ELENA	17 (1994)	14 (2008)	6 months	15 (2009)	Voluntary	2 years 2010-2011	2	7
ERNESTO	17	No Information	No Information	No Information	No Information	3 months 2012	No schooling	No schooling
FABIO[22]	17 (1994)	12 (2006)	2 years and 6 months	14 (2009)	Voluntary	1 year 2011-2011	2	4
JOHNY	17 (1995)	No Information	No Information	No Information	No Information	No Information		7
MARÍA	17 (1994)	10 (2004)	3 years	13 (2008)	Voluntary	3 years 2009-2011	2	9
MANUEL[23]	16 (1996)	9 (2005)	3 years	12 years (2008)	Captured in combat	4 years 2008-2011	2	7
SANTIAGO	16 (1995)	13 (2008)	3 years	16 (2011)	Voluntary	1 year 2011	No schooling	2
TATIANA[24]	15 (1997)	13 (2010)	3 months	13 (2010)	Captured in combat	2 years 2010-2011	3	7
CAMILO	14 (1998)	11 (2009)	7 months	12 (2010)	Rescued by his mother	2 years 2010-2011	3	5

[22] In other programs before enrolling in the PHT. Wounded by the army in combat.
[23] Captured badly wounded in fighting between the Army and the armed group.
[24] Captured in the midst of combat and seriously wounded by Army shelling.

Development Workshop: The Emergence of the Narrative

We established a total duration of one year and designated the University of Caldas' Moving Image Lab as the permanent meeting place. A total of 40 workshops were conducted (see Appendix 1). The same workshop took place in the morning and afternoon, although the results always differed given the characteristics of each group. Five women attended the morning session intermittently. Three of them occasionally attended the afternoon workshop. Female participants were few and it was almost never possible to work with them all at once. The men attended the afternoon group, along with a few women. Each session lasted three hours and a total of 73 sessions were conducted (occasionally a morning or afternoon session would not take place) for a total of 219 hours from December 2, 2011 to December 18, 2012.

The collaborative group agreed that regardless of how each workshop developed, they would all remain: a) flexible and emerging, according to the needs of the youth; b) participatory and open to the recommendations and comments of the youth, who would have open access to video and photography equipment; c) practical, based on workshop methodology in which activities would be more practical than theoretical; d) voluntary for all participants, teachers and student, not just the youth; e) respectful of the youth's characteristics, stories and current conditions; their welfare and learning were more important than any other academic consideration; f) confidential, information circulated during the workshop must not leave the group or laboratory space; g) collective, promoting group activities, conversations and agreements; h) based on the youth's everyday language, interests, knowledge and customs; i) entertaining, interesting and consistent with the youth's desires and motivations; and j) stable, the same people should participate in all the workshops.

With this and the training objectives in mind, we created a general methodological strategy that was observed in most of the workshops:

+ Group Physical Warm-Up: We began with physical activities like running along the ramp, exercising, playing or dancing, to loosen the youth's bodies and alleviate the emotional stress they brought into the workshop. This served as preparation for any subsequent physical exercises.

+ Information on Audiovisual Techniques and Practice: We provided the youth with information about operating photographic and video cameras, etc. and included practical activities performed together or in front of one another.

+ Collective Activities: *Performative*, visual, oral and written activities aimed at building trust inside the group, promoting teamwork and solidarity, and creating narrative events.

+ Group Conversation: Each session ended in a conversation conducted in a circle on the floor and with three goals in mind: to present materials and products created during the workshop; to reflect on relations; and to evaluate the session and overall process.

This research could be considered art-based because we used artistic (visual, *performative* and oral) procedures to find alternative ways to communicate the youth's experiences, to see their stories reflected in the aesthetic productions of others, to evoke emotions, to express what was difficult to put into in words, and, mainly, to produce narratives that would complement the textual, visual and corporal. The youth's participation in artistic procedures greatly motivated their narratives. This also accounted for the different kinds of narratives:

Performative Narratives

Stories told through body movements, static body positions, and actions without the use of the spoken or written word. This includes the collective formation of images, objects and concepts with body actions; role playing in two short stories (*Little Red Riding Hood* and *The vaccine*); using stop motion animation techniques

(taking a photo of each step of an action and then reproducing the photos to give the illusion of movement) to create *The Small Lizard* and *Roller Coaster*; performing action sequences with puppets; using neutral masks created together to perform animal actions (*animalization*); and creating the Body Shadow Performance *The ride*, a joint production from start to finish as we wrote the story together and everyone acted in it, and presenting the play in family gatherings. We were then able to watch a video recording of the presentation planned by PHT.

Performative/Oral Narratives

Stories acted out involving orality, as in the case of the human sculptures in which, in groups of three, one person was the sculptor, another was the clay, and the third a journalist. The sculptor used the person acting as the clay to create a *sculpture* and then explained the meaning of this sculpture to the journalist, and the journalist's interview was videotaped; performances of everyday and fictional scenes and other improvisational exercises such as a conversation two friends might have about their lives if they met by chance in a coffee shop ten years from now.

Visual Narratives

Stories told only through images such as portraits, photos, videos and Body Shadow Performance. These images helped the youth to recognize themselves and all they were learning in the workshops.

Written Narratives

Given the limited formal schooling of most of the youth, I gave priority to oral rather than written narratives. However, some stories were written down in the form of letters, notes and cards and the fiction story written in pairs in which each person asked a fairy godmother to grant them a wish. I wrote more than anyone: letters and emails sharing stories of my everyday life, acknowledgements of their participation in

the workshop, and certificates for the Tree of Life activity in which each of them told the story of what he or she had achieved in the workshop.

Visual/Oral Narratives

These drawings presented orally by each of them in front of their peers were the most relevant to my research. I assumed that the drawings could not speak for themselves and would not be subjected to my own interpretation. This created an opportunity to share the stories, to be part of the audience listening to each other's stories, and to generate group conversations. I am including the map of their relationships and the conversation that this generated; their drawings of their silhouettes and the evaluation of the workshop that followed; the Tree of Life drawings and the conversation about their roots, skills, challenges, dreams and threats; the collective story, "Our Forest of Life"; the maps of Colombia; the group narrative, "Animals and My Life"; and their body drawings and the stories about their scars and marks. Some ideas discussed in later chapters were inspired by these narratives.

Life Stories

Three youth ex-combatants told their life stories in the course of the research. "The Commander's Daughter" told by Mariana is included in its entirety, "Looking for a Dad" told by Daniela, and "Be Somebody in Life" told by Adriana Lucia. Several excerpts from these two life stories are included in subsequent chapters.

Dialogues with Other Audiences

Families of Origin

The PHT hosts an annual meeting with the families of origin of the youth ex-combatants. I attended three of these family gatherings, always in my role as helper, assisting with questionnaires, serving refreshments, or caring for younger children. At

the time of the first gathering in 2011, the workshops had not yet begun. By attending the meeting I was able to meet the youth for the first time. I had several informal conversations with Daniela and Sofia. I was privileged to meet the families of Manuel, Andres, Cielo, Adriana, Camilo and other youth who didn't participated in the research, and I listened for the first time to the families' stories of the moment when their children and youth left home.

At the second family gathering in 2012 (while the workshop was underway), I had the opportunity to interview Camilo's mother and Daniela's and Santiago's fathers. These formal, open and semi-structured interviews were videotaped and gave me a deeper understanding of the families' experiences over the years. Certain excerpts from these interviews are included and were especially relevant to the chapter on discourses on youth ex-combatants. The workshop participants presented the Body Shadow Performance, *The ride,* at this gathering. We repeated the presentation three times for each of the family groups. As mentioned elsewhere, Maria invited me to the third gathering. Because she had no family of origin, she was allowed to invite a significant other, which helped cement our relationship.

Tutor Home Program Professionals

I interviewed four of the program's psychologists and social workers and at the end of the process we set up a focus group to evaluate the workshops. During this focus group the research was heralded as a methodological example for them that inspired a deeper interest in Social Construction`s ideas and its associated collaborative and narrative practices. We then began a Seminar, meeting in ten four-hour session throughout 2013.

This training process produced significant lessons for everyone involved and was relevant to this work because I was able to present and discuss the main ideas that had taken shape in the course of the workshops; listen again and from a different perspective to the youth's stories; read and discuss in detail one of the chapters of this

dissertation; and make a real impact on the program and its intervention strategies.[25] Unfortunately, an analysis of all that happened in this pedagogical space exceeds the possibilities and scope of this research and, therefore, is not explicitly included.

Meaning and Connection

The form and meaning of the statements comprising this inquiry emerged among the various actors who participated in specific moments and situations. My voice as a researcher, as an author, is not the only voice; it is saturated with the voices of the participants and with meanings previously employed by other persons or authors. However, as a researcher and the author, I am responsible for and privileged to be this voice that includes many others, that composes, like a symphony, the manner in which these voices emerge, show themselves, hide, interact, are answered and overlap with each other. This section deals with the way I attempted to organize and recall the meanings that were generated and, above all, to establish connections between them. Three processes were fundamental in achieving this goal: recording, reflection and writing.

From the time the process began, I understood the fundamental value of recording the literature, my thoughts, the conversations with multiple participants, and especially what happened in the workshops. To this end I devised various strategies to carefully document the process:

Virtual Library

I used Firefox's Zotero application to save, classify, and access -- from any computer -- all the bibliographic information collected during the investigation. This virtual library stored in the *cloud* allowed me to continually synchronize files, even when working from different computers or in different cities and countries. I stored all my notes and summaries there and later transferred them to Atlas Ti software for more rigorous selection and encoding of this information.

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[25] For more details, see graduate evaluations in the final report submitted to CEDAT, December 2013.

Field Diary

Throughout the process I recorded my ideas, questions, reflections, exact words, images, answers, and descriptions of movements in my field diary, a simple notebook, which on occasion was quite messy. I kept it on hand and it proved especially useful for jotting down important observations at the close of each workshop session.

Videotaping and taking Photos

Every workshop session was videotaped and countless photos were taken. Lab assistants, the media teacher, and the youth themselves were responsible for videotaping. This made it possible for me to watch what had happened during the session and perceive aspects that had gone unnoticed at the time, especially since I was completely involved and active in all workshop activities. Watching the videos contributed to the construction of meaning and connection in this research. I find it a useful resource for long processes in which participants have time to adjust to that other observant eye that sometimes inspires fear or embarrassment.

Also crucial to the process was the fact that the youth could use the camera whenever they wanted to record the session themselves. This provided them with an additional role during the workshop, accessing the power wielded by the person recording, and helped them to overcome the fear of the camera. Their recordings allowed me to understand what they found interesting, where their attention was focused, and the relational possibilities of using a camera. Certain difficulties related to videotaping also arose: it limited our possibilities of working outdoors, we occasionally spent more time on equipment than people, and the volume of information increased the amount of work to be done. I found the custody of the highly confidential information contained in the files, including classifying and sorting, timely and complete delivery, backing up the information to prevent losses and controlling access by unauthorized persons, to pose an especially difficult problem.

Audio Recording

Audio of all interviews with professionals, mothers and fathers, and the evaluation focus group was recorded and transcribed verbatim. This material was incorporated into Atlas Ti for encoding and classification.

Talleriandos (Doing workshops)

A written document was created for each workshop and included a description of activities, transcribed dialogues, and the photos and reflections generated in the course of the workshop. In order to prepare each *Talleriando* I had to watch the videos, look at the photos, and review my field diary notes. This process was repeated throughout the course of the workshops and resulted in a 426-page document, the workshop memoirs, a portion of which have been included (another portion could not be connected and can be used for future reflection and publications). The *Talleriandos* were integrated into the Atlas Ti program and then encoded.

Writing has been fundamental to the development of meaning and connection. I wrote constantly throughout the process, in my field diary, while compiling the *Talleriandos,* the written reports, published articles, analytical memos and, finally, this dissertation, which is an attempt to integrate and express everything done to date. While compiling the final writing, I once again reviewed the experience with the youth, their stories, theory, other research, and memories, changing the dialogues into present tense to produce a written document that attempts to connect the voices of those who participated in a polyphonic text.

I'd like to clarify the choices I made in content and style. Regarding the content, I used ideas taken from different methods and authors that guided my reflection and writing:

Deconstruction / Reconstruction

I understand deconstruction as subjecting to scrutiny any presupposition or statement of truth regarding youth ex-combatants. This was incorporated into all my work, from the time I began my review of literature through the final revision of this dissertation. Contributions by Foucault, Butler and Gergen regarding power, gender and deficit were especially helpful. The clearest example of this process is visible in the chapters three and four. In both chapters I show the impact that social, political, institutional, academic and professional discourses have on understanding what happens to youth ex-combatants in Colombia. On other hand, I understand reconstruction as the generation of new ideas and practices leading to cultural transformation. And, in the same way that certain presuppositions were deconstructed, I suggested an alternative manner in which I believe these realities can be assumed. My interest in reconstruction is present throughout this work, in the question, the purposes, the process, and my writing. It is most apparent in the last chapter devoted to analyzing alternatives for action with youth ex-combatants.

Dialogic / Performative Analysis

I used Riessman's method (2008), which was useful when reflecting on what happened in the *Green Zone* and on the stories. The author understands narrative analysis as questioning the intent of the language (how and why) and not simply the content to which language refers. Specifically, it questions how speech between those who dialogue is produced and interpreted as narrative. Relevant to this reflection were contributions from Bakhtin and McNamee, widely quoted, and Goffman, in understanding the narrative as *performative*. In other words, the speakers are not trying to provide a recipient with information, but to present dramas to an audience. Identities are therefore located and achieved with an audience in mind. This was fundamentally important to the analysis process. Stories are considered evolving dialogues, small fragments of a speaker which are developed and expanded through group performance. Also relevant was John Shotter's contribution regarding social poetics and witness thinking, especially to the form used in writing the final version.

The Listening Guide

This method proposed by Gilligan (2003) was particularly useful when analyzing life histories, certain photos, the trees of life and the maps drawn in the *Green Zone*. This is a qualitative, relational, and voice-centered method; the voice understood as the multiple spoken selves, taking part in a story, not only the narrator's voice, but the voices of others appearing in the narrative. The aim is to conduct different types of listening to the same story. Based on these ideas, I built a four-tiered listening guide: first, basic trends and emerging themes, story lines, selection of key images, metaphors, scripts, and actors; second, the voice of the ex-combatants who speak in the story, in the *I poems*, one of which is included at the end of the last chapter. The *I poem* uses the first-person voice to respond to the rhythms and patterns of the relationship with oneself and others; third, the counterpoint between the other voices close to the youth ex-combatants; and fourth, voices of wider audiences, power relationships, and dominant ideologies used in conversation. The reflections that resulted from these different listenings were integrated throughout the writing and were especially useful in constructing the narratives of resistance presented in the final chapter.

Limitations of the Study

In the same way that this work may make contributions, to the extent that it resonates with the voices of potential readers, it had limitations. The first of these was the security risk these youth ex-combatants represented, which meant that their relationships with their birth families were limited and difficult, their mobility within the city and outside of it was limited, their identities had to be protected (they were given pseudonyms in this research and their faces were never shown), and they were unable to participate in public activities. This condition limited the possibilities of collective action with them and, especially, conversations with other external groups. Linked to this were the difficulties in keeping proper custody of information; in the end I was left thinking it could have been more thorough.

Although the research was collaborative and carried out in conjunction with them, I believe their participation, as well as the benefits they received from the process, might have been greater. In my opinion, we ran out of time: time for more activities, more conversations, and to further strengthen our relations. I had hoped that when the *Green Zone* concluded as part of my research, the PHT would incorporate a similar methodology to provide continuity to what we had accomplished. However, for several reasons exceeding the scope of this analysis, Caldas University withdrew from the program and there is no contact with the new operators. As so often is the case with these programs, the *Green Zone* could not be continued.

Another limitation was the very structure of the program. Professionals spent more time writing reports to ICBF than relating to the youth. There was pressure to show short-term results and evidence of indicators formulated by the central office, far from local realities. Although the University performed a variety of research that might have informed practice, ICBF officials were unreceptive and insisted on ensuring that guidelines were followed to the letter, exhibiting almost no openness to flexibility, reflection or possibilities for change. For these reasons, there was little space to develop a collective process in which professionals were allowed the necessary time in which to participate. The collaboration between teachers, students and professionals was also limited, which affected the development of the workshops.

3

**Children and youth
Combatants in Colombia:
Why do they
Engage and separate?**

The following is an analysis that takes into account the discourses regarding former children and youth combatants. These discourses flow in conversations with professionals which work with this population, and local, national and international research focusing on children and youth combatants in Colombia. The aim is not to find specific causes but to grasp this complex situation across social, political, ideological, economical, ethical, relational and historical issues.

This chapter is organized in seven sections. The first one shows the logic of war in relation to recruitment, whether compulsory, forced or voluntary. The different strategies used in Colombia such as force, coercion, persuasion and seduction are outlined. This section clearly shows the responsibility of armed groups in the recruitment of children and youth. In section two, it is argued that in regions beset by armed conflict, involvement in an armed group is a socially expected process: rather than seeking it out, war comes to them. These children and young people were born and socialized in areas of conflict, which meant they had daily contact with armed groups. Their involvement was the product of a previous and lengthy process and it cannot be understood as a single, isolated event based on a decision by an individual living in isolation. In section three, enlistment in an armed group is seen as a way of earning a living. Given the extreme poverty and lack of opportunities in the regions from which these children and youth hail, an armed group becomes an alternative livelihood, which also helps the family to survive. This section highlights the responsibility of the State in the involvement of children and youth in war.

In the fourth section, domestic violence is cited as one of the main motives behind child and youth involvement in armed groups. It is often to find instability and marginalization from family. Children and young people, as a form of active resistance, run away from home, a highly rational protection strategy to survive in a hostile environment. However, in the armed group, they encounter a system of subordination, domination and violence based on military order. The fifth section presents the experience inside the armed groups, the multiple tasks assigned, their duties, punishments and learning. Belonging to an armed group is a way of find life, not just death. Finding life in an armed organization, means finding belonging,

recognition of others and themselves, identity, capacity to act, unknown resources, strength and dignity. For women (section sixth) join an armed group means breaking with the traditional roles assigned to them, strengthen their identity and feel recognized. Finally, the seventh section presents the children and youth situation after leaving the armed group. It seems that there is more continuity between living at home and living in the war than between military and civilian life. During this time, they continue to be warriors, but are now disarmed.

Logics of War: Recruitment, Coercion, Persuasion and Seduction

Watch List defines recruitment "as compulsory conscription or enlistment, forced or voluntary, of children to any group or armed force, who are below the age stipulated in international treaties applicable to certain forces or armed groups" (2012, p. 16). According to this, there are three types of recruitment: mandatory, in countries where, by law, youth are required to join the ranks of its armed forces; forced, when violent methods such as kidnapping, weapons or threats are used; and voluntary, when children or young people *choose* to join an armed group. In Colombia, kidnapping recruitment does not exceed 15 percent, contrary to what happens in some African countries (Álvarez-Correa & Aguirre, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2004). Despite this low percentage, it is crucial to deepen the analysis of forced recruitment, and show different strategies used to engage, to understand the armed groups' responsibilities in the linking process of children and young people to their ranks.

Internal FARC-EP and ELN codes prohibit any recruitment of persons under fifteen and any forced recruitment. There is evidence that these organizations ignore their own rules and recruit children from twelve years, on average (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Even the leaders of these guerrilla organizations have publicly admitted they have recruited children under fifteen (Revista Semana, November 2011). Recruitment strategies used by these armed organizations are diverse. First, while it is true that they do not kidnap children and young people, they do employ forced recruitment through pressuring families to comply with a *quota* of children or by threatening the children or their families with death or detention at home, school or

town (Álvarez-Correa & Aguirre, 2002). Moreover, they use children to persuade other young people to join their ranks, almost always from the same ethnic group. Girls visit farms and rural settlements to convince young men to join the group and vice versa. Guerrillas conduct surveys in communities and schools to identify children who would then be recruited (Watch List, 2012). They go into rural schools, let children try on their guns, supplies and caps; they talk of a new life, a life of adventure, money, power and weapons.

FARC-EP has radio stations in rural areas. In their "Voice of resistance" program, the guerrilla presents itself as a benevolent organization that strives to improve education, gender equality, and increase the financial resources of those disadvantaged and marginalized Colombians in small towns and villages (Watch List, 2012). Also, they create songs as part of the *Fariana Music* or FARC´s Music; *Enter* is the name of one of them. This song has a *champeta rhythm*, typical in the Colombian Caribbean region and popular among young people. The letter invites children and youth to join their ranks (Carmona, 2012).

Meanwhile, paramilitary groups established eighteen as the minimum age for recruitment; these groups violate this principle, although apparently they recruit fewer children than guerrilla groups. The main strategy of the paramilitary is the seduction of a salary offering that can vary between 200 and 400 dollars. During the AUC demobilization process between 2003 and 2006, President Uribe's government never demanded child delivery as a condition of participating in the process. Although it is estimated that the percentage of children in these groups was 20 percent, they released only 391 children (Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación –CNRR-, 2010). The government never counted most children linked to paramilitaries groups; they adopted no legal measures for them, and in consequence, children and youth could not provide essential information and did not receive any benefit from reintegration programs. For this reason, thousands of children were unaccounted, unprotected and paramilitary successor groups or emerging criminal gangs - Bacrim

recruited many of them again.[26] The government does not recognize children associated with these gangs as armed conflict victims and thus they cannot receive benefits from any reintegration program. (Coalición contra la vinculación de niños y jóvenes en Colombia –COALICO-, 2011; Conflict Dynamics, 2011).

Some researchers (Boyden, 2003; Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2002) discuss the recruitment of children and youth increased worldwide, due to the proliferation of inexpensive and small arms. These weapons are easy to carry, load and fire, as the AK-47 rifles, which are used by guerrilla groups in Colombia. Incorporating children and youth into armed groups has other advantages for the armed organizations: children can learn faster than adults; they are less critical, easily intimidated, less likely to leave, more faithful to the commanders and rarely do they arouse suspicion among security forces. They eat less, and they do not demand salary; they move themselves easier and faster. In other words, it is an inexpensive way to keep the troops. For armed groups, children are minor losses due to the smaller investment in their training and careers within the organization. So said a young male ex-combatant:

> A child for the guerrillas, it means nothing; a child is bait for them. The child is the one that covers the oldest. That is, the child is the one who is in charge of all the fighting.... For example, when my classmate was killed, I told the commander: "They killed J. .., [he answered] "oh, do not worry, we recruit more". [27]

Regarding the regular armed forces, the Colombian State in 1997 declared that children under eighteen years of age would not be added to the Army or the National Police ranks for military service. This fulfills the obligation not to recruit minors into the armed forces. However, some organizations have reported that the Colombian Army uses children as informants or spies to gather information about guerrilla groups (Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, 2004; Watch List, 2012). Discussing the

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[26] According to Watch List (2012), on December 16, 2011, the Court of Justice and Peace, for the first time, sentenced a paramilitary commander, Fredy Rendón Herrera, known as "El alemán", to eight years in jail for child recruitment. During the trial it was established that the paramilitary group "Elmer Cárdenas" had recruited at least 309 children in Chocó and Antioquia between 1997 and 2002.

[27] Testimony borrowed from: Cifuentes (2012, p.144).

human rights situation in Colombia in 2002, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the Colombian Army's use of children as informants under a rewards promise (Frühling, 2003).

According to young former combatants from the PHT, when they left the armed groups, the Army or Police held them in custody for more than thirty six hours before they handed them over to the ICBF. Also, these legal institutions interrogated them for information, forced them to confess, squeal, point and deliver under unhallowed persuasion mechanisms. The Army carried them as field guides to locate camps, mined areas and creeks, which violate The New Code for Children and Adolescents (Law No. 1098) and the guidelines of the Ministry of National Defense.

The armed forces also involve children in armed conflict, through civil-military campaigns, which include children in educational and recreational activities. As part of these campaigns, the military invites some children to visit army camps, mount on helicopters, planes, police cars and military trucks (Ejército Nacional, 2011). The military creates programs such as Little Lance Club, Soldier for a Day, Child Guards, the Young Police Officer and Boys and Girls of Steel, not to mention promoting military schools. The armed forces show their weapons and uniforms in shopping malls in urban centers (Bello & Ruiz, 2002; Watch List, 2012; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004). In armed conflict areas, these activities endanger children because they appear as helpers, informants or just supporters of the armed forces, which can lead to reprisals from armed groups. For society in general, the effect of these civil-military campaigns is a distorted image of the military that reinforces the growing Colombian culture of militarization and all aspects involved in the enrollment of children in war.

Rather Than Go to War, the War Comes to Them

Children and youth who join armed groups come from areas directly affected by Colombia's armed conflict – the country's poorest and most isolated rural areas, but also the richest because the natural resources: the jungle, the minerals, the oil, the

water. According to OIM (International Migration Office), ICBF, UNICEF, and the Defensoría (2004), the states of Antioquia, Cauca, Chocó, Cundinamarca, Huila, Putumayo and Santander are the seven most in risk for child and youth recruitment. Precisely, most of the kids entering into protection programs come from these states.

Theidon (2007) argues that 17 percent of adults demobilized in Colombia joined the ranks of the United Auto-defenses of Colombia through a paramilitary's territory (i.e., the presence of the paramilitary in a person's specific region) and 29 percent entered by a known person. Combining these two factors, we see that these people grew up in contexts where alternatives to war were invisible. Although the participants in this study made by Theidon were adults, 65 percent of these veterans joined the group when they were less than eighteen years.

Being born and living in a conflict zone implies proximity or cohabitation with armed groups and a daily relationship with the armed actors which in some cases serve as the authority for civil people. The communities of origin of these children and young may perceive these groups as kind people who live in solidarity. They seem to be associated with the ideas of social justice or quality of life, which nurtures a system of positive identification (Valencia & Daza, 2010). Armed actors impose their rules in conflict zones. They are judges and executioners, they decide about life and death of those who are opponents; they warn, threat, and displace, which makes them look powerful and infallible.

In other cases, this cohabitation leads to first-hand experiences at a young age with extreme violence including armed insurrection, massacres, forced displacement, threats and kidnapping. The community perception about the armed agents is that they impose themselves by weapons and threatening life, property, freedom and coexistence. These armed groups become associated with, and the object of, either empathy or fear. In the midst of this context, the culture performs the social construction of children. The armed conflict modifies, impacts, interrupts and distorts the children`s socialization process. Fear and mistrust penetrate the relationships; language, games, relationships and ways of seeing the world are linked to the war

(Ruiz, 2002). Moreover, in a country where armed conflict is diffuse, irregular, disorganized, and unstructured, it is difficult for civilians to know and understand the causes of the conflict and to follow its dynamics. Therefore, violence and armed conflict in particular become naturalized and incorporated into everyday life. The home communities of these kids do not have a good chance of defending these children from the armed conflict, but they can, in some cases, develop strategies to survive it. Joining an armed group is one of them.

These communities have experienced a gradual process of militarization as Enloe (2007) describes it: a socio-political process in which a society becomes controlled or dependent upon military ideas and values. Becoming military can be an attractive alternative for these kids, particularly in the middle of a war that they see as recurrent and inevitable (Corporación Alotropía, 2006). This includes admiration for the weapons, uniforms, idealization of military life, all aspects present in the stories of children and young people entering into armed groups (Brett & Spech, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Páez, 2001; Bello & Ruiz, 2002). This is a testimony of a young female ex-combatant:

> I enlisted into the group thinking about weapons, which looked very good (*Laughs*). The guerrillas prowled the school and snuggled and all to chat with you. Once, I told a guerrilla to let me touch the gun, and he said no because the weapons were not for children. But then, another guerrilla lets me touch the weapon and let me take it. He began to tell us what it was all about the guerrillas and right there I was encouraged. A few days later I enlisted into the group.[28]

The progressive militarization of these regions has led many people, not just children, to believe that it is desirable to join the armed group's ranks. It is common to hear stories told by children and youth that another member of the family belongs to an armed organization –several family members may even belong to different, *apparently* opposing groups–. A family inheritance links the family to armed organizations, which helps rationalize and justify the decision to enlist; it becomes natural and acceptable in certain families (Brett & Specht, 2005). Several studies confirm this family heritage. Carmona (2012) found that of the twenty one girls who were part of his research,

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[28] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre (2010, p. 75).

thirteen had a family linked to an illegal armed group, of which eleven were first-degree relatives of consanguinity. Theidon reported that all women research participants had husbands, partners, sons and daughters in the guerrillas, the regular army, paramilitary, in several cases, all at once. In fact, a woman said: "Well, if we take all men here that have carried a gun and put them in jail, well, we were in the village without men" (2007, p. 93). Keairns (2003) also found the same in her research *The voices of the girls* held in Colombia.

In this long cohabitation of fifty years (which is how long the armed conflict in Colombia has lasted), different generations relate, in one way or another, through membership in the armed groups. These kids are not the first in their families and in their communities, who go to war. Others before them have gone, some have not returned; others have done so and they have told stories of valiant warriors. When this occurs, family members encourage children and youth to join the group or maybe some friend or lover extends an invitation. The linkage with armed groups is not a matter that relates only to individuals, but in armed conflict areas, families and communities have a long history of involvement with the war, as active and passive participants, victims and perpetrators, fighters and spectators. Children are born and grow up in this context amid symbols that lead them to war, in one or another way.

Some families could expect or even desire that their children enlist in armed groups. This depends on the relationship and history between each family and these organizations. As posed Aguirre (2002), not only individuals connect to armed organizations, the family and social networks link with them. The family validates this way of life, and sometimes drives it and legitimizes it. These families may facilitate, or at least not prevent enrollment. Some families accept their male children's enrollment for cultural reasons. A patriarchal society like Colombian, may consider it appropriate for a boy to take up a weapon – a way of acquiring discipline and becoming a man and protecting his family and community —whereas this role is not acceptable for a girl (Brett & Specht, 2005). A girl's enrollment seems to break with family and community ideas whereby a girl should marry, become a housewife and have children.

The armed groups forced some other families to give up their children as part of a fee or a payment. The family aim to keep their property and their lives under the threat of death or displacement from their land (Álvarez-Correa & Aguirre, 2002). Other families never know about the engagement of their children. Those children left home one day, no one knows anything about them, and they never returned. The family believes they are dead or missing. No one has seen them; no one answers the family questions, and the parents have sought them for years. In the best case, the family might eventually know something when the child or young person separates from the armed group, and establishes contact with his/her family.

Other families reject the entrance of their children to any armed group. They fear that their children will die in the war. In fact, in the PHT, there are cases where mothers and fathers have tried to rescue their children heroically –sometimes without success– because the children have decided not to leave the armed group or they have enlisted again. In other cases, the rescue has been successful:

> Camilo's mother, a ten year old boy who joined a guerrilla group, planned an *operation* to rescue her son. With intelligence *almost military* discovered where her son was, learned the group routine and wait for the correct time -a party-group. She went to the campsite, came there with gifts, alcohol and cigarettes, helped the commander to get drunk, and when everyone was asleep, inebriated with the party, including her son, she carried the child quietly and pulled him out of camp. She walked for hours to her house, picked up her three other children and went on the river boat, at night, to the nearest town. She sought a military base and gave Camilo to them because she knew his life would be in danger when the guerrilla realized that he had escaped. The ICBF protected Camilo and she… stayed in the city, displaced. She could not return to her village, out of work, but as she says, "with all my kids alive". This story shows the tremendous courage of a mother and also how these families are linked to the war and survive it. Besides, it shows us the relation between recruitment and displacement.[29]

A child or youth's enlistment cannot be seen as an isolated moment in which they have made a decision; it is part of a long process of approaches, interaction, emotional ties, social history, tradition, admiration and fear. It is more a transition; in some cases, it

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[29] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes, interview with the Camilo´s mother in Manizales, August 2012.

seems to be a rational process of deliberation and in other cases, it is made in a natural way, such that children and youth cannot explain how and why they ended up inside the group. This *decision* must be understood in the context of what is exposed here and cannot be considered "voluntary" in the strict sense of the term. However, it cannot be thought either that children or youth are only *victims* of their circumstances. We, in the PHT, have observed that some children do not try to avoid responsibility in their decision to join. They expose the reasons that led to this decision: the war was an opportunity.

When young people remember the moment they decided to enlist, some say they thought little about the decision they were making and even less about its possible consequences. One kid said: "It's like if someone asks you if you want to go for a ride" (Corporación Alotropía, 2006, p. 64). Some of them cannot remember when they became combatants. The lack of significance allotted to the event shows it is not the event itself that is relevant, but the process leading up to it that makes it possible at that time to be experienced lightly, transitorily or naturally. These kids have no real idea of what awaits them, or of the conditions they will be forced to accept; often they have no idea they will not be allowed to visit their families or villages. Just as some had better information about what went into armed groups, others threw themselves to a vacuum, not knowing the risks they faced.

Most of the youth have no complete understanding of the political or ideological basis for the war they were fighting, despite having lived inside the war and having a social and family heritage (Human Rights Watch, 2004). They have fought in a strange war, not for political reasons. Most researchers agree about this: the ideological factor in Colombia is not a reason for children and youth to join an armed group (Keairns, 2003; Brett & Specht, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2004; Corporación Alotropía, 2006).[30] Apparently, they do not enlist to transform society, and even after

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[30] This is a characteristic that distinguishes the engagement of children and youth in Colombia with other countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mozambique or Palestine where children believed in a revolutionary cause, or were convinced of it during the passage through the war (West, 2000; Boyden, 2003). These experiences were accompanied by the production of a social discourse and a strong sense

they leave the armed conflict behind, they still do not understand what the conflict was about or the reasons for the war. Does anyone understand?

Joining an Armed Group Is a Way of Making a Living

According to the ICBF (2002), 95 percent of boys and girls ex-combatants who enroll in State agency programs in Colombia come from rural backgrounds. A United Nations report states that close to 90 percent of recruitment takes place in rural areas (PNUD, 2011). That is, most recruitment transpires in towns surrounded or isolated by the conflict, in newly colonized regions or areas where agricultural boundaries are expanding and where the presence of the State is limited. In addition, these areas are controlled by armed groups for extended periods of time.

Colombia's rural population is the nation's poorest. This population has the fewest opportunities for growth in all areas: nutrition, health, education, recreation, participation and affection. Save the Children (2001) claims that financial need is the strongest reason for enlisting and many children and youth agree. Corporación Alotropía, (2006) found that 33 percent of children interviewed joined because of their economic status, referring not only to their own physical survival but that of their families, as well. Some, especially women, enlist in the hope of financially supporting their families, their mothers in particular, which are seen as the guarantors of family welfare. This is more likely true of those who join paramilitary organizations that pay a monthly wage than with guerrilla groups that do not pay wages but provide food, clothing and shelter. Guerrilla groups take advantage of this situation when recruiting, offering higher wages to children and youth, which are never paid. In other words, the family has one less mouth to feed. The war becomes an economic survival option given the limited options in the country's rural regions.

> I joined because I really wanted, yes, at the time I made that decision by my will, but do you know what?, I had nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep, no family ... then the group was the only option I had left ..., and I choose it (young female ex-combatant).[31]

of political identity that gave structure and meaning to violent action, even for the young. In these cases ideology can be one of the most important factors that mediate the response of children to violence.

[31] Testimony borrowed from: Chamorro, L. S. (2012, p. 30).

Keairns (2003) in the study with girls, who participated in the war in Colombia, found that the families of these girls had several siblings and relatives. Extended families come together to economically survive. There was not enough food for everyone. Parents had a small piece of land and in most cases were peasant employees to landowners. Survival needs were a constant source of anxiety and uncertainty for girls before enlisting. Boyden (2003) said that the involvement of children in war is an adaptive strategy, an extremely handy survival mechanism, given by the armies, where children get food, shelter, companionship, clothing, security and protection.

Real development alternatives in areas where they live are limited. PNUD (2006) argues that Colombia is the third most unequal country in the world, according to the distribution of wealth. That is to say, the largest percentage of wealth concentrates in the smaller part of the population. These conditions result in lack of educational opportunities, housing, health, recreation and access to any form of a decent life. The Colombia`s Ombudsman Office found that close to 10 percent of children and youth ex-combatants had no formal schooling at the time they entered ICBF programs; 65.6 percent had attended primary school and only 24.9 percent had any high school education. The average number of grades completed (four) at the time of enrolling in the ICBF program and the average age of recruitment (twelve years old) point to a lack of educational opportunities for children. The children should have completed elementary school by the time they entered a group (Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006, p. 26). This indicates that children and youth who enlist in an armed organization have already left the educational system (they are either excluded) or are studying at grade levels below average for children their age.

Keairns (2003) found girls dropped out school to support their families with survival necessities, i.e., work to earn some money, cooking and caring for small children, elderly or sick people, so that their fathers or mothers could work. Often they had no money for tuition or materials. The schools were far from their homes and they had to walk long distances because there is no public transportation. Some also withdrew for violent behavior or because of punitive teachers. Some felt it was difficult for them to learn and they could not meet the standards and expectations placed on

their performance. The boys also experience many of these situations. Time spent with an armed organization is wasted time in terms of schooling, which leaves them faced with a double disadvantage, the educational opportunities lost before enlisting and while part of the group. When they leave the war, they are seriously behind in their education.

As regards labor, research by Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF reports that 57 percent of boys and girls interviewed worked before joining up, and 30 percent of this group worked harvesting and processing coca leaves. Another 35.2 percent of those who worked labored in the fields, harvesting crops and doing other farm work (2006, p. 25). The research found that 90 percent of children interviewed took part in at least one non-domestic work-related activity prior to joining a group, almost always as part of a family survival strategy, or in some form of child labor exploitation (Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006). Children and youth enrolled in the PHT corroborate this: they had work experience prior to enlisting including field work and farming, processing and coca distribution.

> When I went to where my dad was, I was working, and he paid me, and with that, I got used to always have money in my pocket. I helped him, scraping or manufacturing coca, and we sold this very well. Imagine five pounds of cocaine were supplied to 12 million pesos. My dad was up to eight workers, or more, we always had workers (Young male ex-combatant).[32]

The transition from one illegal family job such as a *raspachín*[33] to another such as guarding coca labs for an armed group seems irrelevant to them. It is another transition that they can make naturally after a long informal relationship with armed organizations. Children and youth take enlistment as a way of *earning a living*; they reach the informal job market as rank and file workers, becoming "war laborers" (Corporación Alotropía, 2006, p. 43).

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[32] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N & Muñoz, C. (2011, p.60).
[33] "*Raspachín*" is the term used to designate those who scrape the coca leaves to produce cocaine; in Colombia, generally they are children.

Joining an Armed Group Allow to Survive and Reproduce Violence

Some former child and youth combatants identify domestic violence as one of the reasons for enlisting. Certain researchers believe that family conditions are the most crucial factor leading a child or youth to enlist in an armed group (Brett & Specht, 2005; Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006). This violence may take the form of an unstable family, an absent parent, exploitation, sexual abuse, physical abuse, negligence or abandonment. Brett (2002) found in a study conducted in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia that exploitation and domestic abuse was one of the primary reasons for young participants join the ranks of an armed organization.

A common situation for these kids (Keairns also found the same in the study, in Colombia, 2003) is a permanent change in family configurations: living with parents, grandparents, relatives or neighbors. They are often expelled from the family, welcomed and expelled again in halfway houses. They are marginalized from different family arrangements, such as when a parent gets a new partner and other children are born and displace the siblings. Some are sent to other households seeking better alternatives when the father leaves the family and the mother shares the children with family and neighbors. Others flee, escaping to these realities and turning from house to house, without establishing roots at any of them.

> I was very afraid of my mom. When my mom left, she took my other sister, and I was taking care of the younger children. She left me with my dad. Then my dad went away and left me alone in the house, and that was when the guerrillas appeared (Young female former combatant). [34]

The family, for various reasons including poverty and violence, cannot protect its members. Children and young people cannot find shelter or stability. They pass from hand to hand, not only between family but also friends, neighbors and strangers. An armed group is another of these hands as reflected in the testimony already cited. Grandparents often assume the parenting.

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[34] Testimony borrowed from: Keairns, I. (2003, p. 11).

Santiago, a young man who participated in the PHT, wrote the story of his life in a book called Born to Triumph. This is the first paragraph of the book:

> My sister tells the story of how, when I was about three years old, my father abandoned my mother, who was suffering from uterine cancer. A year after my mother died, I had more or less twelve siblings; I'm not really sure exactly how many of us there were. After my mother's death, we scattered: two drowned in the Putumayo River, others were taken in by a lady in the area who ran a gas station. Our youngest brother was six months old, another was two, and I was four years old. The younger of my two sisters was twelve years old and only days later became attached a man. My two-year old brother was taken in by his godmother, who kept him for a few years; my younger brother wasn't adopted by anyone... I have no idea what happened to the rest of my siblings. This is where my story begins.[35]

The decision to join may be driven by a profound wish to leave home and the belief that an armed organization will provide a family to protect them, an escape route to survival outside the family. In these families, authoritarian structures are rigid; confrontation is not an option for children and young people, so a resource is to flight. For these young people, running away is perhaps a way of resisting power (Cifuentes, 2012). They can find, in the armed actors, hope for a future better than their parents provide; children and youth consider the war as a promise of freedom and independence. They see it as a way of escaping the paternal yoke and entering the adult world of adventure and risk.

This decision is interpreted as a highly rational strategy to protect themselves, as an active resistance to survive a hostile environment, using armed groups for practical or "secondary gains" (Carmona, 2012). We are not facing only immature and vulnerable children who can be manipulated. We are facing subjects who are taking a chance to protect their life and achieve better alternatives. Some of the girls who have been sexually abused or battered by parents or step parents recognized a desire for revenge that drives them to run away from home. Taking up arms empowers, instills fear and respect, at least in the eyes of family and neighbors and of those who were a girl's former tormentors.

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[35] Santiago L. (2007, p.19).

Paradoxically, the armed group is the place where they will have less freedom and autonomy. Although they remain in worse conditions of humiliation and submission, at least they no longer live a diffuse violence (Cifuentes, 2012). Instead, they now live a ritualized and organized violence controlled by the militia. These groups organize this violence around three main issues: the subordination of the individual to the organization or institution, the desensitization to violence, and the dehumanization of any actual or potential adversary.

The first goal is achieved by creating a hyper normalized system, in which members are under threat of severe penalties including death. As a ex-combatant said, "you obey or die". The illegal nature of these organizations implies more severe punishments and frequent abuse, more so than in any legal organization. Children and young people are *victims* of such abuse. The mechanics of power (as suggested by Foucault, 1979/1980), the achievement of domination and subordination rests on the disciplining of bodies (utility and production), the dominance and articulation of movements and time, in the arrangement of spaces, in the domesticating of the mind (obedience) and penetration of rationalities, desires and discourses.

Power as domination monitors, controls, organizes, rationalizes, and justifies both formal structures and informal practices. An armed group is organized around an integrated and whole body image. It is essential to unify and standardize those who belong to the group. Diversity does not fit; every person must conform and feel like each other inside the organization. Therefore, the presence of uniforms, symmetrical marches, unison hymns singing while training, standardization of movements and responses.

To reach the second goal, the desensitization to violence, armed organizations deployed several military training strategies, manipulating fear and anger as "fuel of war" (Cifuentes, 2012) and, systematically control the emotions and suggestion through religious or pagan rituals. When entering the group, these are the most touching experiences for kids: the death of his best friend, having to participate in a war council to decide on the life of a fellow, drink blood from the body of one who has

been killed, not to mourn a death or a fight, not to bury the dead. The commanders require these activities to demonstrate courage and commitment to the group, and reveal the deepest barbarism of war; these are the experiences that produce more pain to children and youth, and maybe are never forgotten.

The kids, gradually, realize this new code and learn to endure violence, helped by this whole war system and by the ever-present and continuous time, the "dead time" (Castro, 2001). They learn to lose touch with themselves, with their emotions and to hide or avoid suffering. If they do not, they and the group will not survive. A girl said: "I got used, and I promised never to cry and I did not cry anymore."[36]

The third purpose that the group must realize is the dehumanization of the actual or potential enemy. For an armed organization, the configuration of an external enemy is of paramount importance for the conservation of group cohesion. This enemy is the object which concentrates hostility, always demonized to justify the war. The enemy is the villain, is the threat, and represents the greatest danger. The organization sets up a strict distinction between the enemy and friend, between the external and the internal, the bad and the good. The group is responsible for protecting and ensuring their durability. Group cohesion is extremely important. It is crucial to avoid, at any cost, disruption and disintegration. Any attempt to separate, however small, is punishable even with death. Thus, the other side of cohesion is repression (Castro, 2001).

The armed group names/identifies both the real and the potential enemy. Anyone who may pose a threat to the group cohesion and survival is a potential enemy. To destroy that enemy, actual or potential, it is necessary to remove all traces of humanity. This means that no matter how the enemy dies or the suffering caused to him, or the reasons why he dies, an enemy is an enemy, actual or potential, and he is a threat. At this point, when the opponent is not respected, and anyone from civil society can be a potential enemy, we face the biggest degradation of the conflict, the

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[36] Testimony borrowed from: Cifuentes, M. R. (2012, p. 200).

barbarity of war that does not respect minimum standards in the military confrontation, norms enshrined in international humanitarian law.

The kids experience this conflict deterioration in their own bodies; some of them even become perpetrators of brutally violent acts and atrocities (Denov & Maclure, 2007). Quickly, some children and youth learn that the more aggressive they behave, the safer they are within the group. Their fellow commanders see them as courageous combatants, worthy of respect that brings practical benefits of survival. Here, we see that to be a victim and a victimizer are two sides of the same coin in the experience of children and youth in war.

This war-related violence and abuse within an armed organization is not clearly recognized by children and youth. To them, violence is an unalterable reality, something they are condemned to suffer. It simply changes face and form. They do not see violence as a social construction susceptible to change. Children tend to repeat the system of domination and then naturalize violent relationships as a normal form of behavior. The following is a statement by a research psychologist (Aguirre, 2010) about a story of a girl ex-combatant:

> Daniela, operating under the same basic premise, became the matchmaker for the commander and brought him beautiful women. The fact that she once had felt violated by an older man did not stop her to set new women guerrillas in the same position she has lived before. Her loyalty was with the leader, not with her partners as a woman. Identified with the aggressor, she handed to the commander young flesh, and she felt no longer had to take care of the old wounds of self, but apply it to new members as part of her position in the guerrilla group. Under these circumstances, the pain produced by childhood abuse is not faced or modified; it is perpetuated in the death and destructive actions inside and outside the group. [37]

But as power is not possessed but circulates unequally in relationships and structures, youth and children also reproduce the dominance in their discourse about their ability to master their first aggressors and to protect those considered most vulnerable, such as mother and younger siblings. This desire may never come to reality because the kids

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[37] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p.189).

contact with their home communities is scarce. Regardless of this, what changes is the way they consider themselves (beings capable of dominance over others), the way the families and neighbors consider them (beings respected and/or feared). They can alter the power roles in some microstructures. Sometimes, they have a chance to exercise power never known at home or school and occupy positions of power and authority, ascending the chain of command with someone to command, regardless of their subordinate position within the group (Corporación Alotropía, 2006).

Fortunately, as shown by Foucault (1970/1980), power is not only negation, subordination, prohibition, censorship, exclusion and punishment. It is also creation, generation, ability to produce discourse, knowledge and desire. Clearly, the generative aspect in the subordinate position which children and young people assume is creating opposition to authority. A first strategy, as mentioned before, is the escape from both: their original family spaces and the armed group. The fugue, from the armed group, is perhaps the most valuable action in the lives of these kids.

There is little room in the armed group for clear and direct confrontation. In the middle of a system as vertical, rigid, hierarchical and authoritarian, confrontation is paid with life; it is a matter of survival. Then, children and young people develop strategies of resistance to subvert the order of things, to prevent or minimize the abuse and the vulnerability they feel. These strategies are placed inside and on subaltern tracks, not to expose them repeatedly to risk. Denov & Maclure (2007) found in their research that girls resisted domination by creating strong links of solidarity between women inside the armed groups in Sierra Leone and Angola. This was strictly forbidden within the ranks, so these relationships should be secret. In Colombia, such relations exist not only among women but also among brothers belonging to the same group, or couples who run away together, or supportive behaviors among peers to prevent death or avoid being caught in punishable acts.

It is also commonly found in the testimonies that the kids fail a shot so that those targeted could escape without being injured or escape the group as a result of sexual abuse by a commander. This could be seen as *small victories,* but are actions that show

extraordinary courage. A challenge to the established order may have saved their lives and are an expression of opposition to domination through the networks of relationships they weave into armed groups.

Belonging to an Armed Group is a Way of Find life, not just Death

Daily life in an armed organization is characterized by controlled comings and goings, strictly scheduled activities, the use of a uniform, exchanging one's birth name for a battle name, the presence of a supervising mentor, swearing loyalty to the group, long marches, hauling of equipment, rifles and munitions, and limited access to food (Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006, p. 35).

Children and youth receive the same military training as adults. Guerrillas use a self-denominated "closed" and "open" order (Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006). The first includes activities inside the camp such as defense and arms trainings, guard duty, parades, training, and presentation of arms. As part of the effort to maintain a troop or military camp and ensure its survival, children and youth perform kitchen tasks, care for the sick; farming, planting and processing coca leaves, washing clothes, assembly and disassembly of a camp, commissary management and operation of communications.

The open order relates to combat training, including survival techniques and tactics used in ambushes and surprise attacks, taking part in other activities directly related to combat such as armed confrontation, caring for kidnapped victims, manufacturing and planting explosives, guard duty, intelligence work, digging trenches, transporting supplies and gathering information, scouting, using assault rifles and automatic weapons, grenades, mortars and explosives, assembling and launching gas cylinder bombs and planting landmines (Human Rights Watch, 2004, p. 23).

Keairns (2003) reported in the study with young women in Colombia that the time for training was inconsistent. Once they reached the camp, the commander told them they could not leave the group at least for three years, and they offered a party

to celebrate their engagement. The girls trained on a bar two meters high, making it a challenge to refrain from falling which would serious injure or kill them. They had to run for hours, walk long distances without food, browse through tunnels and perform rigorous physical training. A week after they entered, they received a gun, uniforms, work clothes and three months later, the AK-47 rifle. They received training in how to shoot and clean guns, how to camouflage so as not to be seen by the enemy, how to operate a communications radio and serve as a bodyguard for a commander. They were prepared to give up their own life to save the life of the commander or other peers. The commanders gave lectures about group norms, such as carrying personal food, abortion if the women became pregnant and how they should treat each other. Contraceptive injections were part of the routine. On weekends, they played soccer games and celebrated some significant dates.

PHT findings reveal lately a lack of political training within these armed groups: combatants do not know who they are fighting or why. Certain children in the program have no idea what an army or a helicopter is. At the outset of the program in 2004, children and youth were coming out of the guerrilla ranks with better military training; they practiced with wooden guns, attended training camps before going into combat, sang the FARC hymn and knew how to organize into formation. Guerrillas now recruit children at an earlier age, for shorter periods, and they give less training, which leaves them more likely to be wounded or killed in combat. Now they enroll in the ICBF program with more serious mutilations.[38]

Children and youth get the same punishment as other adult combatants inside the guerrilla groups. The principal causes for punishment include failure to perform duties, the loss of a weapon, sleeping while on guard duty, attempted desertion, informing the enemy and acting as infiltrators. Punishments range from digging trenches or latrines to clearing forests, cutting and carrying firewood, and kitchen duty to a death sentence from the war council.

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[38] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes regarding a meeting at CEDAT. Manizales, November, 2010.

> In the court-martial, you, for example, arrive, and you choose an advocate, as a lawyer, you choose who will speak for you. One says, that the kid has been good, he has done these things well, and then everyone votes if save or not his life. If everyone says no, they kill him; if not, one will forgive the life (Young male ex-combatant).[39]

Carmona (2012) in the study with girl's combatants, in Colombia, describes the typical process in the guerrilla group. In the first phase, the girls enjoy the novel; most girls say they have found in the armed group what they wanted: adventure, family, recognition. In a second stage, when they undergo a process of "naturalization", their expectations adjust to the situation and they are able to articulate the group's life in a more or less fluid way, through a process of meaning negotiation. They realize that it is possible to make a career in the group and earn a living that represents adventure and freedom. Having exhausted these two steps and facing the rigors of the military, they go to the last period, characterized by a negative nature. The group scheme becomes unbearable, and the desire to escape begins to take shape in some of them.

Certain children and youth who enroll in the PHT find it difficult to talk about living within these groups. Others tell their stories with crude coldness as if they were unaffected by them, but in fact they have constructed a strong armor to protect themselves from the intense emotional pain they pass through (Aguirre, 2010). Others speak about their fight with emotion, with passion, as if it were a game. Everyone panics the first time they participated in combat, but then experience "a kind of intoxication that takes away their fear" (Carmona, 2012, p. 173). This was a young man's account:

> N: What do you most crave from the group, what do miss the most?
> P: The weapons that is what you most want, more long. Shooting, the shoots, shooting. You feel good with the weapon.
> N: As powerful, as strong...
> P: Not so powerful, I do not know. It is good shooting. It is good to feel the vibration, the sound of the shots. It is like a game. Yes, it is like playing shooting to the vultures (Young male ex-combatant).[40]

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[39] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 117).
[40] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 119).

The kids build a strong link with the weapon. It is an object that extends their body, their strength and power. Learning how to handle a weapon increases their safety within the group and also makes them good fighters, warriors capable of defending themselves and the group against enemies; committed warriors, ready to fight. The gun leaves marks on the body: on the shoulder where it is loaded and on the finger where it is fired. Walking, running, moving fits the rifle, the revolver within the sock. All daily life revolves around weapons: cleaning, care, protection, recharging. The fighter deposits his/her confident in the weapon. The arm is not only death but life, life itself is at stake. For these kids, the weapon is company, "the only true", "the mother", and "the value of one." They deposit there trust, safety, affection, confidence, is this symbol of power. Being part of an armed body is being part of his omnipotence and power.

> I like the gun, to shoot gives me an emotion, we said there in the group that the gun was like the husband. I slept with the gun, which was like my husband, and yes, what I like the most is to shoot. Yes, because I do not like killing people - laughs- ... one feels as if one shudders. The first time I shot when I was little, I lay down because I was very little. Yes, I love guns, I love to disarm them, arm them, clean them, and I like to make them darkies, beautiful (Young female ex-combatant). [41]

As stated by Corporación Alotropía (2006), rather than the war itself, which attracts young people, are the signs of prestige, becoming a warrior adult, who is strong, invulnerable, and that serves as a guarantee of respect and recognition as a human being. Linking to an armed group is a rite of passage to adulthood, a rite of passage that allows them not only to stop being a child but also to affirm the masculine ideal, to be viewed with greater respect and admiration. It is an opportunity to prove their courage and place them in a position where they gain social protection and social prestige: the prestige of the warrior.

Finding life in an armed organization, means finding belonging, recognition of others and themselves, capacity to act, unknown resources, strength and some kind of dignity. Several inquiries agree that the group gives children and youth an affiliation

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[41] Testimony borrowed from: Cifuentes, M. R. (2012, p. 267).

and belonging (Cifuentes, 2012; Aguirre, 2010; Corporación Alotropía, 2006). Belonging to an armed organization is to find a social place where someone can be useful and valuable; they fight with others to achieve a goal. Membership provides security and closeness with others, which appear to be the same, or at least, works on equal terms, as primary combatants. Children and young people are proud to belong to an organization where violence is neat and gives meaning to their lives: it gives them a purpose to strive for (Corporación Alotropía, 2006, p. 64).

When the children and young people fight, it is to recognize themselves and to gain the recognition of others (Cifuentes, 2012). This process started before joining an armed group and continues after separation. It is just as necessary to feel part of a group as it is to feel equal to others, appreciated by all, and respected as any other warrior. They struggle for recognition from the difference, to become visible as unique, distinguished from the others and to achieve this, children and young people must exhibit their capacities, show that they are powerful, brave, agile, and cunning. As in a theater, they are holding a performance, acts to be approved and confirmed by the others.

No matter the political or ideological background, what matters is the task to be accomplished every day; the responsibility to be assumed, the action, the adventure and the risks that must be saved, to protect themselves and the group. The lives of others depend on their actions, and this gives meaning to kids' existence: as agents responsible for their actions, not only as individuals but a collective. As they develop skills and strategies to adapt to the war, the sense of security and comfort in the group grows. It is a learning ground to know where it is clear, what is allowed and what is forbidden. It is a land they know, which is not uncertain.

The capacity to act collectively is something that leaves a deep impression on young and children. Although they are under an authoritarian and hierarchical structure that strictly orders what to do, they act collectively, living in the community and respecting rules to preserve the survival of all. Castro (2001) claims that those who have left the war particularly remember with nostalgia the strength of ties, of

meetings, of filiation. They are special relations, narrow, intense, not recurring in the same way outside of the war. They are intense because there is solidarity and competition, there is loyalty and betrayal. There is an overlapping collective interest in the survival of the group above the individual interest, and the kids learn this.

As posed Cifuentes (2012), power is also expressed as the capacity to act, as agency capacity, as the will to power. Children and young people, when they belong to an armed group, can economically sustain themselves and sometimes support other family members; they may move to other places, broaden their horizon beyond the narrow areas of family and social origin. For many of them, this is a powerful experience. They know places as rivers, mountains, forests, back roads, villages. According to West (2000), women ex-combatants of the armed conflict in Mozambique, could broaden their horizons. Being part of the Detachment of Women madethem realize that their lives would not be limited to serving the agricultural fields, carrying water, cooking and caring for their children. Living as a fighter allowed them a large radius of action and movement in different geographical and social settings. They experienced fears and triumphs unknown to their mothers' generation. The women had stories to tell in the evenings around the fire as their parents did. Through participation in the war, as combatants, they expanded and extended their range of family domains, not moving directly towards new relations of dependence on a husband.

This everyday life of risk and adventure, of surviving in the jungle, makes children and youth learn invaluable skills and abilities, which are not appropriately recognized by them or others when they leave the armed groups. Living on the edge involves developing or at least discover, vitality, strength, courage. As stated by Martin-Baró (1984), not all the effects of the war are negative ... facing extreme situations, some people find the resources of which they weren't aware. These resources for survival, risk coping, to withstand the toughest conditions of hunger, cold, humidity, fear, are not well known in the civilian and urban world. Apparently, survival fills the existential spectrum; there is no place for anything else.

> And I neglected about that subject because I had more urgent things, like running, so the troop did not reach us, right? Like keeping attentive to maintain the little of life that was like hanging (Young female ex-combatant).[42]

Keairns (2001), in her study in Colombia, reported that girls expressed that armed groups gave them greater opportunities to learn valuable skills for life. If it were not for the fighting, many of them would have chosen to remain in the group that served as a family where they felt protected. Their basic needs were met; they felt respected and had a voice that was heard. Some said they learned to confront and negotiate with others and learned communication skills that have been used in civilian life. Brett (2002) agrees with this assessment and further emphasizes that the veterans were protected from death and developed their leadership ability.

Joining an Armed Group Is a Desire to Become a Woman Warrior like Men

According to Denov & Maclure (2007) governments and official institutions often underestimate the women's and girls' participation in armed conflicts, making invisible their needs and rights during and after conflict. Between 1990 and 2003, girls joined armed forces of fifty five countries and took part in thirty eight national conflicts around the world (McKay & Mazurana, 2004). They are more often involved in opposition groups than in the regular armed forces of a State. A quarter of the members of guerrilla groups in Colombia are women (Human Rights Watch, 2004, p. 28). [43]

Girls and young women who enlist in Colombia do so for an additional reason specific to their gender and based on their experiences prior to enlisting. Like their

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[42] Testimony borrowed from: Cifuentes, M. R. (2012, p. 161).

[43] As stated by Méndez (2012), women have fought alongside men in many wars: with the Communists in China in the 30s and 40s, in the African National Congress in South Africa in the 70's and 80's, in Vietnam in the '60s and '70s, in El Salvador in the 80, in the Gulf War in the 90's. Women have been present in liberation movements in countries like Ethiopia, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Djibouti. It is estimated that 30% of the "Tamil Tigers" in Sri Lanka were women, and the same for the guerrilla movement in Nicaragua and Eritrea, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. In Guatemala, women made up 15% of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The amount was highest in Peru, where 40% of the Communist Party of Peru - Shining Path (PCP-SL) was women.

male counterparts, they may have experienced domestic abuse, further aggravated by their female condition, which usually means they are subjects of sexual abuse, forced to carry out long hours of housework, or feel they have no voice in decisions regarding their own lives such as marriage or childrearing. Some girls and young women claim to have enlisted in order to be treated equally alongside the men in the social structure. Many girls have stated that, compared to the civilian world, female guerrillas are treated more equally: men and women receive the same training and are responsible for the same tasks, even in combat.

> There is nothing different there because the man and woman are equal; a woman cooks, the man cooks; a woman washes, the man washes; a woman guards also the man; the woman carries firewood, also the man; the woman makes trenches, also man. There, everything is the same. There, because you are a woman, you cannot stay sitting, no, you have to work together. Imagine, when I entered there, I carried up to three, oh, how do you call that? To carry a bale of rice, and I was so small, they put you to carry by *arrobas* (Young female ex-combatant).[44]

This has powerful meaning for them and occasionally allows them to use power over those who once threatened or abused them; thereby feeling they are protecting their family. They, probably, no longer play a passive, dominated role and achieve positions of greater power. Girls who enlist experience a process of identification with symbols traditionally perceived as masculine, and that they take up the flag of the powerful, brave and daring warrior and could use weapons to earn respect and inspire fear.

Feeling like men when they are part of an armed group means breaking with the traditional roles assigned to women and carrying out the most masculine activity, war. The women take the masculine ideal of the warrior, to strengthen their identity and feel recognized. They desire to change the position usually held in their family and social contexts prior to the enlistment. They learn skills to carry out activities never thought possible for a woman; they gain a space for recognition and power, similar to men, where they feel they can protect their family, and not only be seen as victims, or vulnerable beings in need of protection. They prove their worth against men. They can

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[44] Testimony borrowed from: Cifuentes, M. R. (2012, p. 327).

be fighters as the men, participating in heroic deeds, making a military career, which leads them to resist the role of victims.

These women left the domestic life, separated from the fate of motherhood, the only option for them before enlisting, and made part of a larger social space, collective, which recognizes them as useful. A more public space, where they break the boundaries of home and get to know other interests, other worlds, other ideals, to which they did not have access at home. So said an ex-combatant of Mozambique:

> Our mothers lead a limited life. Outside the house and, even, inside it they could not speak freely. During the "Luta armada", we lived a different life. We rose to meet the needs of our whole society, not just of husbands and our own children. In this way, we were just like men, and we had to vet rated just like men. [45]

The ideal of women who join an armed group is being like men and be treated like them. This entails going after this ideal, generating change in roles, positioning and identity.[46] According to Butler (1990), identity is a contingent social construct, which despite its various forms, presents itself as stable and singular. This challenges the traditional idea of identity, including gender identity that assumes masculine or feminine qualities are essential. Butler argues that gender identities are constructs and processes occurring in a culture, and they are both *performative* and imitative, in the sense that there is no original gender, but the illusion of the original given by the performance and repetition of specific gender roles. Gender cannot be understood as a state of being, but rather as an act, a *performance*, which follows established rules in society: it is not essence that is expressed or externalized, nor an ideal goal to which to aspire. Gender is not a given fact. It is created by acts also involving other people. Gender identity is always produced in relation to the other, what Butler calls "unbearable relationality". Gender identity has no specified boundaries than separate one gender from another.

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[45] Testimony borrowed from: West, H. G. (2000, p.187).
[46] Kampwirth (2001) found that in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas (Mexico) and Cuba, the women tried to escape their traditional gender roles by joining an armed group. Many of these women were then converted into feminist activists.

As proposed by Méndez (2012) transformation in gender identity of girls who have been part of the war in Colombia is deep. They have to leave, change and adopt different aspects of their gender identity once they enlist. These women construct their gender on the performance and repetition of roles that are required and are observed within an armed group. This happens in a social, cultural and political patriarchy, which is a structural and ideological system that perpetuates the privilege for masculinity, and infantilizes, ignores and trivializes what is considered feminine (Enloe, 2007).

Enloe (2007) argues that an armed organization militarized masculinity; military values control gender identity, and depends on the exaltation of what is supposed to be male and degradation of what is supposed to be female. Méndez (2012) goes a step further to say that each armed organization has determined ideals of femininity and masculinity both determined by militarization. Each of these genres militarized, comprising a particular sphere of *performativity*, to what has been called "gender *performativity* militarized". This is supported and played by rules and notions of masculinity and femininity, which are enacted in everyday life.

Women combatants do not become just men; they experience a nuanced process where traditional identities are juxtaposed with military requirements of a particular organization. Their roles, experiences and expectations are limited to a strict patriarchal military in the context of Colombian culture. As combatants, women are allowed to represent the same roles as men, but the standard for evaluating their performance is built on hyper-masculine traditional ideal. Women imitate the men and adopt a militarized femininity as their gender identity. This also means that some aspects of traditional femininity may be acceptable and desirable within the armed organizations.

Certain researchers have suggested that women who engage occupy subordinate positions, which maintain the traditional and asymmetric power relationships between men and women. A certain amount of empowerment and perceived equality may exist, but in the end these women become part of a vertical

hierarchy controlled by men; therefore, they suffer multiple forms of abuse and stigmatization while within the armed group and after leaving it (Cifuentes, 2009).[47]

According to Méndez (2012), the FARC officially promotes gender equality, and this is part of the internal policy of the organization. However, this does not automatically translate into consistent practices aimed to increase the power of women within the organization. This situation shows a contradiction between official policy and everyday practices in the organization. The most notorious case of violation of women's rights concerns birth control and forced abortion (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Keairns (2003) reports that the young combatants in Colombia receive some form of contraception immediately upon entering the armed group. The most common are injections, although they also use the intrauterine device (IUD) and pills. Contraception was part of life and training as fighters. Men do not use any method of family planning. The girls are totally blamed for a pregnancy, which in most cases, is interrupted by abortion.

These practices violate the reproductive rights of women, denying their right to free choice, having physical and psychological effects and show the militarization influence on women's sexuality. On the other hand, paramilitary groups do not indicate a formal commitment for equality between men and women within the organization, but they do not force women to use contraception and/or have abortions. In most cases, when a pregnancy occurs, they can temporarily withdraw from the organization and return after fulfilling their maternal duties.

Although guerrilla groups state that women decide whether or not to have sex and who to partner with, these decisions are not entirely free because the logic of military management and the normative order constrain female sexuality. Some women are forced to have unwanted sex inside guerrilla and paramilitary groups. The

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[47] D'Amico (1998) suggests that women who enter the military are successfully militarized but not necessarily empowered. For example, in Sandinista Nicaragua´s discourse, women who were not fighters were assigned to the role of "mother" or "girlfriends" of the revolution, without breaking any traditional notion of gender. In the case of Peru, beyond the fact that women were present at all levels of the movement "Sendero Luminoso", their interests and needs were not built and they were maintained as an instrumental presence.

girls naturalize and legitimize these practices as part of a sexual market of opportunities, interests, exchanges and benefits. At times, it is convenient for them to have sexual relations with male commanders: a combination of protection and privilege that is hard to resist. These relationships can be seen as a strategy for survival, protection, empower and status (Chamorro, 2012; Denov & Maclure, 2007).

Women's sexuality plays a central role in the combatants' militarization, in the armed organizations. At the same time they preserve traditional and asymmetrical relations of the gender, they transform others according to the demands and needs of the organization. The transformation of these gender identities reveals the *performative* nature of gender roles in a militarized context (Méndez, 2012).

They Have Not Stopped Being Warriors

Some youth[48] escape from armed groups. Others are captured in combat and still others have been released as part of the collective demobilization process. Defensoría del pueblo & UNICEF found that the most common forms of disengagement were escape (45 percent) and capture (35 percent), followed by voluntary surrender, group submission and surrender during mass demobilizations (2006, p. 42). Youth point to their needs such as affection and protection as the primary reason for escaping: a need to return to their families and a fear of dying in armed combat.

Other authors (Carmona, 2012; Brett, 2002; Theidon, 2007) also agree that young people escaped because they long for their families, specifically their mothers. They felt that being at home was not so terrible after all or because "war is very hard." The latter refers to the suffering kids experienced during their stay in the group due to participation in combat, deaths of friends, killing and observing killing, hurting, becoming sick, not sleeping and not eating well, and living in hiding. According to

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[48] Henceforth, the text refers mainly to youth, assuming that none of them emerged from the war as a child, regardless of their age.

Cifuentes (2012), the separation tends to follow safety reasons, which forced them, to flee the group and surrender to authorities. Youth who surrender, as well as those captured, are taken to Police stations or military battalions before being delivered to the ICBF. The manner in which they leave has a significant impact on their return or passage to civilian life. Those who escape are associated with treason and disloyalty while those captured in combat are seen as brave.

Certain youth who participate in the PHT have no birth certificate and most of them have no I.D. card. Occasionally their ages must be calculated using biological testing since these children do not know their own birthday (they were not registered citizens prior to enlisting). Each of them undergoes legal proceedings, which in most cases (unless crimes against humanity can be proven) recognize their legal condition as victims of forced recruitment by illegal armed groups. This means they can claim government protection until reaching the legal age of eighteen by entering a program that guarantees protection of their rights. In cases where a young woman already has a child or is pregnant, both the underage mother and her child are granted access to the protection program.

The safety of youth who leave the war is threatened, by virtue of both escape and capture. They have become enemies of their own group, and, therefore, potential informers and military targets. The former mates or enemies follow them and prevent them from returning to their homes because of the risk to their own safety and that of their families. Families face the threat of sanctions from armed groups who may punish, threaten, persecute, exile and even kill them (Defensoría del Pueblo & UNICEF, 2006). Therefore, these young people are forced to remain in hiding, just as when they belonged to the armed organization. This is part of the process of returning to civilian life in the midst of an armed conflict; Colombia is not yet a post-conflict society. Armed actors are still present in the regions where these young people were born and grew up. How can they live a passage to a civil life while continuing to hide?

Theidon (2007, p. 93) states that DDR programs, -disarmament, demobilization and reintegration-, involve transitions for fighters who give up their weapons, for

governments seeking a way out of the conflict, and for communities receiving demobilized people. At each level, the transitions involve a complex, dynamic conflict equation between truth, justice, reparation and reconciliation. This equation is further complicated when a country seeks to implement the process in the middle of a war. There are several transitions faced by young people when they retire (Rethmann, 2010). They must transition from military to civilian, from illegal to legal, from the rural life to an urban. They need to face changes in physical and symbolic spaces, in the roles, responsibilities and tasks, in family relationships that may or may not be restored, in the basic referents of identity such as their alias, uniform, gun, in guidelines and standards relating to others, and in the social positioning from fighters to victims (Cifuentes, 2012).

For many of them, the transition from army life to civilian life is more difficult than the transition from their home to an armed group. There is more continuity between living at home and living in the war than between military life and civilian life (Aguirre, 2010). To West (2000), many women veterans from Mozambique are less traumatized by the experience of war than by the experience of reintegration after the war. This is because the political reality of post-war undermines the project to which they had given their life, also undermining their identities as women. Now when they have to face the consequences of the decisions they made when they were children or young people, they face giving continuity to the story of their lives.

The youth prior to enlisting were *disengaged* from society –excluded, marginalized, and unable fully exercise their rights as Colombian citizens; to a certain extent they did not exist in the eyes of society. When they enlisted or *engaged* they transitioned from civilian to military life and illegal, underground status, but still with no status as citizens with rights and responsibilities. The biggest paradox of all is that even after separating from the armed group, they are unable to fully *engage* in society.

During the process to become civilians, the Colombian ex-combatants need to hide their identities to avoid stigmatization. They do not publicly acknowledge the fact they belonged to an armed group; some do not want their children to know this part

of their personal histories.[49] And so the skills learned in war, such as going unnoticed -- camouflage, mimicry – become valuable again. They continue to be warriors, but are now disarmed.

> I do not tell anyone who am I; can you imagine If I would tell people I'm a guerrilla? They could be scared and say, uy! I feel fear of this guy, what will he do to us? One cannot judge anyone just like that, without knowing the person. But I do know people around here think very badly of the guerrillas; over here the guerrillas are the worst. Because of that, I say nothing of what I am. First, because you don't know what is going to think the people or what are they going to do with me. And, on the other hand, to take care of me, because I know it can be dangerous. But one is not how people think. Only with someone who already has the confidence, very confident, one starts to tell who are you, who were you, but with others not, for what? (Young male ex-combatant).[50]

The youth experience conflict during the process of becoming civilian: they used to fight against the establishment that represented everything that should not be; now the system is the container for all their hopes and dreams and they expect with uncertainty and doubt. They long to be treated like everyone else but at the same time realize they are not the same. Often they are treated like children, which they no longer are, having left childhood behind when they enlisted in the armed group ("they come out prematurely aged… like all warriors"- Castro, 2007), or they cease to be children even before enlisting because of the financial and social responsibilities inherent in caring for themselves and others. They want neither to be seen as former combatants nor as victims, and they need to talk about what happened and assume their share of responsibility. Urban life is a challenge for them as the majority come from rural backgrounds. They face social upheaval, separation from their loved ones (family members or companions from the organization) and their place of origin (either their homes or the area where the armed group operated), to which they feel strong ties. Before disengaging there is no need to think, it is impossible to think. Now they must think about everything, make decisions regarding their lives, and set personal goals. Before disengaging, there is no future; there is never a future in war. Now the future is laid out before them by others amidst overwhelming uncertainty.

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[49] Focal group with PHT staff. Manizales, December 2013.
[50] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 134).

"In war you cannot trust anyone, not even your shadow"; it is one of the certainties the youth have. If you trust, you die; this is a survival strategy in the war. Youth point to counterintelligence agents within the armed group who flush out possible informers or infiltrators. This creates meanings that permeate the daily relationships of former combatants, meanings expressed in phrases such as "there are no friends in this world" or "everyone is out to get everyone" (Corporación Alotropía, 2006), a worldview based on a general mistrust, which reproduces the militarization of the conflict in a micro social space. In a world constructed in this manner, anyone can be a traitor. The youth are involved in temporary and weak relationships that make it difficult to strengthen bonds of affection and friendship.

> But I'll tell you why I do not trust, I do not trust the government, I do not trust them. Now will you believe that, after all the things you did there against the soldiers and the army, you are going to be here quiet? Assuming we get all these things, but who knows, what are they going to do with all that information about us, at any time they can come and look for me, and that is it. So, that is the reason because I do not trust the program because always when you go there, you see them all (the professionals) doing and doing reports, putting and putting things about one. Who knows what kind of stuff and all that information is sent to there, going to the government, and they can do whatever they want with the information (Young male ex-combatant).[51]

Even the bonds shared by couples within and outside the group are transitory, uncertain, and temporary; in the words of one youth: "Why fall in love if you could be killed at any moment?" (Ruiz, 2002, p. 35). The secrecy and temporary nature of relationships lead former youth combatants to develop temporary, nomadic and flexible identities, which take different forms (Cifuentes, 2012). These kids become, or perhaps have always been, nomads, from everywhere and nowhere; they feel rootless and face a constant desire to flee (Aguirre, 2010). They are still warriors, struggling to get ahead, but without weapons. What they knew was useful for war, but it is not anymore; they must learn new strategies, new skills, recover others, identify resources they had given up for lost, restore relationships, and rebuild their lives. They are torn between returning permanently to a military life as familiar territory for which they

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[51] Testimony borrowed from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 123).

feel fit, or attempting to pass a civil life that they do not know, which is uncertain and insecure. They are warriors even without weapons.

4

¿VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS?

A Difference that Matters

> Historically, we could describe
> ourselves, initially, as victims,
> then as survivors,
> and, currently, as citizens
> with full rights and responsibilities.
>
> Colombian women[52]

One of the most vexing ideas, or shall I say, one of the ideas I have questioned most during the inquiry process, has been the use of the term *victim* when referring to child and youth ex-combatants. Not only because of the implications this use has in any relationship established with them or in the way they see themselves, but also because of the cultural, political, legal and social consequences it carries with it. The term *victim* suggests discourses focusing on inferiority and submission, all fundamentally important to the understanding of what happens to child and youth ex-combatants, and to strategies for action that facilitate their transition to civilian life. This chapter presents a deconstruction of these discourses, an analysis of the significance of being referred to as a *victim* in the current context of the conflict in Colombia, and, at the same time, alternative understandings from a Social Construction perspective. It also includes stories presenting alternatives to the dominant discourses in literature, psychological theories, and protection programs.

The Significance of Being Referred to as a Victim in Colombia

"We are *victims* without land, without bread, without justice, and without peace. We are millions and don't want to be more." That was the motto under which different communities and social organizations in Colombia rallied in the Plaza de Bolívar (Bogotá) on December 14, 2011. The motivation behind the rally was to express solidarity with the *victims* of human rights violations and to protest the statements by government officials against these *victims* and against human rights organizations representing them such as Peace Brigades International.[53]

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[52] Colombian women victims of a variety of violations, participants in a workshop held in Bogota in 2012. Quoted by Fried Schnitman, D. (2010, p.52).
[53] http://www.pbi-colombia.org/field-projects/pbi-colombia/news-from-colombia/news, September 2, 2013

The term *victim* in Colombia has a political and legal undertone that needs to be analyzed. Politically, due to the multiple forms of violence that have afflicted our country for five decades, women, men, communities and organizations of diverse ethnic and cultural origins have experienced the impact of the violence generated by all the actors involved in the conflict, whether the State, illegal armed groups, drug traffickers, or common criminals. This impact results in the violation of fundamental individual and collective rights and the destruction of life projects, communities and the environment. It could be said that all Colombians, in one way or another, have suffered the consequences of the multiple forms of violence; we are all *victims* of the armed conflict. However, certain of our countrymen, their families and communities, have borne the brunt. They have been kidnapped, displaced, disappeared, tortured, killed, recruited, driven off their land, raped, imprisoned, persecuted, exiled and mistreated in the most cruel, degrading and inhuman way possible.

As part of their war strategies, perpetrators rarely admit their crimes and the justice system has not been sufficiently effective in uncovering the truth and prosecuting those responsible. The State, alleged guarantor of the safety and security of its citizens, has been, to say the least, negligent in the search for truth and justice due its own role in some of these crimes as perpetrator, facilitator or passive observer. So, for decades the *victims,* who have suffered the most, have remained anonymous, silent, with no knowledge of what happened, how it happened, or who was responsible, much less any acknowledgement or redress from perpetrators or the State. One might say that these *victims* have remained invisible in the eyes of the State, their perpetrators, and even in the eyes of us in civil society.
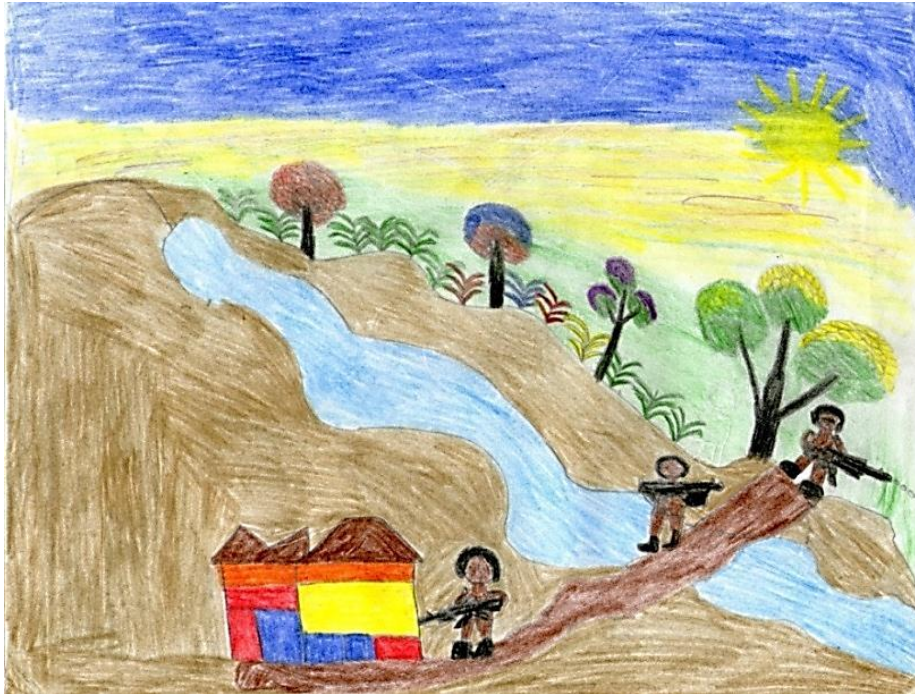
Figure 4. Drawing by Ernesto (youth ex-combatant participant of this inquiry) about an armed attack on civilians, 2012.

Currently, this situation is beginning to change and it is important to draw attention to certain facts. During the last decade, the number of social movements in Colombia has increased; of the 7,000 demonstrations between 1975 and 2010, more than half took place in the last ten years (CINEP, 2011). These social movements have not only increased in frequency, but have changed their form of action as well. These movements now integrate multiple social expressions, are better able to meet and organize, and not only prefer direct action such as demonstrations or denunciations, but use other legal means such as international advocacy and outreach through mainstream media communication in their drive to be heard and recognized (Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, 2012).

The social movements of *victims of the armed conflict* are among the most important in Colombia today. A decade ago, a large portion of the public knew nothing about the extent of this suffering. "Awareness of these *victims* has grown among members of Colombia's urban society, who now recognize the importance of defending their rights." CINEP (2011) statistics also support this new role. Victims'

associations' spearheaded 945 social struggles between 1975 and 2010 and of these, 764 actions (80%) took place during the last decade.

This is not the place, given the purpose of this research, to provide an in-depth historical account of the development of social movements in Colombia and, in particular, the struggle and mobilization of *victims* of the armed conflict. Nor is it the place to elaborate on the difficulties that this type of movement faces in a country still in conflict. However, it is clear that *victims* in Colombia nowadays have more hope of recovering the history of their suffering, of seeing justice done, and receiving some reparation for the damage inflicted. Their suffering is more greatly acknowledged by civil society and the international community. Their actions are better organized and more combative; they participate not only in protest movements but also in the trials of perpetrators and in the national forum surrounding the recent peace process. *Victims'* movements have also proposed alternatives for securing historical memory, justice and reparation and have demanded a place at the negotiating table. In fact, the *victims* issue is one of the negotiating points agreed to at the Havana peace talks, achieved primarily by these social movements.

Thus, the *victims* of Colombia's armed conflict are in the process of securing a place and recognition, not only of their suffering but of their political leadership as well, enabling them to contribute to the transformation towards a more just and inclusive society. To be recognized as a *victim* in Colombia also means being recognized as a citizen, with all the rights and obligations this entails. In this context, the *victim* discourse is an empowering one that has allowed millions of *victims* in Colombia to make progress in the struggle against the invisibility, ignorance, suffering, and isolation critically affecting them. The *victim* discourse in this context refers to the fight to defend rights that have been denied: not only has the most indignant and inhuman mistreatment taken place, but, worse still, no one is aware of it. Children and youth ex-combatants are considered *victims* of the crime of forced recruitment and other degrading and despicable mistreatment, as presented in a previous chapter of this dissertation.

The Commission on Human Rights (2002) defines 'victim' as anyone who, "individually or collectively, as a result of acts or omissions that constitute a violation of international human rights or humanitarian law norms, suffers harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss, or impairment of fundamental legal rights." The term *victim* also applies to first or second-generation relatives, close family groups, and their communities, especially indigenous peoples or communities of similar composition subjected to anguish and suffering due to the situation experienced by the principal *victims*, which is even worse in cases where the State has acted to generate impunity, or has performed acts of coercion, or threatened or limited choices in other ways.[54]

In Colombia, *victims* of the internal armed conflict are currently entitled to care, assistance and reparation through Law 1448 of 2011. This law defines *victim* as "those persons individually or collectively harmed by the events occurring on and after January 1, 1985, as a result of violations of International Humanitarian Law or of serious and gross violations of International Human Rights standards due to the internal armed conflict."[55] Article 3, paragraph 2 states: "Members of organized illegal armed groups will not be considered victims, except in cases of child or adolescent combatants who were underage at the time of their demobilization." Previously, the New Code of Childhood and Adolescence in Colombia (2006) recognized that children under the age of 18 could not have been voluntarily linked to an armed group, but only through "ignorance or coercion."

Therefore, in legal terms, child and youth ex-combatants in Colombia are considered *victims* of forced recruitment more because of their age than because of the actions they may have committed. [56] One limitation associated with this law is that it protects neither children nor youth involved in the new organizations that succeeded

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[54] Definition provided by the Commission on Human Rights, 56th Session, "The Right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation for victims of grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms." Report by Special Reporter Cherif Bassiouni, January 18, 2002. Annex paragraphs 8 and 9.

[55] Accordingly, before 1985 there were no victims in Colombia, although an armed conflict existing for five decades has been officially recognized.

[56] International humanitarian law applicable to civil wars prohibits combatants from recruiting children under the age of 15 or allowing them to participate in hostilities. The Facultative Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child raised this limit to age eighteen.

the paramilitary groups, nor those who enrolled in these groups as minors regardless of their at age at the time of disengagement, nor those who left an organization after the age of 18. This constitutes an unconstitutional discrimination that has been widely informed by human rights organizations. The *victim* status granted by the Act allows children and young people to access state protection and, in most cases, makes them exempt from criminal responsibility for crimes they committed. The law puts an end to the debate over whether to prosecute child and youth ex-combatants based on the rights of other *victims* by considering them *victims* of the armed conflict. In this respect the law is consistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards such as the Beijing Rules in that the interests of the child and his or her unimputability prevail. Furthermore, the condition of *victim* granted these children and youth implies criminal responsibility for the illegal armed groups who commit the crime of forced recruitment and should also hold the Colombian state accountable for not fulfilling their duty to protect children.

The Implications of Being Called a Victim

As stated above, the use of the term *victim* in Colombia is of fundamental legal and political importance for child and youth combatants. However, this discourse has other implications, which are discussed below.

In the case that concerns us, the *victim* discourse is closely related to the discourse of *child protection* largely rooted in the rights perspective. The development model of childhood (supported by classic Developmental Psychology) promotes the notion of childhood as a stage in the transition and natural progression towards a rational and normal adulthood, to the full acquisition of a social, biological, sexual, legal and cultural condition, that is, a post-autonomous condition (James & Prout, 1997). This development is seen as the same for all children regardless of their ethnicity, gender or origin. The above has served to promote what Walkerdine (2004) referred to as the *essential childhood*, which in Western tradition has been used to categorize children as normal or abnormal.

Childhood, as well as youth, is evaluated in terms of what adults have established as the norm, a vision labeled *adult-centric.* Biologists and psychologists (mainly Western scientists from the northern hemisphere) have established parameters to measure the *normal* characteristics which children and young people must acquire if they are to be seen as physically, cognitively, emotionally and morally mature, and no long malleable, impressionable, vulnerable, defenseless, inexperienced and in need of help. It is understood that children and young people must be led by others more experienced, which legitimizes their dependency and creates a social space conducive to the structuring of disciplinary and control measures known as *child protection* (Macmillan, 2009).

One of the most important criteria in the development model is age. The evolutionary cycle of growth and development establishes stages through which one progresses linearly and unidirectionally, according to age. From childhood, we pass through adolescence, adulthood and then old age. The image that represents this life cycle is that of a normal curve, where development reaches its peak in the adult stage and then decreases until death. The only ones who come out ahead in this graph are the adults, supposedly at the top. Children and adolescents have not yet reached their peak, and the elderly have left it behind.

Colombia's Childhood and Adolescence Code (Law 1098 of 2006), like some other international codes of its kind, defines "underage" as less than 18 years old ("child" as 0-12, "teen" as 12-18); all are "children" under the Law. Although it could be said that this differentiation between a minor and someone of legal age is accurate in terms of having lived more or less years, the term *minor* seems to apply not only to age, but to all characteristics attributed to children and youth. According to Castro (2007), being underage would seem to be associated with inferiority and subordination, with the age at which one is not yet capable of disposing of oneself or one's belongings, with an inability to judge, decide and assume responsibility for one's own actions, with an exceptional legal situation, with delegation of responsibility in adults, and a required representation by others. A minor is inferior to an adult, not only in age and responsibilities, but in desirable and expected capabilities.

The development paradigm has been widely criticized in the social sciences and yet, despite the emergence of new visions of childhood, it can be said that this paradigm is still dominant in the health sciences and in child protection programs in Colombia. It is difficult enough to establish what is normal or abnormal based on age given the fact that, among other things, there are more exceptional than typical cases, but it is even harder when considering child and youth ex-combatants. Many of these children do not know their biological age; either they don't know their own history -- they don't know when or how they were born --, or they have been presented with conflicting versions by their multiple caregivers.

> Vicky: When is your birthday?
> Daniela: My dad says it's November 12; my grandma says it's November 27 and my mom says it's January 1st. In January of this year I turned 18. My dad and my siblings call me on November 12 every year. He says he's going to change the date because my mom is confused; it's my sister who was born on January 1.[57]

Some of them have no birth certificate -- the official document stating date of birth and information regarding parents--, let alone an identity card. When they enroll in the protection program their age must be established through a medical examination that sets an approximate range according to physical growth (seriously affected by food and nutrition problems before and during their passage through the armed group). They are also registered, assigned a date of birth, and given a legal guardian since some of their parents are unable to fulfill this function. Their biological age is therefore a new, relative reality, constructed from multiple medical and legal versions and bits of memories provided either by them or by available family members.

Prior to joining an armed group, some of them did not live with their parents, did not attend school, helped support themselves and their families financially, or cared for other family members, all of which are adult functions. In light of this paradigm, what kind of childhood can they be said to have had prior to becoming youth or adults? Once enrolled in the armed group, they performed the same duties as the other members, consuming liquor, smoking, and becoming sexually active

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[57] A piece of the story "Looking for a Dad" written with Daniela in June 2012.

warriors. With this in mind, can they be said to be children? What remains of the notion of urban childhood, designed and produced by scientists at universities in northern countries? It may be necessary to reconstruct this idea of childhood and youth.

Child and youth ex-combatants entering a protection program are all legally considered minors and are treated as *children*, regardless of their newly established biological age: they are associated with inferiority and subordination. The State acts in a paternalistic and authoritarian manner that mimics the parent-child relationship and, therefore, "disciplines them, organizes their lives, their money, their expectations for the future, and their behavior according to preset standards" (Cárdenas, 2005, p. 39). Those who, until recently, were warriors must adapt to being treated like children, to being told what they can and can't do, and to being punished if they break the rules, all the while assimilating into a new family that is not their own and learning to obey unarmed civilians.

They must be 18 in order to leave the program. The legal age limit is constantly questioned, either because their biological age is not clear, or because professionals, or the youth themselves, do not believe they are prepared for independent living, even after spending 5 or 6 years in the program. What then is the significance of one age or another? Under what parameters can they be compared? What does being a minor or of legal age mean when the limit is uncertain, diffuse, or malleable? What do we gain and what do we lose by insisting on standard age-based criteria?

For Social Construction, childhood and youth is not only a natural phenomenon derived directly from development or physical growth, as certain sciences suggest, but also, and above all, a social construct, a social phenomenon that refers to a defined status, incorporated within a social structure, and expressed in certain forms of behavior, all related to a particular set of cultural elements (Jenks, 1982).

James & Prout (1997) propose a new paradigm for the study of childhood and youth as a social construction: it varies culturally and depends on components and

structures specific to each society. Every society constructs a set of stereotypes and expectations about them, which determine the way they are seen and, especially, the capacities and capabilities assigned to them. This results in discourses surrounding them in the form of everyday wisdom, images, perceptions that guide our actions, ways of relating, social and legislative norms, knowledge, and public policy related to children and youth.

Parallel to the expansion of the development paradigm, the discourse on children's rights grew stronger. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989 is now considered one of the most important instruments adopted by the international community and has become "an ethical and cultural fact, but, most of all, a political fact that gives it a historically transcendent legal scope" (Alfageme, Cantos & Martínez, 2003, p. 37). The discourse of children's rights is a step forward compared to the days when children were relegated to the domestic private sphere, outside the protection of the law and basically considered the property of their parents. The paradigm of comprehensive protectionism reports progress being made in the acknowledgement of children as subjects of rights and in the recognition of the child's best interest as the maximum criteria in the exercise of their rights. By entering the international public sphere, children became carriers of Human Rights. This helps to make children visible and challenges governments to question their concepts and values regarding them as subjects of rights.

The rights approach, embodied in the Convention, has also been criticized from different points of view. Like the development model, it shows a clear adult and ethnocentric tendency, having failed to include the voices and realities of diverse boys and girls in the discussion (they were the objects, not the authors of the story) and given the notorious predominance of northern over southern and western over eastern countries. Possibly for this reason, individual rights take precedence over the rights of the community, greater emphasis is placed on the nuclear family than other family configurations, and protective rights prevail over other rights (Monforte, 2007). The protectionist paradigm, based on paternalism, triggers an asymmetric social

relationship, where the protector is active and the protected is a passive receiver, which fuels the discourse on childhood as the property of the family and State; children are seen as *victims*, incapable and in need of help, a discourse fuelled by both the rights approach and the development paradigm. In the case of child and youth ex-combatants, the State acts as a protector, concealing a discourse of inferiority and subordination.

On the other hand, to assume that child and youth ex-combatants were mere *victims* of their families, armed groups and the State is to reduce the analysis of a complex situation, presented in a previous chapter, to a dualism of victim and victimizer that reproduces, as Bateson (1980) would say, the epistemological error of the power myth. This myth states that certain people wield power and wield it over others who cannot have it. This obscures a great number of analyses of, for example, the different situations that facilitate the damage, the various perpetrators involved, not just those of flesh and blood, the role of notions such as ideology or alienation, the strategies of submission used to force *victims* into cooperating, or the vicious circle that turns some *victims* into victimizers, to name only a few. The *victim* would seem to be a helpless, needy, dependent, vulnerable person, powerless or with no control over his or her life, incapable and submissive. This is similar to what is said about children. This discourse is, in other words, disempowering; it diminishes and marginalizes and affects the construction of identity and the way child and youth ex-combatants are seen. It has permeated the *protection* programs set up by the Colombian government and has negative implications, which I'll show later.

> In August 2011, youth ex-combatants at the PHT participated in a *training* session. The purpose was to inform them of the new Victims Law. During the four-hour session, *facilitators,* equipped with a structured agenda created in Bogota (The Capital), did nothing more than dump a heap of incomprehensible legal information on these youth. Previously, they had been shown a video about "Mary's story" which was patently offensive to the youth as it portrayed guerrillas as murderers and rapists alone, and portrayed them as helpless victims. During the initial presentation, the youth were imprudently, or awkwardly perhaps, asked, in public, where they came from. This may be one of the most compromising questions you can ask one of these youth, and the *facilitators* should have been aware of this. At one point, the session became

undisciplined and disorderly when the youth lost interest in the *training* session. The *facilitator*, who introduced himself as a "political scientist" and anticipated that "listening is always difficult for everyone", said: "Next time I'll bring a microphone for me and muzzles for you."

To whom were these facilitators speaking? To passive listeners with no history or opinions? To people with no right to speak? A training session for victims on the Victims' Law that denies the other (the victim) a role as a legitimate, respectable interlocutor worth listening to? Would these facilitators speak this way to their bosses, their colleagues, or other political scientists? The victim discourse establishes a certain kind of relationship with the so-called victim, which is anything but egalitarian or equitable. [58]

Child and youth ex-combatants from the PHT do not see themselves as *victims* or as children. This has also been informed in other studies and is due mainly, as discussed in a previous chapter, to the fact that, for many of these kids, joining an armed group means a way entering the autonomous, independent adult world, a way of occupying a position of power and authority, at least in the eyes of their families and neighbors. As stated in the research conducted by Corporation Alotropía (2006), joining an armed group is an escape from the shame and humiliation of being a *victim*, from feeling fear and dread, and a chance, instead of being punished and abused, to be the one who instils fear and is respected. War is a way out of being a civilian *victim*.

The term *victim* conflicts entirely with the warrior identity of which many of them are still proud, along with the armed group to which they belonged; they feel linked to the logic of war and, therefore, to be seen as *victims* is to be stripped of the warrior's bravery and honour. To think of themselves as *victims* would also mean accepting as negative what happened while a part of the armed group, accepting they had no control over what happened and that they should forget it, get over it, move on, and turn the page, which makes their own history, as well as all they learned from war, less important and less valid. Put another way, it would mean remaining trapped in the submission of power imposed by the perpetrators and not in the power they wielded as members of an armed organization. They perceive their passage through an armed group as an extensive and intensive time of learning and experiences: "*it's just*

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[58] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. August 2011.

that you experienced so much there... after you go through that, you're not a kid anymore... after you've killed, you're no longer a child, we know more than many of you... " [59]

Thirteen year-old Tatiana was captured by the army in the middle of combat. When she entered the PHT she still had the wounds on her belly. Later, she was asked if she wanted surgery to remove the scars. Tatiana said no; they are her battle scars. She is proud of them and displays them without shame. This is a drawing she made of herself in the workshops.

Figure 5. Drawing by Tatiana of herself, 2012

The *victim* discourse also implies that although it is fair, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, not to criminalize child and youth ex-combatants given the complex situation surrounding their enlistment and the futility of imprisoning them during their recovery process, this discourse hinders to a certain degree their ability to ethically take responsibility for having left their families and neighbors to join an armed group and for the acts committed during the war. Being deemed a *victim* clouds their understanding of events and limits the possibilities of being forgiven for acts that torment them and actively participating in the reparation of damage done to others. These issues, especially the trauma and guilt, are only discussed in the privacy of psychological clinics and not as part of the programs' recovery strategies.

An indigenous community in the southern province of Cauca runs a program for youth who have been to war, who they refer to as "disharmonized". When a youth leaves an armed group and returns home, the community performs a purification ritual designed to clean the territory and heal all its inhabitants physically and spiritually, because they believe the youth's involvement with the armed group affects the entire community. They form a circle and the youth stand in the center. Everyone speaks of how he or she was affected by the youth' involvement with the armed group and the Taita[60] speaks of forgiveness, wisdom, understanding, humility and strength. Apart from this ritual, the youth

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[59] Testimony borrowed from: Castro, MC. (2007, p. 160).
[60] The "Taita" in an indigenous community is the guiding parent, the wise man schooled in traditional medicine who communicates with the spirits and thus heals the soul, the spirit, the mind and the body.

are expected to speak with other young people in the community to prevent future involvement and once again be considered "harmonized".[61]

In this story we see how indigenous communities assume that the most important thing is not the suffering of the individual but the damage to which the entire community is subjected. Therefore, while generously welcoming the youth, they require him to participate in acts of reparation, which will contribute to the recovery of the entire community. Other indigenous communities impose sterner punishments that must be carried out before the youth can again be considered part of the group. The westernized and individualist *victim* discourse based on the victim-victimizer relationship disempowers the former and blames the latter, and does not include the rest of the group or community. Indigenous communities use the term "disharmonized" to refer more to a relationship or a group than to an individual; it's more of a community approach. When a youth enlists in an armed group, he falls out of harmony with himself, his culture, his community, and his beliefs. The harmonizing process must be enacted with others. The questions that arise are: What do we expect of children and youth as part of the reparation to them and to the other *victims*? How can they, as well as recovering individually, contribute to memory, justice and the reparation of others affected by the armed conflict?

Finally, the term *victim* when applied to girls and young female ex-combatants reinforces gender stereotyping whereby women, especially girls, are seen only as *victims* because violent activities are unnatural for females. Not only does this lead to a discourse of women as passive *victims* and men as active perpetrators, but justifies hierarchical, dichotomous gender concepts that perpetuate inequality. As stated by Macmillan (2009), the textual portrait of the violence suffered by girls and young female ex-combatants is one of the most dehumanizing discourses and produces a story of "prior victimization". Specifically, when speaking of the sexual abuse they suffer inside the armed groups, they are held up as objects of degradation, humiliation, injury and torture rather than agents operating under unequal power

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[61] Lugo, Victoria. Notes from field journal based on a conversation with Juan Gabriel Luna, social worker at the PHT. Manizales, June 2012.

relations. Sadly, this is the picture painted by civil society groups to raise funds and awareness in others.

This approach has ignored and silenced knowledge about, for example, the lives of women who have fought alongside men in illegal organizations; the violence that women and girls may have committed, perpetrating human rights violations; the masculine and feminine roles that perpetuate and maintain systems of domination and violence; or the masculine acts performed by men as a result of caretaking and solidarity in the midst of war. It's not that women are not *victims*, but accepting the possibility of seeing them as active participants may also reveal important information about the agency of women and men in extreme social situations (Méndez, 2012).

Manipulation of the "Child Soldiers"-as-Victims Discourse[62]

Some researchers find it significant that although "child soldiers" have existed since time immemorial they are now internationally considered a new phenomenon. And, that in a world where millions of children suffer from violence and hunger, 300,000 "child soldiers" have gained such attention (Macmillan, 2009). The report titled *Youth Speak Out* (2005) states that "child soldiers" account for only 10% of the approximately 300 million young people under 25 around the world affected by armed conflicts.

One hypothesis offered by certain researchers is that the *child soldier* discourse has been manipulated internationally to delegitimize wars in southern countries, especially African countries. By emphasizing the harmful effects on *child victims*, northern countries seek to demonstrate the irrationality and barbarism of the nations at war (Macmillan, 2009). They attempt to show that these are primitive wars without ideological foundations that don't respect international standards, as opposed to "conventional" wars, meaning those waged by northern countries, which are considered fair, disciplined, organized, proportionate and eminently rational. This

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[62] "Child Soldier" is the most common term used internationally to refer to children and youth ex-combatants.

colonialist discourse may help justify military interventions in these countries and reinforce the old north-south hierarchy.

In Colombia, the discourse of children enlisted in armed groups has been used as a war strategy to discredit the opponent (Rethmann, 2010). Álvaro Uribe's government, in particular, used the discourse in the mass media to delegitimize insurgent movements. The Colombian Army frequently presented captured children to the media; in fact, one of the youngest boys in the PHT was featured on national television as a great military trophy. Researchers suggest that "the child victim and its association with martyrdom are images used to sensitize public opinion. In a context of intensified armed conflict, criminalization of the enemy and its brutality can be used as a strategy of war" (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2002). Several questions arise: Why not work with equal interest to prevent recruitment? Why didn't these children and youth have State protection before enlisting in the armed groups? Why aren't all children and young people (or everyone for that matter) affected by the armed conflict protected, not even those closest to it, such as siblings and neighbors?

> At a meeting with the biological families of child and youth ex-combatants, the little brother of Camilo, the kid rescued by his mother mentioned in a previous chapter, told the PHT psychologist that he wanted to join an armed group so he could leave it and enrol in the program like his brother. How is this possible? Why doesn't the State protect the whole family? Why not protect the unemployed mother and the children who believe Camilo has a better life than they do because he has food, clothes, a foster home, and a chance to go to school?[63]

The *victims* are so numerous and not limited to children and youth combatants. The definition of vulnerable populations warranting action is not a naive or neutral definition in terms of political interests. The interest in nationally and internationally discrediting the guerrilla groups in Colombia has led to more focus on child and youth combatants than, for example, on displaced children and youth who have undergone extreme difficulties. What happens socially and culturally if certain people are protected and others are not? What family and social ties are being affected by this

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[63] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes based on a conversation with psychologist Ricardo Delgado in Manizales, at the Hacienda El Caney, September 2011.

focus? What perverse paradoxes are being created, like within Camilo's family, in the interest of protecting ex-combatants?

Victimization and the Deficit Discourse

Being considered a *victim* is closely associated with the discourse of deficiency, which has implications in the explanation assigned to the phenomenon of enlistment of children and youth, the pathologization of both the phenomenon and the children and youth themselves, the way they are viewed and treated, the strategies used in their recovery, the future expectations relating to them, the impact on their identity (self-weakening), and the cultural impact given the progressive cycle of infirmity, as Gergen (1994/2007) refers to it.

A first category of deficiency associated with child and youth ex-combatants is related to individual cognitive immaturity expressed in irrationality, lack of control, difficulty making decisions, and amorality. Rationality, as suggested by Macmillan (2009), is the universal mark of adulthood. It is easy then to see children as irrational and, furthermore, see enlistment in an armed group as an irrational act in which they naively do not foresee the consequences of their actions, rather than a highly rational strategy to survive hostile environments, as stated in a previous chapter of this dissertation. Obedience inside an armed group, which is a matter of survival, is interpreted as a lack of moral development or autonomy. Irrationality is also associated with ignorance, thus the emphasis on literature, international literature in particular, on the lack of education in children and youth, which automatically associates them with a poor level of cognitive development. It is assumed that outside of formal schooling they haven't been able to develop other cognitive skills which might open doors to future possibilities rather than close them and which must be explored so that the youth themselves can acknowledge them. Psychometric scales designed to test children and youth with formal schooling are almost always used to evaluate their cognitive development. It is therefore likely they will be diagnosed with a cognitive deficit along with the respective prescriptions this entails.

Adriana Lucía is a young woman who enlisted in an armed group at age of eleven. She spent three years there and enrolled in the program at age 14, with a second grade education. Her admission file includes an initial evaluation performed by a psychologist who states: "She is a poorly coordinated, vulnerable, impulsive, and insecure young woman with a below-average mental capacity (that of a seven year-old) and probable brain lesion." An IQ test was administered with the following results: "Immature level of cognitive development and moderate deficiencies with respect to expectations for her age. CI 55, very low". Adriana Lucia is now 22 and has just graduated from high school. In other words, she finished primary and secondary school in just seven years, without even knowing how to read and write, having forgotten what she had learned in just two years of primary schooling before entering the armed group. How was this achieved by someone with a brain lesion, a moderate deficiency, a very low level of intelligence, and apparently no qualities whatsoever? Today, she is considered one of the program's success stories.[64]

This story shows the risk of a diagnosis based solely on deficit, and the consequences this may have in terms of low expectations regarding the potential of these young people. Youth enrolled in the PHT who are diagnosed with a cognitive deficit attend a specialized institution. The following is another story that shows the risks of low expectations based on the deficit discourse.

Jaime was diagnosed with a mild learning disability. Since starting this research, he asked to participate in the "Narrative, Visual and Corporal Expression" workshops. What he most wanted was to learn how to use a camera to take photos. The project began in December and permission was requested from the special education institution so that Jaime and some of his peers could attend the workshop one afternoon a week. Permission was denied. Over the course of six months, Jaime repeatedly asked to be allowed to attend the workshop and stated: "I've spent years here (at the institution) and have made no progress. Why can't I study with my friends?" In other words, his request extended not only to participation in the workshops, but also to attending a regular school. The PHT director invited me to a meeting with the director of the special education institution to speak about the workshops, emphasizing their importance in Jaime's learning and development. Broadly, I argued that Jaime would enjoy benefits in virtually all areas of development: the ethical-evaluative area (respect, solidarity, teamwork, cooperation, cohabitation); the cognitive area (memory, attention, concentration, symbolization); the leisure area (free expression, creativity); the affective area (self-esteem, identity, emotional expression, recognition, self-control); the productive-labor area (public speaking, manual skills --- painting, puppets, masks --, teamwork, use of audiovisual equipment); the biological area (physical activity, motor development, speech

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[64] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes based on a review of folders on file at the PHT, April 2013.

and body control); the political area (forming opinions, discussions, participation, decision-making), the social area (improving social relationships, inclusion, respect for difference, cohabitation); and the communicative area (expression, comprehension, assertiveness, spontaneity, improvisation). After listening to my speech and those of other colleagues, the director of the institution proceeded to show us cardboard boxes made by the young people for a bakery, to which the institution is under contract. She stressed the qualities of the 100 perfectly identical boxes the youth had manufactured and said: "Everything you just mentioned sounds very nice, but the important thing is to train these special youth to endure long hours of work in the standing position, which is what they will be asked to do in the workplace." This response shocked us all, and served as a basis for the decision to withdraw Jaime from the institution, integrate him into the regular classroom, and allow him to attend the workshops, where fortunately, he learned much more than to assemble cardboard boxes.[65]

Some psychological theories understand moral development as part of individual cognitive development. Therefore, if cognitive development is poor, moral development will also be poor. Some international literature promotes the notion that children and young people who were in violent environments for long periods are likely to lose the ability to empathize with others and internalize violent behavior as normal practice. This idea feeds the fear about the persistence of violent behavior in youth ex-combatants after leaving the war, because it is thought that such conduct is deep-rooted and cannot be reversed. Boyden criticizes various studies on the moral development of young combatants which argue that ex-combatants would experience profound disorientation and remain attached to a "primitive" moral development, aggressive behavior, emotional "numbness" and a loss of empathy. Auster and his colleagues stated categorically that "war distorts their sense of right and wrong, turning 12 year-old children into cold-blooded murderers" (2000, p. 8). The direst of interpretations state that "moral socialization is suspended during armed conflict since the behavior of "all of society" consists of denying human values" (Punamäki, 1987, p. 33).

The supposed moral deficit of young ex-combatants can easily lead to their being interpreted as criminals, antisocial, or psychopathic. The criminal personality, as suggested by Carmona (2012), works in practice as an argument used to stigmatize

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[65] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes based on the meeting at Institution for special education, December 2012.

young people and legitimize proposed intervention based on repression and exclusion. The logical consequence would be to consider young ex-combatants as juvenile delinquents, with little hope of recovery and who must be isolated in detention centers to protect the rest of society. Fortunately, the recent Victims Law in Colombia protects them from being legally considered criminals. However, we see that when these young people commit acts that break with the norm, such as stealing, bearing weapons, using psychoactive substances, or having "inappropriate" sexual relationships, their behavior is evaluated more in terms of their past as members of an armed group than in comparison, for example, with other youth their own age. In other words, they are thought to be more prone to violent and criminal acts than other young people in their communities, including the biological children of their foster parents of a similar age. A youth of this description spoke to us about this:

> A few months ago, one of the kids in the program was assaulted on the street. The delinquents were young kids from his neighborhood, and armed. They threatened him with a knife and took all his belongings. When the young man told the story, he asked: "Why is it alright for them to be armed and not me? Because I was a guerrilla? Why am I forbidden and not them? If I'd had a gun, I would have been able to defend myself." Young ex-combatants sign a commitment to give up weapons; if are caught with one they lose all the benefits of the protection program. The question is valid, not in the sense of why are they are all armed, but why are they not all unarmed?[66]

There is an underlying hypothesis in this discussion that assumes that children and youth exposed to and involved in violence are necessarily socialized in a way that makes them likely to perpetuate the cycle of violence. This establishes a mechanical relationship between exposure to violence and a young person's moral dysfunction. They have therefore been called "children of violence" or "descendants of conflict". This hypothesis could be extended not only to the young combatants but to every child or youth who has witnessed violent acts, lived in violent environments, or been neglected or abused. Consistent with this is the idea that an abused child will be an adult abuser. And from there it is easy to believe in the existence in Colombia of a

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[66] Lugo, Victoria. Field Journal notes based on a conversation with the PHT team during analysis of this case. Manizales, 2011.

'fatal, deeply-rooted historical destiny that determines a collective personality built on the "pervasiveness of violence" (Arocha et al, 1998).

Children and young people would be doomed to repeat the history of their parents, their commanders, or of previous generations. Objections to the use of this hypothesis have been made in studies of violence in Colombia and will be made during this dissertation from a Social Construction perspective. An initial objection points to the risk of falling into a pseudo-culturalist reductionism that sees violence more as a static social pathology rooted in our history, or in a psychologistic bias that views socialization as vicarious individual and mechanical reproduction of behaviors observed in childhood.

Another category associated with this deficit, aside from cognitive and moral immaturity, relates to the war trauma experience and its pathological consequences. As stated by Boyden (2003), studies of children affected by war are mostly dominated by medical and psychological perspectives that emphasize the adverse impacts of war on the individual due to exposure to violence, separation from their families and other stressful events. Psychological research in particular tends to use a pathological framework of mental dysfunction in which studies of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) prevail. According to Hernández (2002), traumatic stress models link their theoretical and empirical explanations to individual clinical diagnosis.

The main characteristics of PTSD are described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V). This syndrome was developed, according to Hernández (2002), to understand the effects of the Vietnam War on the U.S. soldiers who returned home. At that time, it was used as a diagnostic category by mental health professionals to help veterans gain access to psychological and psychiatric services and to educate the public about the harmful effects of war on individual functioning. Its use spread to all *victims* of armed conflicts in other parts of the world and has been used to study the effects of trauma, recognize the needs of *victims* in the field of mental health, and render the unknown more familiar (as Gergen would say) and, therefore, less frightening, especially in the case of war. To assume that veterans

are ill, rather than dangerous, may generate more humane and sympathetic reactions and some hope of their recovery.

According to DSM V, PTSD is characterized by the appearance of specific symptoms following exposure *to a stressful, extremely traumatic event* involving physical harm, or one that is *extraordinarily* threatening or catastrophic for the individual. This refers to an event in the individual's life, an experience over a short period of time, which contributes to levels of psychic excitation so great that any *possibility of elaboration* is eliminated. The psyche, therefore, *being unable* to discharge such intense excitement, *is incapable* of controlling it, which leads to *pathogenic effects and lasting disorders*. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is the set of symptoms that appear as a result of this traumatic event. It is also considered a severe emotional reaction to extreme psychological trauma. The stressor may be related to a death, a threat to the patient's or another individual's life, a serious physical injury, or some other threat to the individual's physical or psychological integrity, to the degree that *the individual's mental defenses cannot assimilate it*. In some cases, it may be also due to deep psychological or emotional trauma and not necessarily any physical damage; although it generally involves two combined factors (italics are mine – APA, 2013).

As can be seen in the syndrome's definition, there is an exclusive tendency towards deficit. This tendency is accentuated by the use of phrases like "any possibility of elaboration is eliminated" or "inability to control it." From this perspective, a person who lives through a traumatic experience will necessarily collapse because there seems to be no alternative, and this will trigger a lasting disorder: "the trauma implies the collapse of the structure itself, across all planes of reference, as a result of the confrontation between a catastrophic threat and a chaotic response" (Benyaker et al, 1987). This generalization, with regard to ex-combatants, can be seen, for example, in the following quote: "Psychological studies have concluded that, without exception, those who survive the battle are traumatized" (Schmid and Schmid, quoted in Collmer, 2004).

Summerfield (2001) argues that the inevitable association of war experiences with processes of traumatization confuses normally understandable emotional responses and even ordinary responses to war with mental disorders defined from a mental health perspective. The need to approach trauma in a more differentiated manner has been acknowledged, along with the fact that traumatic events may or may not lead to development of a mental disorder (Breslau, 1998; Summerfield & Toser, 1991). Ignacio Martín-Baró's quote (1984, p.2) on this topic is pertinent:

> The first few times I came into contact with groups of farmers displaced by the war I felt that much of their behavior showed signs of paranoid delusion: they were constantly alert, multiplied their surveillance, did not trust anyone they didn't know, were suspicious of anyone who approached, and scrutinized all actions and words for signs of possible danger. And yet once I became familiar with what they had gone through, the real dangers still lurking, and their helplessness and powerlessness in the face of any type of attack, I soon came to understand that this hyperalertness and mistrusting behavior were not paranoid delusions resulting from their anxieties, but instead the most realistic approach given their situation. Without a doubt, it was the most normal reaction to be expected under the abnormal circumstances facing them.

Outside the medical paradigm, some have criticized the widespread use of PTSD to understand the effects of war. Hernández (2002) argues that in Latin America the concept of PTSD has been questioned by various mental health professionals who have worked with people affected by dictatorships and war. This is the case of Lira (1988) and Becker (1995) in Chile, who questioned the notion of post-traumatic. The word "post" suggests that the traumatic event occurred at a specific time in the past, which is problematic given the difficulty of determining the beginning and end of the traumatic events in situations that, like in Colombia, can last for years and decades.

Another analysis regards the individualistic approach to the disorder. As McNamee (2003) suggest, under the discourse of individualism, if a person's identity is located within him or herself, then what is problematic must emanate from the individual's mind or psyche; it is the individual who must be diagnosed. Hernández, & Blanco (2005) argue that of the 14 indicators of psychic damage detected in victims of violent crime suffering from PTSD, only three (changes in the value system, hostility and aggression, and changing relationships) have any relation to the individual's social

reality. The rest are resolved inside the psychological subject apparently isolated from the environment. This view of trauma focuses on the individual and is in line with the tradition of Western biomedicine and psychology that considers the human being as the base unit of study.

In the case of young ex-combatants, as argued by Rethmman (2010), an individualistic perspective implies that the causes and effects of conflict are to be sought in the individual himself. It reduces the social problem of violence to a pathology *of the combatant* used to explain, for example, the enlistment of young people in the armed groups and the effects of war based on the signs and symptoms visible in their bodies. This pathologizing of violence, and the positioning of this violence in an individual's body, legitimizes state intervention in the form of depoliticized and technocratic reintegration processes.

According to McNamee (2003), there are ways in which diagnosis can be used to stigmatize the individual. Classification of a disease carries over to classification of a person. In other words, diagnosis is not free of value judgments; not only does it describe what is there, but also serves as a moral judgment, holding a person's deficit up to others. As Tomm (1990, p.7) suggested:

> For instance, "a person with schizophrenia" is referred to as "schizophrenic"… This is often first done by professionals, then by family members, friends, and the public at large, and eventually by the "patients" themselves. The labeling process initiates permanent patterns of social interaction in the human network in which a person so labeled is embedded. A person, once authoritatively labeled "a schizophrenic", is never treated the same again in his o her social network. People simply look at him or her differently.

In the case of young ex-combatants, a PTSD diagnosis increases the stigmatization process they already face after belonging to an armed illegal group. And so, in addition to being considered potentially dangerous, they may also be considered mentally ill, reinforcing the *victim* discourse with its implications of weakness, instability, amorality and disability, as described here before. A diagnosis of mental illness also implies a tendency to blame people for their faults, the dysfunction lies within the person and,

therefore, failure to deal with a stressful situation is a sign of disability. Suffering from a mental disease can also be interpreted as being driven by forces beyond one's control, or being a *victim* or a puppet. People, therefore, stop seeing their actions as voluntary. This demonstrates a tendency to stress the *inadequacy* of attention given to personal tragedies and failures rather than the solutions requiring attention in the form of resources and competencies. As Foucault (1977) put it, diagnosis of a disease is not a purely physiological question; it is a social and moral issue, because by determining that another person is mentally ill we are making a judgment based on the standards and values of a social group.

I will therefore continue with an analysis of the consequences of the deficit discourse in a cultural and local context, specifically regarding youth ex-combatants. This analysis is mainly based on the article: *The cultural consequences of deficit discourse* by K. Gergen (1994/2007). One consequence raised by the author is the self-weakening of both the person classified as mentally ill and the community. As stated earlier, the mental deficit operates to essentialize the nature of the person being described. The terms of deficiency inform us that the "problem" is not restricted or limited in time or in space, or to a particular domain of life, but is completely general. The person, the young ex-combatant, carries the deficit from one situation to another and, like a birthmark or a fingerprint, this deficit will inevitably become manifest. This promotes a static rather than dynamic perspective, emphasizing permanent rather than transient states. Being labeled with the terminology of mental deficit means facing potential self-doubt. The language of individual deficit diverts attention from the social context, essential for the creation of the difficulties of young ex-combatants. It hinders the exploration of potentially relevant family, occupational, interpersonal, and socio-cultural factors. The young person is blamed, while the system remains unexamined. The following story illustrates the progressive self-weakening of one of the young ex-combatants participating in this research:

> Camilo, the boy of 13 who was rescued by his mother, began having difficulties at school and in his foster home. Right in the middle of his pubertal development, when hormones levels rise and fall uncontrollably, like with my own 13 year-old son, he committed several disciplinary offenses, which were

classified as serious. In June 2012, he was found smoking in secret in the classroom; he broke a school window with a soccer ball, and insulted a teacher who told him "that's what you get for being black". He committed a theft in his foster home, stealing $2,000 pesos (roughly 1 US dollar) from a family friend in order to buy candies. He asked for money from people who came to the house in order to buy powdered milk with sugar and he bought sweets at the local shops on credit. His foster father found money stashed under the boy's mattress and took it from him without saying anything. When Camilo came home from school, he looked for the money, found it missing, and said: "You can't trust anybody in this house."[67] In our workshops, in the *Green Zone*, we saw him as restless, playful, intelligent, outgoing, undisciplined, loving, joyful, and challenging and he might well have been described as *the best student in the class* given the great interest he showed and his ability to learn quickly. Following difficulties in school, the attending psychologist referred him to a psychiatrist and he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Syndrome and put on medication. The difficulties continued and on September 25th we were informed that Camilo would no longer attend the workshops because he had been placed in an institution for patients with drug dependence. He remained there for a year and in August 2013 I was informed that he had attempted suicide and had been moved to the city psychiatric hospital. How was it possible he hadn't died while with the armed group and yet could lose his life in a rehabilitation facility? How could this be? At this time, the professional team decided to remove him from the institution and return him to a foster home.[68]

Community weakening occurs, according to Gergen (1994/2007), because after the disease is named diagnosis and treatment by professionals are required. When the "afflicted" enrolls in these programs the "problem" is removed from its normal operating context and reconstituted in a professional sphere. Consequently, organic relations with the community are disrupted, communication is weakened and patterns of interdependence are altered. In short, community life deteriorates. The result is that the problems that would otherwise require the participation of people involved in the community are removed from their ecological niche; the tissues of community interdependence are injured or atrophied. In the story about Camilo, it is clear that the boy not only underwent a process of self-weakening but everyone around him, including his foster home, his biological family, program professionals, his friends, and the workshop participants, could access neither him nor his life because he was

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[67] Camilo was right: a year later this same foster parent was proven to have sexually abused young women allegedly under his protection and care.
[68] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes.

completely isolated from his social environment. He was allowed visitors only one afternoon a week.

Gergen suggests that we may face a cultural "cycle of progressive infirmity" due to expanding hierarchies of discrimination, altered patterns of interdependence, and the field of self-deprecation:

> The existence of a deficit vocabulary is analogous to the availability of weapons -- their very presence creates the possibility of targets --, and once 'treatment programs' are set up, 'less than perfect' individuals are encouraged to enter the programs, to place themselves in the care psychopharmacology, or withdraw from society to enter institutions. The greater the number of criteria for mental wellbeing, the greater the number of ways that one can be inferior when compared to others (1994/2007, p.288).

The cycle begins with translation of the deficit. By culturally accepting the possibility of "mental illness" and a profession responsible for diagnosing and curing it, issues expressed in the common or profane language such as sadness, boredom or despair must be translated to the professional or scientific language of mental deficiency. This result in one important cultural consequence: these languages are technologized, stripped of their great descriptive wealth, and situated within technical practices that few people understand. Those "intimately familiar" with the situation are forced to give way to a foreign, professional, scientific authority. Summerfield presents an illustrative example of this translation of the deficit. The professionals with the Dutch humanitarian organization "Doctors without Borders" assisted the Rwandan population after the humanitarian crisis, publishing a brochure and distributing 75,000 copies among the population. The main difficulty they encountered was to find a translation for the word "stress", because the word to express stress or anything like it doesn't exist in the Kinyarwanda language (Summerfield & Toser, 1991).

In Camilo's story, he was initially diagnosed with Attention Deficit Syndrome. The serious faults he was accused of at school might have been interpreted as normal for any 13 year-old boy experimenting with cigarette or marijuana consumption, an accident to be expected of any ardent soccer lover (it could happen to anyone), and an

understandable reaction to a phrase that openly expressed racial discrimination. This diagnosis takes place in the context of a school where teachers cannot tolerate an energetic, challenging, restless child, and where they feel unable to cope with such situations. However, in the context of the workshop, where discipline was less strict, the boy did not enter into any *serious misconduct* and his diagnosis did not take this into account. He was prescribed Ritalin which managed to keep him quieter; in fact, in the workshops we felt he was apathetic, disinterested and even a little sad. Now, not only was he saddled with discrimination for having been a guerrilla and for being "black", like his teacher said, but also for having a mental illness and having to take "pills", as he himself said.

> Camilo's psychologist was concerned about his participation in the *Green Zone.* She in fact tried to dissuade him from attending and scheduled other activities and appointments for the same time as the workshops, fearing his participation would "affect" his therapeutic process. We met with the social worker to clarify the situation. The psychologist spoke about Camilo's "traumatization" process. She claimed response to trauma was limited to three types --flee, freeze or fight--, and that Camilo was in "fight" mode and therefore had to be "calmed down". She worried that Camilo might be "retraumatized" in workshops by telling his story to people who, according to her, were not trained and, except for me, were not psychologists, the only professionals qualified to handle the case. She also believed that acknowledging his status as an ex-combatant "strengthened his ego" and was not positive for his therapeutic process. As for me, I laid out how Camilo's participation could benefit his development and wellbeing (as with Jaime) and ensured her that he was not at risk. I also referred to the institutional authority by warning her that his participation had been a decision supported by the program and that they did not agree to his withdrawal from the project. Nevertheless, one month after this meeting he was admitted to the facility for drug addicts and all of us who participated in the workshop missed him until the very last day.[69]

As pointed out by Gergen, the deficit language undergoes a process of cultural dissemination as mental illnesses are transformed into public threats. "It becomes the responsibility of the professionals to warn the public of unrecognized instances or instances of which they were not aware. People must learn to recognize the signs of mental illness so they can seek early treatment, and should be informed of possible causes and probable cures" (1994/2007, p. 297). This gives rise to the cultural

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[69] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes regarding the meeting at CEDAT headquarters with Camilo's psychologist and social worker, June 28, 2012.

construction of illness, where the deficit language spreads throughout the culture and is absorbed into the common language. This is why 13 year-old boys say "girls are bipolar". And as these terms used to define people such as depressive, hysterical, neurotic, bipolar, hyperactive (imperative, in the words of a young female ex-combatant) become increasingly popular, they also become available for the construction of our everyday reality. "Furnish the population with the hammers of mental deficit, and the social world is full of nails" (Gergen, 1994/2007, p. 299). This is no longer just about labeling or individual discrimination; the symptoms are becoming cultural models: "the culture learns how to be mentally ill" (Gergen, 1994/2007, p. 300). Thus, the population of "patients" expands and forces the mental health profession to increasingly expand its vocabulary and more and more problems are constructed.

As stated by the author, it's not a question of placing the blame at this stage; it is a complex social process, a byproduct of the attempt to improve people's quality of life, and is evident not only in the medical profession but also in law, with increased litigation or insurance supremacy. It is, however, important to make a critical reading of the way we construct illness, how it expands culturally, and of the alternatives, even within the same paradigm.

This is the story of Fabio. A kid of 17 who enrolled in the program in early 2012 and has also participated in the workshops since February. At the institution where he lived in another city, he attempted suicide several times, jumping from a third floor, eating ground glass and harming himself with a weapon. He also belonged to armed urban street gangs. His suicidal tendencies lingered: he sat on a wall, dangling his feet into the void, saying he didn't want to live anymore.

These are my notes after the first workshop: "He attended the workshop for the first time, is very shy, but participated in all activities with his peers and, at the end of the session, he said goodbye with a hug. His anxiety is noticeable in his face. He does not look well, he perspired, but had fun with the last activity we did together. It is very important that he continue in the project. During these first sessions we observed aggressive behavior, shyness, isolation, body rigidity and a strong rejection of his peers. I warned all the professionals and monitors that we should be alert to any situation that would jeopardize his life or the lives of others. During a workshop in May, he played an important role in verbal aggressions against one of his female peers. This served as an excuse for the whole group to hold a discussion. Fabio had difficulty concentrating and responding to communication.

In June, he was diagnosed with a moderate depressive episode and was put on medication. He presented more severe self-harming behavior such as scratching his cheeks, arms and chest with a piece of glass. His clinical history states he underwent a neurological evaluation and the result was an IQ of 60 - poor. Despite this, in conjunction with social worker, we decided to keep him in the group since it was a place he liked and enjoyed very much. Between July and August, he missed several weeks of the workshop while hospitalized. He continually asked when he would be released so he could return to

the workshop. And he did. During the months following his release he made amazing progress. He was calmer, more confident, more physically relaxed, and the group showed greater acceptance of him; even the women were more affectionate with him. He took an active role in the final workshops on makeup artistry.

During the final evaluation, he wrote letters to each and every one of the professionals who participated, six in total. I quote mine: "First of all, I want to thank you for teaching me to be more educated and serious, able to do things well, with commitment and interest. I learned to participate in workshops respectfully. Thank you. I love you." Fabio was the only one of the men to continue another alternative set of workshops during an additional six months. Apparently, his performance and commitment were excellent: I was told he had a girlfriend.[70]

Figure 6. Drawing by Fabio of himself, 2012.

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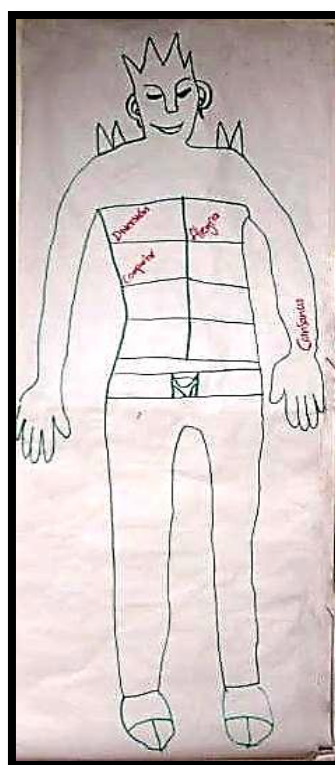
[70] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes.

As can be seen through his story, Fabio's participation in workshops was crucial to his recovery, particularly since it was a group workspace in which he managed to strengthen his trust and recognition through relationships with others. Although he was diagnosed and treated with drugs, which may have been necessary, his isolation process was not total, as in the case of Camilo, but temporary and restricted to a specific situation. Everyone in the workshop was able to go beyond the deficit, see him not only as a mental patient, but as a hugely interested and committed young man, extremely willing to be present despite his difficulties. Together we were able to overcome the fear caused by certain of his reactions and behaviors. We learned to love him and he loved us from day one.

From Victims to Survivors

This inquiry considers young combatants survivors rather than *victims*; those who got out alive (with a "shred of life", as one young woman put it), surviving extremely dangerous situations in which they could have died. They also survived inhumane and degrading situations before, during and after the war that caused pain and suffering and wounded not only to their own identity but their world, including people, objects, territory, customs, words, etc. They are survivors because of the courage they display, seeking a better life for themselves and others while facing extremely difficult situations. Survivors who know deep down that unhappiness can never be all-encompassing; in the midst of deep suffering, there is always a way out, an encouraging voice, someone to help, a strategy to be employed. Having faced death so many times in their lives, they know that the future is uncertain, but they always hang on to some hope. They recognized the fragility of their lives and were able, some of them at least, to appreciate the essentials.

> Vicky: Why do you want to tell your story?
> Daniela: To help others. As his sister, I tell my brother how tough it really is. My brother is always threatening my dad to take off with the guerrillas. It's easy to say "I'm leaving"... but then you want to run away. I'd like to help other people to not choose that path. The most important thing has been the people who support me: my dad, my brother, the lady where I live... I'm going to fight for them. The most important thing has been the people I'm with, and the people who have died: my uncle, my friend, and the other man. Especially, my uncle.

> Vicky: And how would you like your story to end?
> Daniela: I'd say "This little plant has only just been born".[71]

In Social Construction, whether or not a painful event becomes a trauma will depend on the meaning given the event through relationships with others. In other words, trauma is not installed in the person; it is constructed in discourse. The meaning of the painful event, which is always changing and different, is embedded in a cultural system that favors one or another. And so, beyond the painful episodes of death, fear, injury and shock presented as losses by young ex-combatants, there is a sense of shame or pride, betrayal or loyalty, unawareness or acknowledgement, which has been constructed and continues to be reconstructed, with others, throughout their lives.

> That marks your life and nobody believes you, no one can imagine it. It marks your life. You miss out on a lot of things there: You miss out on school and the possibility of studying because you could die any minute and no longer be, forever and always, die at any time.
> You lose your dreams; you stop dreaming. What for, if death is hanging over you; you can lose your life any second, die. Why dream?
> Many, many friends, with whom you slept, ate, got up, walked and spent all your time, were killed, they died. I had to carry a lot of them. There a lot of things you don't talk about, but that are there; things you've lived through. Being there marks your life and nobody believes it. And many were left behind, couldn't get out... just couldn't. After that, life is never the same (Young female ex-combatant).[72]

At the same time as the young woman tells of the losses she sustained during her passage through the armed group, she insists that no one believes her, no one can imagine it. And so she is also telling us about the value others assign to her suffering. We could say, from a narrative perspective, that the story about the *trauma* is a story within others. Many young ex-combatants are reluctant to talk about these painful experiences: "A lot of these things you don't talk about." People who have suffered painful experiences keep quiet to protect themselves, especially to keep from others the inhuman and humiliating events that make them feel ashamed and guilty. This sets up a zone of silence that nevertheless speaks constantly in other ways, a loudspeaker mumbling an unconfessable story, a numbed suffering, as Cyrulnik (2011) puts it. They

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[71] Excerpt from the story "Looking for a Dad" written with Daniela in June 2012.
[72] Testimony taken from: Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 78).

keep quiet to protect themselves from stigma, discrimination and rejection, holding on to the image.

But the young ex-combatants also silence themselves to protect us, because their story makes us uncomfortable: "I will uncover only the part of my story that you are able to bear. The other part, the dark part, will live quietly in the basement of my personality" (Cyrulnik, 2011, p.11). Often in foster families, youth are asked not to talk about it, told to forget what happened and to "throw dirt" over all that pain. In fact, this denial of their experiences not only aims to protect the young people, but to protect those in the foster family from the suffering these stories cause them. The environment becomes complicit in the denial; silence becomes a tyrant that freezes the relationship and increases the closed-mouth intensity of the ghosts. Primo Levi (1958) tells how following his liberation from a Nazi concentration camp he told his family in detail what had happened and "a world of ice closed over me." The people he loved grew silent, bowed their heads and avoided his gaze, terribly saddened by the horror stories he had cast in their faces: "My sister looks at me, gets up and leaves without saying a word." The survivor, by bearing witness, ended up freezing all bonds. They fell silent, left the table, and he found himself alone with a horrible memory he could not share (Cyrulnik, 2011, p. 123).

There is danger in revealing the unspeakable. The environment must also evolve in order to listen to the story of suffering without succumbing to disqualification, victimization, belittling, ridicule or marginalization. The fear experienced by those who have suffered is not unfounded. Besides, the trust that youth who have been to war have in others has been affected. Martín-Baró said: "Without a doubt, the most deleterious effect of war on the mental health of the Salvadoran people is the undermining of social relations, which is the scaffolding where we construct ourselves historically as individuals and as a human community" (1984, p. 4). In war, those who trust die; it's a survival strategy. Therefore, a "disenchantment with the world takes place; you don't believe the world is fair, that people are decent and good, that things make sense" (Hernandez & Blanco, 2005, p.

284). It is, however, possible to build a trusting relationship together, in which young people can tell their stories of suffering, as will be shown throughout this dissertation.

As White (2006) put it, the story of *trauma* is one of many stories, perhaps the one that most captures our attention given the suffering it implies or the intensity of emotion. Or perhaps it's the story that young people perform and act out in relationship contexts with an aim towards identification or recognition. In other words, the story of the *trauma* is used to achieve certain aims.

> At the beginning of the workshops, we were accompanied by three female students from the university. From the beginning, I realized that the kids liked these students and they started a game of seduction with them. One day, Camilo, Fabio and Eduardo discovered where the girls lived and went to their homes to accompany them to the workshop. On the way to the university, the boys told them terrible things: Fabio spoke of the group he belonged to, saying he had connections with them and was armed, and that he was in love with one of them. Camilo said that Tatiana, another girl in the program, had threatened to kill him, and asked if the students knew they "could kill in cold blood." That which is silenced in certain contexts, in others is exhibited and exaggerated, I believe, in order to impress the girls as strong and powerful men.[73]

The telling of the story, which may even include the most painful events, is therefore also a *performance*, an interpretation in a particular setting with changing players and audiences, and scripts that are updated continually. Both those telling the story and those of us who listen to it are part of the *performance*. Together we build the stage upon which this and other stories are told.

One story commonly overlooked is the alternative story of how children and young people have responded to their painful experiences. As White stated:

> No one is an empty vessel for trauma. Even children respond in ways that diminish the effects to find comfort, trying to preserve what is precious to them. The ways in which children respond to trauma are based on tools that reflect that to which children give value. And what children value is connected with their history, their family, their community and their culture (2006, p. 88).

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[73] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes based on a meeting with the collaborative group on March 27, 2012.

Acknowledging the response to suffering and the ability to survive does not mean failing to recognize the importance of everything that young ex-combatants have lived and experienced. This, as already stated, deserves major acknowledgment. However, it is important to overcome the victimization and deficit discourses by acknowledging that the war, as an extreme situation, has not only negative effects but also allows for learning that is often undervalued in the unique history of *war trauma.* The stories of response to the *trauma* are alternative stories that relate to skills, knowledge and values, pointing out to us what is important to the people who have survived. Rescuing these stories allows people to strengthen their identity and not define themselves solely based on the *trauma*. In this way it is also possible to reconnect these stories with stories of family, community and culture; in other words, it is possible to create a different territory of identity.

Alternative stories or stories subordinate to the dominant history of trauma provide insight into the strategies and survival responses of young ex-combatants, including ways to protect themselves, acts of caring, life skills, acts of resistance, lessons, changes, processes of struggle, recovery rituals aimed at preserving life, finding support in hostile environments, establishing secure domains in unsafe places, presenting joint responses in situations where such responses are disqualified, finding connection and a sense of affiliation with others in places of isolation, refusing to see oneself or others as *victims,* dealing with the aftermath of the *traumatic* events in unfavorable conditions, and achieving levels of self-acceptance in environments that promote rejection. Apparently, there are more answers to *trauma* than to flee, freeze or fight, as Camilo's psychologist claimed.

Subsequent chapters elaborate on young ex-combatants' responses as survivors, from their participation in the *Green Zone*, where together we build a secure territory of identity that helps them see pain and suffering as a testament to what is meaningful in life, reconnect and reflect on their history, join their stories with the stories of others, acknowledge what they consider valuable, catch a glimpse of their dreams and aspirations, and develop new knowledge and skills. I hope this helps build an alternative to the victim and deficit discourses.

5

The Commander's Daughter

By Mariana & Victoria

La vida no es la que uno vivió;
sino la que uno recuerda y cómo
la recuerda para contarla.

Your life is not the one you lived;
it's the one you remember and the way
you remember it when you tell it.

Gabriel García Márquez

Mariana's is the only complete story included; the stories of the other youth ex-combatants gradually emerge through the telling of events linked to the workshops or in the analyses of the various subjects. There are several reasons for this: Mariana's story is unique, atypical of the majority of children and youth who have gone to war in Colombia. Her story reveals the many faces of a commander of an armed group, his parenting and caretaking, as well as the barbarity of war, as seen through the eyes of a child and, now, a naive, intelligent and, above all, brave young woman. Mariana grew up in the jungle, alongside a guerrilla commander who became the father who raised her. Her experience of war differs, therefore, in many ways, from that of most youth ex-combatants. War saved her from neglect and gave her a father. Leaving the war behind was perhaps the most traumatic event of her life, as it separated her from the only affective bond she had known.

Mariana's conduct in the midst of war illustrates her ethical position vis-à-vis her commander and colleagues, touching complex human issues such as life and death, justice and power. Mariana's reflections at the time, and the way she speaks of them now, are worthy of my admiration in light of the difficult circumstances in which they emerged, and the implications they had on the lives of others and on her own. They demonstrate the possible forms of resistance and response to extremely difficult and painful situations. Mariana has maintained this critical attitude of questioning, doubting, and reflection; it has been, and will continue to be, one of her main tools for succeeding in a world still foreign to her. Ethically, this story is also a chance for Mariana to publicly ask for forgiveness, and I would like to be instrumental in this by publishing her story. A very important part of recovery for the young ex-combatants is the acknowledgement of the acts they committed that affected the lives of others, so they may forgive themselves and participate in the recovery of those who were also

their victims. This is a journey that is just beginning for Mariana, and for others who participated in this war.

The fact that Mariana told me her story, in front of others and a video camera, is, I believe, one of the most important results of this inquiry. I attribute this result to the close relationship we built together, which moved me, to tears even, and may be one of the most meaningful experiences to have come out of this research and into my own life. Our relationship is founded on affection, trust and mutual admiration. Gilligan (2009, p.11) in a conversation with Kiegelmann argues, "Loss of voice is the psychological marker of trauma. It is also the mark of totalitarian or fascist societies... Voice is an instrument of relationship, and in losing voice, one loses relationship". I believe Mariana lost her voice not inside the armed group, but when she was separated from it. At that point she stopped talking and eating. Mariana lost the only relationship in which she had a voice. She has, during her recovery process, once again, and slowly, found that voice. The telling in public of her story, over a period of three hours, therefore represents a milestone in this process. I might say that the relationship we built allowed this story to emerge, and that this was also mainly the result of her previous process in the PHT. It has been extremely difficult for Mariana to piece together the puzzle of her life. Remembering and forgetting are intertwined with the fear of and desire to remember a story made up of fragments. A story that, when confronted by new interlocutors (like her brother), now begins to fall apart all over again. This is one of her main challenges: to build a life story that makes sense and will provide continuity for the configuration of her identity. I think this story has contributed significantly to this purpose.

When Mariana was separated from the armed group, she discovered a world different from the jungle and war. Despite the difficult and painful situations she experienced under these circumstances and the indelible mark they left on her life, and regardless of how much she misses her father, Mariana recognizes that today she has a "better life" than the one she led in the armed group, that includes new opportunities to study and lead a decent life. She sees through different eyes, from a distance, the horrors that war holds for her and others. She has acknowledged that her

life is worth living and that she need not, under any circumstances, expose herself to hurt, suffering or death. This is an example of recovery, of the possibility of building a new life despite the difficult situations that may arise. Today, five years after leaving the armed group, Mariana is a high school graduate and hopes to become a lawyer in order to "defend the rights of indigenous communities like mine." This, and motherhood, are her challenges. She has a two year-old daughter and isn't quite sure how to take care of her, having no maternal reference herself. And yet her daughter has also become a reason for Mariana to continue living.

How a Story Unfolds

I met Mariana on February 14, 2012. Over a two-month period, I invited her to participate in the *Green Zone*, although I had been told she didn't like attending group activities. The psychologist who works with her insisted we try to motivate her, believing the experience could be very useful to her. Between the two of us we convinced her to at least try a session. Mariana joined the morning group, which was attended by four or five women only. She dubiously attended six workshops during the months of February and March, as if testing the waters.

On April 17, we waited about half an hour for María, Daniela, Adriana Lucía, Cielo and Mariana, the women participating in the workshop. Only Mariana appeared, and as usual she was late. We walked through the botanical gardens. In previous sessions we had recorded some scenes for the "Red Riding Hood" video among these tree-filled gardens in the middle of the city. I had already noticed that Mariana loved it there and enjoyed listening to the sounds of the birds, the leaves and the wind.

- It sounds like when I was there, she said.
- There? Where is there? I asked her as if I had no idea what she was talking about.
- You know, there, in the bush. When I was in the bush.
- Do you remember being in the bush? Do you like that memory? I asked uneasily.
- Yes, I do, except I'm really afraid of snakes.
- Afraid? You lived there for so long; why would you be afraid?

Her fear of snakes, says Mariana, began when she and the 300 guerrillas in her group built a bridge using *palos* to cross a swollen river. (She always uses the word *palo*, or "sticks" to refer to boards cut from wood or branches fallen from trees.) As they were crossing the bridge in single file, a snake bit one of her fellow combatants on the hand. Mariana, who was right behind him, watched what happened: blood spewed from his nose and he died instantly. Other times, they walked across the river: But because their rifles were so heavy, they would sink almost up to their eyes, lifting their heads to take a breath before continuing. They had to be very careful to keep from being hit by the logs and rocks in the rushing current. Sometimes as they crossed the river they would see frogs, and Mariana is afraid of them too. There are poisonous frogs and snakes in the jungle.[74]

And so began the telling of this story. A part of it was videotaped so that it could be transcribed verbatim and presented as closely as possible to the way it was told by Mariana. I went back and took a few quotes from the video to be presented here, verbatim. I narrated other pieces of the story in the video myself to give it more rhythm. I reconstructed yet another part that was not recorded from notes taken right after talking with her, and I tell this part of the story myself. I had to do extensive editing to ensure the coherence and continuity of the written story, especially because of the way Mariana speaks. Her speech is a combination of her poorly-learned indigenous native language and poorly-learned Spanish. How she learned to speak still remains a mystery. In any case, I made only the strictly necessary grammatical changes to aid the understanding of the text, without, wherever possible, altering her meaning. In other cases I used "sic" to point out that this is what she literally said so that her form of expression is not lost. Text in parentheses provides the reader with clarification. The titles are my own, as well as the order of presentation. I changed Mariana's name and deleted references to people's names and geographical locations to protect their identity. I also include several of my own reflections to contribute to the understanding of the story. Ultimately, what is presented in this chapter is a story told and written by four hands.

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[74] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. April 17, 2012.

We corrected the final version together; she specified and provided details for certain information, and chose what should be omitted. She asked about those who might read her story and if she could have a copy of the "book". We cried, laughed, and then she spoke to me of her mother, which was not included in this story and might be at another time.

On How a Life Begins in the Midst of War and the Jungle

The guerrilla commander found Mariana in an indigenous village. The guerrillas came to this community and stumbled upon a two or three year-old girl, alone and abandoned in a house. She was so small that the commander put her inside his backpack and took her back to camp, adopting her as his daughter and assigning her, like everyone else, an alias. Later, he crafted a carry-all with holes in it so she could breathe; a special backpack just for her. He carried her with him at all times, on long walks, day and night, and also into the midst of combat, with the girl inside his backpack. How must the world have looked from inside that backpack? The 300 guerrillas took care of their commander and the child. If nothing happened to the commander, nothing happened to her; this was one of the many ways to protect her. He made a comb from a *palo* and combed her hair, cut it with a machete, scrubbed her clean with sand, made her a tiny pair of boots and a spoon, and slept with her in the same *cambuche* --he on his mat and she next to him in a bed made from leaves and a pillow made from grass, just her size.[75]

> I slept with him from the time I was little. I was 11 or 13 when I told him I wouldn't sleep with him anymore. His was the mattress (sic) and for me he got leaves from those trees. He laid down a kind of mat and in the middle put a kind of stick. I had to sleep there; I slept well. THAT'S HOW I GREW UP.

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[75] A *cambuche* is a lean-to or temporary shelter made for sleeping. Members of armed groups make them from sticks and leaves when sleeping in the jungle at night. In one of the workshops, Santiago explained how a *cambuche* is constructed: "You sink four sticks firmly in the ground, then lay others across them, cover them with plastic sheeting and mosquito netting. Place a lot of leaves on the ground to sleep on top of. To make it better, lay down sticks as if building a bed frame and fill it with dirt so that it's high enough you don't get wet when it rains. Anyway, you always get wet." (*Talleriando* 7. Red Riding Hood and the Vaccine. March 27, 2012).

"That's how I grew up" is a phrase pronounced repeatedly by Mariana as she tells her story. She grew up in the jungle, with her father. The armed group was her community, not her family. She developed no close relationships with anyone other than her father because, she says, the law of the jungle prevailed, the law of every man for himself, the law of silence and obedience, as in any armed organization. Her only family was her father.

Perhaps Mariana's earliest childhood memories are of the animals she had, which were her companions and toys. The commander used to find animals for her in the jungle, or purchased from farmers: a multi-colored striped mouse, a young fox, a furry anteater, a parrot that repeated everything, a dog she still adores, and the horse that threw her the first time she rode it.

- I had a dog he bought me, but sometimes (I) treated her so bad ... she was my bodyguard, she was black, kind of big... He gave it to me when she was just a puppy, when her eyes were still shut. When she heard "helicotters" (sic), she'd hide and never dared to make a sound; she stayed very still. I think he gave her to me so nothing would happen to me.
- To protect you? - I asked.
- Yes, to protect me, -she answered and continued-. I had a real arepa[76] obsession; when my dad would go to the farmers, he always asked for a bunch of arepa dough (uses hands to show a large amount) and the farmers would put it in a bag and I'd eat it after it had gone sour... the arepa dough. I used to share my rice or whatever there was with my dog. I shared with my dog and the dog turned into a real hunter; he hunted pacas, possums... he liked to hunt. And I remember I had a horse, too. But I was afraid of cows and horses because they're so big and they make you fall off of them. I never knew how to ride them. Once the horse ran off and threw me. But the dogs were very special.

Mariana received, in some respects, the same treatment as the other guerrillas. Everyone was provided with two bars of rough laundry soap, a waterproof sweat suit, a camouflage uniform and boots. From the age of six or seven, she was already walking on her own and later, carrying her own rifle and equipment, like any other combatant. "*When I was little, that gun was bigger than me.*"

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[76] Arepas are a thick, tortilla-like cornbread eaten throughout Colombia and prepared in different ways, depending on the region.

The commander would wake her at midnight and train her to shoot. She was expected to fight, stand guard and take part in missions. The members of the group divided among themselves the pounds of food they needed on long treks. Most of the time they ate rice, bananas, lentils, sardines, and sometimes fruit and fish. Punishment, including cooking for 300 guerrillas, standing guard, and fetching the firewood and water needed to cook three times a day. Punishment could last up to six months.

> ... I remember when I was nine... they taught me to fish. I knew how to do all that... You tie some nylon thread to a long stick, and that little thing where the little fish goes... and you throw it in with some bait and the fish comes up and grabs it. And there are others that don't bite. Sometimes I caught fish by hand because there were so many. I was happy when they took me there.

The commander taught her to lie and steal. They stole food from the peasants and shared it with each other. This was one of her privileges; a complicity of stealing chickens and pigs to eat only with him, roasting cassava for him. She remembers eating canned sardines, meat, fish or chicken with her dad. He tried to teach her survival strategies in the jungle and she remembers the complicity, the secrecy, the privilege of being his daughter, their mutual caretaking (what he got for her, what she cooked for him, stealing together). Mariana puts it this way:

> But I ate well with my dad; we ate meat, chicken. And my dad taught me to steal and to lie (with an expression of complicity). One day he said: "Want to steal a chicken?" And I said: "Yes!" And there were some chicks running around, not as fast as the hens... baby chicks... Then he said: "If you were to steal, which one would you take?" "The little chick," I said. And he said: "No, you have to steal a big rooster, because we're going to eat it and the little one won't fill you up." And because I had trouble running (sic) and those chickens run so fast.... I was very young, and he taught me to steal from the time I was a little girl (laughs). Stealing chickens and pigs, and I always looked for the little ones and he always looked for the biggest. So he ate more and used to say: "You're smaller and I'm bigger; I have to eat more." And when I'd grown bigger I said: "I also have to eat more because I'm big." And once I went to steal a chicken and it had laid some eggs. I was going to pick it up and it flew away so I grabbed the eggs and took them to my dad and said, "Dad, I brought you eggs" and he said: "No, don't bring me any eggs; I want chicken."

The animals were not only companions to Mariana; they were her toys, her protectors, her food in these difficult circumstances, and the emotional bond with her father. They also helped the commander explain to the girl the things he couldn't explain, hidden truths that no one dared mention. How to explain acts of war to a girl constantly asking questions? Because asking questions has been part of Mariana's life from the beginning and she has hung on to the habit until today. She is always questioning, always wanting to know. This is perhaps one of her main resources, a strategy that has allowed her to get close to the mystery, the enigma, and the puzzle of her life. Lost pieces, fragments strewn helter-skelter, conflicting versions. In the jungle, the commander told her that the helicopters, which looked like little black dots in the sky from down below where they were, were buzzards and when she saw her first real buzzard and discovered the lie, the commander said they were sharks, an animal she would never see first-hand. Later, she would fly in a "buzzard" and the myth her father had created would take on great meaning in her life.

Mariana's tells her story with great love for her father, who she calls "the dad I grew up with". In other words, the father who raised her. She built a trusting relationship with him, one of caretaking, protection and admiration. She even began to dream of taking over his command, replacing him, and it seems that he shared her dream.

> That was my dream: if I become commander, what I'll do is food first, I used to say. I used to dream and tell my dad. And at night he'd say to me: "What did you dream? Tell me." "I dreamed I climbed on a buzzard, climbed into a car", whatever you call it… "I dreamed of a striped robe…" which I realize now was a uniform, "with a notebook, a pencil." I dreamed of studying with many people, and I told him that: "I dreamed about some white bags", and I drew them for him with a stick (she drew her dreams on the ground) and he told me, "Those dreams... I thought you dreamed about having power like me."

As is clear in the above story, Mariana's dreams included more than just becoming commander. She also dreamed of getting on a "buzzard" (leaving the camp), studying, going to school, having a house, seeing what a village was like. And perhaps for this reason, the commander tried twice to release her, as will be seen later. It was real love; he wanted the best for her and knew she wouldn't find it in a guerrilla group.

My dad was a person who told me his story, and even told me how he was with the girlfriends he had, but I didn't pay him any attention because when you're small (sic) it's like you didn't... I listened when I was three... or eleven (years old), and what I saw was that he had no one to vent with. Sometimes desperate (sic), I saw that in him a lot, I saw my dad... I now realize more... sometimes sad, thoughtful, sometimes he didn't know what to do with the groups he was leading, and then sometimes he'd talk to me, tell me about the villages, for example. Sometimes I remained behind the group and they went ahead and I'd ask him where they'd gone and he'd tell me and ask how things had gone with the other group... we trusted each other a lot.

Her relationship with the commander was therefore one of trust, complicity, learning and protection. He did everything to protect her; she always felt protected. He did everything to teach her survival; she learned and was never physically injured or hurt. Being his daughter, she enjoyed privileges that allowed her to survive the war. I think Mariana learned early on what Butler (2009/2010) refers to as the precariousness of life. She realized that her life was always in the hands of others, especially her father's hands, and that her life depended on those she knew and those she didn't know. These relationships were not always built on love, like her relationships with the other guerrillas, which were based on obligation to them, those she can't even name, those whose names she can't remember, and other strangers who are part of a "we" not fully acknowledged.

Mariana experienced first-hand and early on that her survival depended on a *social network of hands*. Mariana realized that: "To live is to live a life that is in danger from the beginning and can be endangered or suddenly deleted from outside and for reasons that are not always under one's control" (Butler, 2009/2010, p.52). The commander knew that his life, and the girl's, were always at risk and did everything to protect her life, a life that existed in the midst of war, that became possible in the midst of war, a life that he was forced to value, even if he failed to value any other, even if he never cried for any other life lost in the war. What would have happened if the commander hadn't rescued Mariana and carried her off in his backpack? He was her saviour, her protector. The commander had found Mariana's life and perhaps hers alone, worthy of protection. Other lives were not. Mariana's story is explicit in

revealing that life cannot exist without social conditions to maintain it, without the sustaining social relations that create who we are.

The Commander's First Attempt to Free Her

The commander never told Mariana she was adopted. She found out during a meeting attended by Karina, Raúl Reyes and Alfonso Cano in the guerrilla camp, when she was 12.[77] On that day, they spread out some plastic sheeting to eat on, fried sausages and roasted meat, which was a special meal, and danced and drank liquor. Mariana overheard her father tell the other commanders that she was his adopted daughter.

From that day on Mariana began to beg constantly for the commander to take her back to where she had been found and seek out her birth family. She wanted to know a house in a real village. She now understood why her father used to talk to her about the Indians, their language, and their customs. He didn't want her to lose touch completely with her identity and her roots.

> ... I used to love it when my dad would talk about the Indians: he told me like (sic) that Indians ate lice, and that they made porridge with their teeth, they chewed it and when the porridge was (ready), then they chewed it and spit it back into the pot. But that you added aguapanelita (sic) to the mixture and stirred it and it tasted delicious. My dad told me that, and my dad used to tell me that.[78] So sometimes when I got impatient he would ask me: "How's the fish?" And I'd say "delicious" and then he'd say: "There is food that tastes even better" and he'd talk about the natives, about the roasted bananas, the roasted cassava. When he told me the Indians made yummy yummy food I said: "Let's go!" And in the jungle there aren't hardly any Indians close by, they live deep in the jungle, where the guerrillas don't go. Then one day I told him let's go where the Indians were, and they had porridge, but it wasn't in a pot; it was like in the ground where they put it. And my dad said: "It's just that my daughter wants porridge like the one you people make... has it gone off?" They said yes. They were afraid because the army would come afterwards and harass them, and we came

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[77] The supreme commanders of this guerrilla group.

[78] *Mazamorra* porridge is a pre-Columbian indigenous gastronomic tradition consisting of whole corn kernels cooked and served with milk and something sweet like *panela* (hardened sugarcane molasses) or *bocadillo* (guava paste sweetened with sugar cane or sugar). *Aguapanela* is a sugar cane and water infusion common in certain regions of South and Central America.

around harassing them too, saying "did the army come by here?" and they couldn't say a word. And we told them the same thing: "never say we showed up around here. You haven't seen anyone; you don't know anything about any guerrillas"... But when they gave me that delicious porridge...

The moment when she would meet her people and family came much later. Mariana's father had already known her family and was willing to give her up forever. The commander moved the entire guerrillas group, 300 men and women, just to deliver Mariana to her birth family. They located several members of her family and the girl stayed several weeks with them at their house. The commander had given her a *toldillo* (mosquito netting) to cover her bed at night, to keep the insects from biting her. Mariana had great expectations but was very disappointed. "They weren't like I thought they'd be." These people did not acknowledge her as family, as their daughter, and more importantly, did not take care of her. This is what still rankles; they didn't care for her like the commander had. Someone living in that house "took the mosquito netting from her bed one night."

> ...And what did he do to me? ... Well, my dad had gotten me mosquito netting, the dad I grew up with, and they took it from me. I mean I didn't have the netting anymore and the mosquitoes could sting me. So to make me sleep with that person, that person took the netting from me and so I had to sleep with that person. And (that person) grabbed like this and wanted to... And my dad (the commander) never, ever did anything like that with me. I slept with him but he was not the person who hugged me (sic) and gave me kiss. I never got a kiss from my dad. I remember he held my hand, combed my hair, but I never ever received a kiss from him. He was not the person who gave me a kiss on the cheek. Nobody ever gave me a kiss on the mouth and I never had a boyfriend there.

In addition to the mosquito netting, the commander had given her a gun, which she thought to use but didn't dare. Finally, the commander was told what was going on and he went to rescue her. What really happened during this time is a secret, an intimate secret that Mariana doesn't want to share. Apparently, what happened there is part of a pact of silence between her and her father. The commander looked for the people who participated in this event. He didn't find them all, but he executed those he found and sealed a covenant of vengeance with Mariana:

... "When we find those people (who they never found), you're going to kill them and you're going to say a lot of things to them like you're saying to me, and that's the way it has to be, because if you don't give me an excuse like that, I swear to God I'll kill you." He threatened me like that and because I asked so many questions, and so we looked everywhere but they never turned up.

This episode was a missed opportunity for Mariana to reconnect with her roots, her origins. The abuse to which she was subjected left a deep impression, which she still doesn't understand completely. It distanced her even further from her birth family; she got only a quick look at her past and was horrified. Her questions about her parents and her family remained unresolved. She was briefly exposed to a situation even more difficult than the one she knew while living with the armed group. Today, Mariana has made contact with her birth family; she met a brother and communicates with some of them. However, the stories her brother tells are different from those the commander told her and those she heard when she was in the indigenous village. The puzzle of her origins remains unfinished; many pieces still don't fit. Today, Mariana has a deep and pressing need to know where she comes from and how and why she was abandoned. Who knows Mariana's story? Who can tell it to her? How is she to make sense of her childhood memories and other images, fantasies, dreams, hopes and desires?

Ethics in War: The Commander Is Questioned

Mariana's relationship with her father developed inside an armed group and was, therefore, colored by the logic of war. Mariana questioned the commander on a number of occasions, when they were alone or even in front of the troops. The questions ranged from the breach of his obligations as a warrior to the reasons one human had for killing another. This created conflict with her father: when it's impossible to explain, what remains is violence. When there are no words, you try yelling, beating and punishment. The complex analysis of this young child, now a young woman, tormented her and her father; so much so that sometimes she preferred not to think, and instead applied a kind of emotional anesthesia, simply acting and forgetting, a strategy to tolerate the war. She now asks herself: Why didn't I think? Where have all those "forgotten" experiences gone?

He would lock up the provisions and used to tell us he wasn't going to give us any food. It was like he was an idiot, and I'd say to him: "Don't you realize we were being held and couldn't go, for god's sake? It's not our fault." And he responded, "No, it's like I say it is." Sometimes he was just evil and didn't feel like giving us any food. It made me angry with him and they (the other guerrillas) used to say to me: "Tell him, talk to him. Because he can hit you but he could never kill you. He can beat you but he won't kill you." So when they gave me that bad advice it was worse; I got even more rebellious. And when he realized that someone had told me that, he punished them terribly; he hit them.

Her questions centered on proper performance of his tasks as a guerrilla, feeding the troops properly, ordering fair punishment, and, quite naively, always fighting the enemy, regardless of the conditions in which they found themselves. For example, she didn't understand why they should hide if they were supposed to be fighting. If being a guerrilla was all there was, why couldn't her father be a better commander, or the best warrior, unafraid, not hiding, facing the enemy, fair to his subordinates? Once, in the middle of a battle, a bomb dropped from one of those "buzzards" and exploded very close to Mariana. She was left behind and didn't know what to do or how to hide and she was very afraid. "But the dog hid and stayed very still." She nearly died that day and the commander scolded her for not running away like everyone else, for not escaping or hiding.

- "And what did you say to your dad?" I asked.
- I said to my dad: "Sometimes, if we're here to kill, why do we hide? It's like we're afraid of them." And he said: "No, it's because there are many more of them." "But if that's what we're here for!" (She said). So when he told us to hide, hide, hide, it made me angry. I thought we were supposed to kill, and here he won't even answer me. But why do we kill a human being? I wasn't aware when the army began shooting. I didn't realize it and then it was all over and four or five people had been killed, more of us wounded, and you don't realize it. When you're in the middle of combat with your rifle, you just shoot wildly. Sometimes I didn't even know who was shooting. And I'd say "I don't understand why the guerrillas always hide...”

Perhaps, deep down, what Mariana wanted was for her father to be a better person, a better commander, and a better dad. Mariana didn't understand the logic of combat, had no real knowledge of survival strategies, and didn't understand why they killed other human beings. She asked the commander about this repeatedly:

> ... And when I asked him he said he didn't know why we kill humans, why we who are human beings kill other human beings. It would be different if we killed a snake. We don't feel bad about it because they bite, or because it's not a human being. Or we kill animals to eat them... and he didn't know how to answer me. Sometimes he would scold me because I asked a question he didn't know how to answer...

You kill an animal to defend your life, or because you need food. But why do you kill another human? What justifies this death? How could the commander answer this...? This is the essential ethical question: Why are certain lives worth living and protecting and others not? The stance Mariana takes with the commander is that of being responsible for her own survival and that of her group, but also for the others she doesn't know who are considered *enemies.* Perhaps what she means by the phrase "we who are human beings" is that she as a person is related to those other people, even her enemies, in such a way that "I" becomes a "we" to whom she feels she belongs, is a part of. And this sense of belonging is not based on nationality, territory, language or culture. She belongs because of the basic quality that defines us: "we who are human beings." The outrage expressed by Mariana in this paragraph, against the injustice of killing another human being, of a loss she considers illegitimate, has enormous ethical and political connotations, especially in the context of war, of having grown up in war. Mariana offers a different kind of moral response, an interpretation unexpected in the context of war, which questions the commander's military ideology. This positioning did not stop at simple questioning; she occasionally took action to defend the life of another, as related below:

> But I'm sure I saved them (the other guerrilla) because my dad wanted to kill them like some kind of crazy man, and they hadn't done anything. One day he was going to kill a girl. I don't know what had happened. I was asleep and I heard a noise and I could hear my dad hitting her. I couldn't really tell. And I asked him why he had hit the girl. And he answered me: 'I'm going to kill that bitch' and like that." When he was reaching for his gun I got up and said: "But she hasn't done anything," And I went to her and he didn't do anything and so I said: "Punish her" and he punished her... for nine months, I think almost a year, because there was December and then December.

This was one life saved by Mariana, the life of someone closer, a guerrilla she believed deserved to live. The phrase "my dad wanted to kill like some kind of crazy man"

expresses the irrationality, not only the injustice, of the act. Mariana acted courageously by confronting the commander with his inability to be fair and dictate the punishment someone deserved for making a mistake. Receiving no answer as to why you would kill another human being, and understanding that in war "you must kill", her questions focus on what makes one deserving of the death penalty. Which offenses should be punishable by death and which should not? Why go "crazy" and resort to death if you can punish otherwise? Is this what is meant by "humanizing war"? Is this then an example of humanity, justice, in the midst of this barbarism?

In addition to concerns regarding his fairness in the line of duty and the killing of other human beings "like us", Mariana made another ethical appeal to her father regarding power. Mariana refers repeatedly in her story to the way she questioned the commander's power.

> ... but we fought, we were like those couples who are always fighting, we were like that, and when he hit me, we'd fight with each other the whole week. And that day when, like I told you, he hit me with the stick, he also slapped my face, pushed me, and that's when I told him, I told him he had no power. I mean it was true, when I told him that he had no power, because everyone around him was protecting him, they didn't even protect me, because the guerrillas said that without him they wouldn't have anything to eat, because he was the one handling the money, who bought the food, who did everything.

Perhaps what Mariana wanted to tell the commander was that he was not self-sufficient, that he depended on others for his survival, in spite of his position of dominance over others. That he depended on the protection of all of them in order to survive. That he was in their debt. That his life could be lost, destroyed or damaged to the point of death if not for the protection of his 300 troops. However dominant his position, his life depended on them: "Without them you have no power." Neither was he invulnerable; he was forced to hide like any other guerrilla when the bombs flew; his life was as precarious as any other.

> To tell my dad not to think... even though he is a human being. "But I don't feel anything, I have no heart, I don't know what I have, I command and I have power," he used to say. And I'd say: "You have power because they surround

you, it's like they keep you in a box; nobody can kill you because all those 300 guerrillas you see are protecting you, but I'm sure, Dad, without them you have no power." I said that to him. And he ... I mean the man would start to throw everything. He got mad and when he felt that gun in his hand, he'd fire it in the air, anywhere, (sic) he shot it and said: "I have power! I'm the greatest! I'm the one who talks to all the important people!" Raúl Reyes was very important to him. He said: "I've learned from him." He said that; he called him a "teacher" and out there we didn't even know what a teacher was. And I said, "Raul Reyes? He has power the same way as you." And sometimes he wouldn't let me talk and covered my mouth. He'd say: "Be quiet and don't make fun of my commander, my boss." And I'd say: "Dad, if you had power I'd be sure you were a man...' Do you know what you did when I was little? You put me in a backpack and carried me, because you don't have so much power, Dad. One hasn't the power." (The commander answered :) "Don't insult me!" and things like that... "You're the one who is powerless! You poor thing, you're such a pain (sic)!" (And Mariana said :) "If you want to talk about pain, well, we all feel pain. And if you´d had power, Dad, you'd bring me a lot of food, many things... Sometimes I'm hungry. How long will this go on? Tell me, how many years have you been a guerrilla, and your history and career has been difficult. I'm sure you get tired of it sometimes, Dad, because you have to walk just like us (the other guerrillas)."

This "one hasn't the power" and "we all feel pain" are two phrases that express Mariana's depth of feeling with regard to this matter. As mentioned earlier, Foucault (1981) argues that power does not belong to anyone, that power flows in relationships, and changes, even when not well distributed, as is clear in the relationship between Mariana and the commander. In a hierarchy, inequality is expressed through places of domination and others of subordination. But in the midst of this unequal relationship Mariana concludes that power does not lie with the commander; it resides in the safety net they all build together. Mariana's questions are an act of resistance from a subaltern position, an act of opposition to domination, of subordination. This subordination is also possible because of her privileged position as the commander's daughter, the only one "he was incapable of killing." She moves from submission to subordination as if along a continuum, in the midst of an ambivalent, contradictory, consenting and confrontational relationship; while questioning the commander's power, she consents to it, and receives his protection.

The father's position of power seeks perpetuation through the violent mechanisms inherent in war: death, threats, punishment, mistreatment, abuse and

repression, and also through authoritarian mechanisms such as discipline, order and control. Mariana's resistance is grounded in arguments and words, in questions threatening the commander's position of domination, which challenge the discourse of truth he maintains so poorly. "To resist is not to endure or withstand a force, but to actively oppose it; in other words, to face and block its machinery, maintaining a presence throughout the entire power network" (Foucault, 1976/1977, p. 176). The phrase *"We all feel pain"* once again calls attention to the human condition, to what all human beings are, the suffering of one in a position of power that makes him or her just like everyone else. She also challenged the subordinate position of the troops:

> So while we were singing the anthem there I'd say to him: "It's just that we have opinions too. We're leaders too. We're powers too" And when I said powers he responded with: "What? You all know nothing, and you even less - you're still growing" and he yelled this out and sometimes he punished us because I opened my mouth, he punished all of us.

The phrase "we're powers too" was an even greater challenge to the commander, threatening his position within the armed group and her own empowerment directed at her companions. This is unacceptable mutiny in an armed group with its firmly established hierarchies of authority and command. This conviction led Mariana to become the voice of her peers, occasionally bringing the commander to his senses regarding an injustice, and at times to being punished for questioning his actions.

> So he'd say, "I am powerful, I have the most power of any of the guerrillas here, I can do whatever I want (sic) with women, with other guerrillas." And that fool, do you know what he did? He wanted to kill someone for no reason, and I said: "No, he hasn't done anything." And so the guerrillas were very fond of me because I was a person that, well, when I was little I said nothing, but later they would say: "Look how you've grown! You're very big now. You can walk alone. We remember you (sic) when your dad brought you; you hardly walked, you got tired a lot, now you walk; now you're like the one who watches over us." My dad sometimes he felt like killing them, shooting them (sic) and I'd say: "But they didn't do anything, they didn't do anything. So what makes you want to kill?" Sometimes he listened to me and just fired into the air. But when we sang the anthem he'd say: "I am power. I am the one with power. I command. I do what I please with you."

Was it possible that Mariana was becoming a problem for the commander? Could this also be the reason he wanted her out of the camp? In any case, through this relationship Mariana constructed her vision of the world and a form of communicating which she still maintains. She often comments, questions, doubts and reflects. She defends her rights, believes in equality, and disagrees with injustice or discrimination. She said as much in a workshop on gender where we discussed the differences between men and women, arguing against the discrimination to which homosexuals are subjected.[79]

All of Mariana's questions concerning justice, death and power come together in the next tragic event that would mark her life forever. The last mission Mariana took part in was when the commander "sent them to kill an Indian." He was an indigenous governor. Although Mariana didn't fire a gun, she was present at this operation ordered by the commander and has clear images and memories of the people who were there, their faces, the words they spoke, the children's actions.

> When we got there at five, they were in a meeting, and the natives' houses are high up, you have to climb a stick ladder (sic) and there were many Indians. There were two dogs on the ball court and he was in the middle of the people, surrounded like that, when we arrived and we ordered them to come down. Then my buddy said: "You know we are guerrillas and you know what your mission was, and you didn't fulfil it. And we, just like you, had a mission, and have to fulfil it. We have to do our duty, the reason the commander sent us, and that's what we came to do." Then he turned pale. And he had three little children, his mother and his wife, and the lady was like pregnant too, like Indians have tiny little babies, young children, one after another...

> ... That day I felt sorry for the children... for the mother, and because I felt such love for my dad ... When I was growing up he would put me in his backpack, he carried me in the midst of danger, he never left me alone. So, I was thinking that if the same thing happened to me with my dad, it would be very hard on me, if they (the alleged perpetrators) would kill me it would be much better for me. What am I going to do in this world without my dad? Because he was who I grew up with, that's what I told my dad.

> So I got back (to the camp). We arrived at six in the evening and started to make dinner and everyone has to stand in a long line to get their food, when everyone

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[79] *Talleriando* 25. Gender and makeup. September 11, 2012.

started to sit down and dad sat on a rock and I sat behind him and in front of everybody I said to him:

- 'Pa (sic), when they kill you (sic), will I have to do like those children who ran?' Because you killed a man who had three children and a lady that was - I didn't know what was a pregnancy - I said, a lady with another baby in her belly, and her belly was already big, I'm sure that the baby was about to grow or be born.

- And he said: "That's their problem and they will see how they take care of it." He said it nicely, like that.

- And so I said: "Didn't you think of the children? We could have let him live (sic)."

- And he said: "I don't know how long I'm going to have to explain these things to you. It's like you don't understand me. You're a girl who always wants to be right and when you want to ask me these questions, do it when we go to sleep, not in front of everyone."

And everybody there watches, and one guerrilla, looked, ate, and ate and looked (sic). And I kept asking questions because that day he didn't tell me anything. And he shed tears, because I told him that when they killed him I would do the same thing; I would run to save him, even if I couldn't save him, I'd hug him in the middle of that blood, like those other babies did, the children of natives.

This inhuman act of war pushes us to the limits of pain, suffering, injustice, humiliation, cruelty, brutality. Although Mariana participated, her story tries to bring some humanity to this tragedy. First, she observed the situation in detail, the presence of dogs, the way the houses were built, the family conformation, the attempt to protect the person in danger. Her powers of observation allowed her to recognize the social network that tried to protect the leader, including the participation of children. She refers to him with respect: as the governor of the community, and to the children with kindness, as babies. Second, she accurately recalls the last words of the native regarding his responsibility as a parent, to a life that should be preserved because others depended on him. To a death that should not have been public. Third, she sees herself in the faces and bodies of the indigenous children who embrace their father's feet. She sees herself in that situation, identifies with the feelings of the children, as if her own father had been killed, and this is very significant. Finally, she has the courage to publicly question the commander's orders: Didn't it matter that he had young children? Didn't he think of the children? Was the governor's *error* more important than his children? She manages to move the commander by putting herself in the place of the indigenous children, and putting him in the place of the murdered man, because he values Mariana's life. She makes him cry in front of the silent, submissive

ranks, unacceptable behaviour for a commander; she *humiliates* him in front of his subordinates, like the indigenous governor was humiliated in front of his community.

> That day he started to cry, as far as I remember, was the only time I remember him crying. It was like he was sad, it was like, I mean, I had asked him so many questions he couldn't answer, it was like he regretted what he did.
>
> - Why do you think he cried? I asked Mariana.
> - I think he was sorry after I told him I would run up to him, and I think it made him sad. And because I told him that the Indian, before he died, said, "I am responsible for my children." And the mother looked at the man's face, and he was about to die and looked at the faces of his children, and the woman and the three children and the baby on the way were all there, the other Indians. So I asked my dad why he had ordered that done in front of everyone. "It's very nasty," like I said to him, "very nasty, like if you were eating and here comes a person and says you have to die right now! That would hit me very hard, dad. I'd cry and it would be very difficult if they did something like that to you..." He meant many different things to me: first, he carried me with him, he combed my hair, and made me things, like a stick spoon (sic), boots, I mean he was my dad, and I kept saying dad this and dad that... So I made him cry and the other guerrillas were quiet and ate and ate as if they hadn't heard anything, and so he went to the shelter we had set up.

According to Butler's analysis based on the ethics of Levinas, the *Others' faces* in Mariana's story (the children's faces, the faces of the mother and the murdered father), the corporeality of the Other (the children embracing the feet of the destroyed body), have created an ethical demand to Mariana, accused her of the offence committed, demanded she take responsibility (Butler, 2004/2006). Mariana's ethical position with regard to this event does not arise from the prior and individual ethical principle of a self-sufficient or autonomous subject; it is instead an ethical position constructed after the fact, based on demands made by the *Other's face,* an appeal made by the Other, which creates a moral obligation for her to challenge her father.[80] This demand originates on the outside and gives rise to a moral obligation. This moral obligation is not something that Mariana has imposed on herself, something arising out of her autonomous, reflective nature; it comes to her from another place, suddenly, unexpectedly, a moral appeal that Mariana could not refuse. The *face* speaks and, according to Levinas, says, "Thou shalt not kill," the only ethical mandate possible.

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[80] The "face" is understood as the visage, the voice, the whole physicality of the Other.

The *face* did not prevent the murder, but did create the moral obligation to challenge the person who issued the order. Mariana experienced these faces as an *epiphany,* a revelation of the Other's humanity, suffering and vulnerability. The presence of all mankind watching us. It is the *face* which conveys the message "Thou shalt not kill*,*" the *face* that cannot be depleted; the *face* interpreted as human suffering, as the tears of someone in pain.

As Levinas (1986, p. 23) says,

> The proximity of the face is the most basic form of responsibility... The face is not in front of me, but on top of me; it is the Other before death, looking through death and manifesting it. Secondly, the face is the Other asking me to not let it die alone, as if doing so meant becoming complicit in his death."

In Mariana's case, it is the Other before and after death, the Other begging her not to let him die and reproaching her for allowing him to die. The sound that came from the Indian face is one of pleading, "I am responsible for my children*,*" of suffering because of another, which shows Mariana the extreme precariousness, vulnerability and fragility of life. She realizes that "the mother looked at the man's face," the man "looked at the faces of the children;" the entire plea for clemency and the suffering was concentrated in looks on the faces of the Others. And the children *"*embracing his feet in the midst of the blood" express the helplessness. The face, the look at the Other's face, expresses, as Levinas (1971/2002, p.212) puts it, "the resistance of he who makes no resistance: ethical resistance."

On the other hand, Mariana was able to see in that *face* another human like her. As Butler (2004/2006, p.169) says, "To respond to the face, understand what it means, means waking to what is precarious in another life, or rather, to the precariousness of life itself." In Mariana's case, this meant awakening to her own life, an extrapolation of the understanding of her precariousness based on the precariousness of the lives of others. This is what made her put herself in the place of the children and anticipate that, if her father were killed, she would act in the same way, would want to save him, like those children; she wouldn't want to be left alone like them. She also tries to make him put himself in the father's position in an act of

public reflection, even threatening him with the possibility that the murdered father's children might avenge his death.

Today, in addition to accurately recalling this episode, Mariana feels sorry for what happened, has repented, feels guilty, and needs to ask forgiveness. There were times when she thought, and others when she did not. It hurts to have forgotten at the time, to not have prevented the tragedy, and acted like the others. To remember and to forget are also both forms of resistance, ways to escape extremely painful situations. Today, she has recovered the exact memory of what happened and based on this memory she can assign meaning to the episode.

> That was the last participation and I think after that never again and I think the departure came two weeks later. Most of all, now that I'm like this, no longer ashamed, I think I'm more right than him (the commander) and I think I have more knowledge than him and how I've come so far in five years, and he could progress too. Sometimes, like I've said to my psychologist, I regret the things I did, now that I'm big. But I asked him those things and then I forgot, I'd ask questions and then forget and when things happened I'd ask the same questions again. The same thing happened with the combats, when they started shooting; I asked questions and then kept quiet and I forgot. But now I can't, I remember the whole process I've experienced and I can remember the details.

The phrase: "I regret the things I did now that I'm big" acknowledges all she has learned, what she's begun to remember, the way she has slowly begun to find meaning in life, the way she has begun to recover. She now recognizes herself as unlike her father. She is reaffirmed by what she once went through, what she used to say to him. *"Now I think I'm more right than him."* She is no longer simply the girl who needed his protection, who obeyed orders. She is now a grown woman and part of growing up is to repent, not to forget, to remember, to repair herself and help others.

She recently made contact with a person from her indigenous community and discovered that the governor killed in front of his children may have been a relative. She feels even sorrier because of this and what follows is Mariana's public plea for forgiveness, part of her reparation for the harm she caused.

-   "What I believe, Mariana, is that you are very brave," I told her.

- No, I don't think of myself like that. Sometimes I think I'm a bad person. Sometimes I say to my psychologist "what did I do? For example, my participation in that story I told you... So now I don't know... I just think I have to ask for forgiveness, because what else can I do, right? What's done is done, and like I say to my psychologist: "I regret what I did and I wish I could be born again." Although I think: "Sometimes it wasn't my fault I did it, because since I was little, and I wasn't conscious" and then I think, "it wasn't my fault." But sometimes I feel guilty or think that my dad to blame for all that because he was the one who taught me that I had to do it, he was the one who taught me that I had to steal. And like I say, I have to ask for forgiveness, from the family I did that to. I participated, and even to the army if I killed any of them. I would tell them to forgive me because there isn't any other choice. And now that I have a daughter, I've realized, for example, that when she gets sick, it's very hard for me to see her that way. And now they're dead (someone) and you'll never be able to see them again, to see your children in front of you, killing (sic). So I've felt that kind of pain and I recognize the mistakes I made.

Yes, Mariana, it is very important to ask for forgiveness, and also to understand that we mustn't judge the girl who grew up in the bush, who thought that life was war, that all clothing was camouflage, that houses were lean-tos, that food was lentils, rice and raw *arepa* dough, that wild animals were toys, that combat was a chore, that punishment was to stand guard or cook for 300 hungry mouths. Yes, Mariana, aside from asking for forgiveness, you must also forgive yourself, and acknowledge that you were a very brave little girl who, in addition to surviving war, was capable of challenging the commander's actions, his power, and defending your comrades, saving other's lives, helping others, and trying to inject some humanity into the heart of this barbarous war. If you could do this, you can do anything.

The Commander's Second Attempt to Set Her Free

Mariana speaks of several objects that led her to want to see what a village was like. One of them was a B*om Bom Bum* (lollypop) that a female guerrilla once gave her. She remembers that the stick was white because she saved it for a long time.[81] She wanted another lollypop like that one. Another was the watch worn by a female guerrilla. She wanted a watch like that. Mariana often asked her father about the village: Where did they get their food? What were cars like? What were the people

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[81] A Bom Bom Bum is a brightly colored lollypop with a chewing gum center.

like? The commander warned her that if she left the camp to move into town "they would give her food to fatten her up and then sell her to some very bad men." This warning would haunt Mariana for a long time.

The Preparation

For nine months her father warned her about what could happen when she went into town and spoke of the dangers of not sticking close to him. Every night he explained the difference between the police officers ("those dressed in light green") and the Colombian army troops ("who dressed in camouflage like us"). Both were dangerous, and she mustn't approach them. The commander planned two gifts to celebrate Mariana's 15th birthday: a party, which her father said would be held at the estate of a member of the (pro-guerrilla) militia and would include food, music and dancing. It would be a big party. The other gift would be a chance to visit a town, and not just an indigenous village like the ones Mariana had visited, but a bigger town with houses and real cars. This, in my opinion, was the commander's second attempt to release her, as he was fully aware of the risk involved for Mariana, and that he would not be able to rescue her. But if she were caught, it would be an indirect way of freeing her, thinking ahead to Mariana's future and what might be best for her, or perhaps thinking of himself and what was best for the organization, since Mariana was becoming increasingly troublesome for him.

The commander decided that five guerrillas and Mariana were to go into the nearest town on a reconnaissance mission. They were planning to take the town by assault and the guerrillas had to assess security, the number of army troops and police officers, the kind of weapons they had, and the way they were organized and distributed. This was the mission and Mariana took full responsibility. They were to go, look around, observe and then come back. The mission seemed simple enough. Mariana listened to all the warnings:

> "If anything happens," said the commander, "nobody can help you, and you can't help anyone either. Nobody knows you; nobody knows anything, because it endangers the entire organization. And don't go gawking at the cars or the

people. Act normal so you don't draw attention to yourself. Memorize this name: your name is Tatiana Marcela Castro Guerrero."

The commander dressed her in civilian clothing, like a man, to protect her. Overprotecting her, perhaps, as this would be one of the things that attracted the attention of the police. He combed her hair, pulled it back into a ponytail (her hair was very long at the time), gave her a copy of her birth certificate (which they had solicited when they took her to a health center after she was taken ill with "el pito"), and a gun for her to carry inside her sock, strapped to her ankle.[82] This was all the preparation Mariana was given before facing the world.

Seeing a Village for the First Time: In Heaven

The guerrillas walked away from the camp until they came to a road leading into a village. They waited there until a Willys jeep came by, the first car Mariana had ever seen.[83] She remembers it as if the headlights were eyes, as if it were a living, moving being. They got into the jeep, without speaking a word. A few minutes later, they reached an army checkpoint. They were stopped and forced to get out of the car. They were searched. She thought: *This is the end of the line*. The soldiers eyed them suspiciously, talked among themselves, and inspected them again before, finally, letting them pass. Then they arrived in town. Mariana remembers everything as very beautiful, so different. The houses were like cubes with windows; the buses looked as if they would swallow her up; the faces of the people seemed so different. The candy was kept in stores, along with lights that turned on and off... She was seeing a different world for the first time at age fifteen.

> I saw a large mini-bus, some smaller cars, and I was terrified, and when they drive a car, how it works... I looked down and wondered where its legs were and the things it used to walk. And it was the wheels and I had fun looking at everything. And then a colleague said to me: "What did they tell you?" And

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[82] Mariana refers to Chagas disease, which is caused by an insect commonly known as a "pito" that attacks silently and painlessly, anywhere in the body. The animal feeds exclusively on blood and hides in cracks in the walls and among the palm leaf roofs of homes located in the bush or jungle. Many youth ex-combatants have scars as a result of this disease.

[83] The Willys jeep is very popular among farmers, especially in the coffee-growing regions of Colombia, because it is used to transport people, supplies and agricultural products.

those light bulbs... I can't remember if it was December, but the lights turned on and off, all different colours, and it was like I was in the clouds, and they started making fun of me. It was so strange. When I saw those lollypops... It was at the first supermarket I went into. It was full of candy (sic) and there were all kinds (sic). I wanted one so bad... I said to my comrade, the one who kept the money: "I want this, I want this, I want this." And they let me have one... And the houses were like up in the air, one on top of another, because the apartments were big... And I was like, it was so beautiful, but I was so scared too. Even the houses scared me because the houses were strange, full of windows, and I called them "drawers"... And when I woke up and looked out the window, I called them "little boxes"... So when I woke up and looked at the windows, I called them little boxes, I looked outside and there was nothing, it was dawn...

In town, each of the guerrillas slept in a different house belonging to guerrilla accomplices, to avoid suspicion. Mariana stayed with a woman who had a young daughter and three babies. She stayed there on her own. That night she slept in a bed with a mattress for the first time in her life.

The next day, she went out, tried to get on a bus, but was frightened because it seemed to her the bus wanted to swallow her up: *"No, this thing (the mini-bus) it likes swallowed me and I'll be locked inside."* She was afraid of the doors that closed automatically and couldn't understand how it was possible, like the car that moved along on its own. What must it have been like to see another world for the first time at age 15? Her first impressions were of objects: cars, buses, houses, beds. The world is not the jungle; there is another world, a material world. A mechanical and autonomous world. A world in motion. A world with lights that turn on and off. She didn't have much time to discover it all.

How She is Separated Once and for All from the Commander

Suspicion

And so, Mariana began to walk. She walked a lot, looking around closely, perhaps too closely. She decided to go to the battalion, to fulfil the commander's mission. She asked where it was, approached it, walked around it, and then returned. She came to the church, which was full of "green men." She went around back. She waited. She didn't eat much during the day. She was frightened and blushed as the

policemen started to eye her, and her lips trembled. A policeman approached (*green,*
with a funny thing and carrying a gun, so I recognized him). And the questions started:

- Girl, what are you doing here?
- And I said, "Nothing... just waiting for my mom".
- And what is your mother's name?
- (I didn't know my mom's name.) My mom is an Indian like me, I said.
- Hmmm, he said. Why don't we wait for her over here: You look frightened to me,
  lost, and you know that the police are always here to protect you.
- And I thought: Protect me? What this guy wants is to eat me. What do you mean
  protect?

The policeman suspected something was wrong and offered to buy her a cup of coffee
and continued his increasingly incisive interrogation and she became more and more
confused, not knowing what to say. From inside the cafeteria she watched as her
guerrilla colleagues passed by on the sidewalk, one after another, spying her out of the
corner of their eye as they walked past. Then she saw the Willys jeep drive by that
could take her back to camp. But the questions kept coming:

- A girl walked past the cafeteria and said (to the policeman): "Hey, that girl is a
  guerrilla."
- I said (to the policeman): "What's a guerrilla?"
- "Guerrillas are bandits," said the policeman, like he was scolding me:
  "Guerrillas are bandits who hide."
- And when he started talking about hiding, I said to myself, that's us, we hide.
- And she (the girl) said to the policeman: "That girl is a guerrilla," like for a joke,
  and then walked away.
- And the policeman said "Hey, your mom is taking her time: What's your name
  anyway?"
- And me (sic), I used the name they'd told me to say when anyone asked:
  "Tatiana Marcela Castro Guerrero," I replied.
- "Really? Let me see your papers," said the policeman.
- "No, my papers are over there, past the battalion; I don't have them here."
- "Well, let's go get them then. It's OK, climb into our car." And I saw my
  comrades walking back and forth, and I wanted desperately for them to help
  me.

She hoped the commander would come and rescue her, that they would assault the
town to save her, while also remembering his warning. There was no escape. The
policeman asked her why she was dressed like a man, if she was a lesbian. She didn't

understand the question and thought about killing him then and there, but it was too hard to get the gun from its hiding place. The policeman got tired of waiting and called the station. He told her she had to accompany him to the police station and put her in a car "dressed in green."

The Capture

When they reached the station, a tall, heavy-set woman dressed in green searched her everywhere, especially inside her rubber boots. The police officers entered the station ahead of Mariana and went through the metal detector. Mariana went through and it began to beep; they made her go through again and it beeped again, so they took her clothes from her... and it was all over.

> First my shirt ... and this woman started to put on gloves! And she said "do like this" (raising her arms) and I said, "no, I'm not doing that" (arms down). I didn't do what she said to do. She said I should stand against the wall and I said "no way". I thought: "This disgusting old policewoman"... Now I realize they couldn't force me, because I was a minor at the time so I could do whatever I wanted, screaming and everything. So they finally searched me and made me remove my pants and said: "You know there are many guerrillas in this town" so I took off my pants: When I took off my boot the weapon fell out and it was all over. They didn't put those things on my hands or anything (referring to handcuffs). I just kept quiet and the lady asked me (sic) and I stayed mute. I said: "I'm not talking." And they started talking about jail, how there were murderers there, and I didn't know what a jail was, so it didn't matter. I said, "I don't know what jail means" and she said: "It's where the murderers are" and stuff like that. But then those people started to shout at me and then a lady who is supposedly a police psychologist came, I'm not sure. A strange lady started talking to me, like "honey" this and that, and why didn't I talk, I was going to have a better life, and I thought "a better life?"

From that moment on, Mariana refused to eat or speak. They brought social workers and psychologists to speak to her and convince her everything would be fine. She thought "psychologist" was a name. But she neither ate nor spoke. She had to be taken to a hospital. She thought the hospital was worse than the station. Syringes, needles, people crying, shouting, complaining... she had no idea what was happening there. What did they do to people there? Were they given food to fatten them up and then sell them? Were they tortured? In the hospital she was fed intravenously. They

threatened to feed her intravenously day and night if she refused to eat. They asked about the commander, her father, the other guerrillas and her friends. She didn't say a word. She withstood the interrogation.

> They brought me some food in the morning, beans, salad, meat, and the same day I arrived there they brought me something like chocolate... (Did you eat?) I didn't eat because my dad had told me they were going to fatten me up. When they brought me those beans, the meat and the salad, I said "my dad was right" and the memory popped into my head about the watch I was going to have, and the puppy...
>
> And I was very hungry: They took me to a store and said: "Look, girl, we're going to a place where there are lots of clothes and you can choose the clothes you want." And I said "clothes"? In that store there were clothes, shoes and I didn't know how to use those shoes and when I put them on I felt like I walked in socks so they bought me shoes. I didn't know how to choose them. I didn't say anything. The guy who picked them was him (referring to the salesman) and a policewoman measured me. She (sic) put them on me and said: "How do you feel?" And I said "nothing, I feel the same; I want to go." "Where do you want to go?" said the policewoman. "My dad is very sick and I need to visit him." I answered. "And why can't we go in the "helicotter" (sic) and pick him up and see how he is? And you can take us there." she said. So I said: "I'm not going up in that buzzard."

After a few days, Mariana apparently spoke, unable to stand the hunger, imprisonment, interrogation and pressure. How different strategies had they used? What else could she do? She was taken to the battalion for two more days. The interrogation began again; they wrote everything she said on a computer and "that computer looked strange to me." She had never seen a computer. Next, they announced her transfer; they would take her to a city, a bigger place than the town where they were. They told her that the city had "cars, airplanes, candy and cookies." Manipulation, seduction... what other strategies did they use? What would have happened if Mariana had not spoken? [84]

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[84] Mariana's story shows that, prior to being handed over to the ICBF, Mariana was held in custody by the army or police for more than the 36 hours allowed, was subjected to interrogation to gather information, was pressured to confess, inform, identify and provide information using unauthorized mechanisms of persuasion, and they attempted to use her to guide them to the camp in clear violation of the Child and Adolescent Law 1098 and Ministry of Defence guidelines.

As I said earlier, I believe this is one of the most difficult episodes of her life. Following her capture, Mariana was separated from her father forever. All of her efforts from this moment on were aimed at surviving without his protection. Almost none of the coping strategies she learned are of any use in this new world. She must learn almost everything all over again, from how to use a toilet and a shower for bathing to reading and writing. She must discover other strategies for surviving outside the jungle, how to relate to unknown others, even how to speak since other people can barely understand her indigenous hybrid language. She is a complete stranger in a completely foreign, different and threatening world.

The Start of a New Life

The police, together with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF, for its Spanish acronym), decided to move her to a Center for Specialized Care (CAE, for their Spanish acronym). The transfer was to be carried out by helicopter, the black "buzzards" the commander had spoken of. The myth crumbled completely. From that moment on, Mariana realized she had lost her father; she was all alone, starting another life unknown to her, entering the world abruptly, like a new-born baby's first day of life, forced to learn about the world outside the womb.

The first thing I ate was porridge with *bocadillo* and milk. At snack time I had *pandequeso* and some of that hot chocolate. I think it was at four in the afternoon.[85] I cried a lot when they told me I was going to get on that "helicotter" (sic) and I looked around at everything, at the town, to see what it looked like. I thought "Someday I'll come back here. What will happen to my life?" I felt desperate like (sic). I was sweating. I cried a lot... I cried a lot when they told me: "You're not going to live there anymore." While I was there (referring to the village) I felt like closer to them (to the guerrillas) and with a better chance (that they would rescue you?) Yes, that was what I felt.

And while they spoke to me about that city a man so, so fat said to me:

- Do you want some mecato? I didn't know what mecato was. "Would you like some yogurt?" I didn't know what yogurt was. I didn't know anything.
- Then he said: "Firme acá! Firme!" (Sign here! Sign!)

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[85] *Pandequeso* is a savory Colombian roll made with corn and cheese and baked in the oven.

- What is "firme?" And I remembered in the guerrillas you had to do like this (hand on forehead).[86]
- "Yes, ¡firme! (Sign!) He insisted.
- So I get up (laughs).
- And he says, "What are you doing? I'm handing you a sheet of paper to write your name on," and he handed me the pen I saw in those hospitals and I didn't know how to write.
- And I said: "I don't know anything! I don't know how to write."
- "Come here. Tell me, what is your name?"
- Tatiana Marcela Castro Guerrero
- "What a lovely name," he said.
- And I said "Yeah..."
- "You're going with me and other people from the army in that little buzzard..."

When the helicopter reached the city it landed at a battalion even bigger than the one in the town. She locked herself in a bathroom; she didn't know how to work the toilet; she felt as if it were going to swallow her up, like the doors on the bus. Everything that could be operated, with a mechanism, was threatening to her. She thought small children were animated objects that could hurt her. There were army troops. She understood there was no way to escape and thought to herself: "All I can do is waiting for death." This phrase expresses the despair that Mariana felt at the time: a completely unknown world, her inability to perform the most mundane tasks, afraid to eat, unable to sleep, surrounded by her former enemies. Mariana wouldn't eat normally until much later. She remembered the commander's warning; perhaps it was a way of remaining faithful to him? Even if it was only this? From the battalion she was taken to a center for child and youth ex-combatants.

> And they put me in one of their cars and took me to where I would live. There was a social worker, a psychologist, a lawyer. And when I got to that institution, all the time they would eat and eat and eat. So, for example, I ate the one in the morning and I didn't eat the one in the afternoon. I had breakfast but not lunch or dinner. (I thought) "I want to be skinnier to last longer, and so I'm not so easy for them. They'd have to work hard to fatten me up." I saw the ones who ate and ate and there was this girl (another guerrilla) and I said to her: "What group were you in?" "In Group 24." "Didn't they tell you not to eat because they're going to fatten us and sell us?" And I saw the other chubby girls and I said "this one's ready to be sold."

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[86] In Spanish, "firme" means "sign here", but is also an expression used by soldiers when they snap to attention, or "stand firm".

How could anyone withstand this? With Mariana's history, which nobody knew? Which of her resources enabled her to deal with this situation? As discussed earlier, Mariana's departure from the armed group was much more traumatic than the time she spent in it. All she remembers about this institution is the fear of eating, getting fat and being sold like the commander had warned her. Her emotional stability was pushed to the limit. She says: "They were making me crazy." Given her difficulties in adjusting, they decided to send her to the PHT where she will live with a foster family. This is her story of her arrival in the program:

> I cried when I got here; I cried all night. They said school and I said: "When will I walk alone?" because I said: "If I get to walk alone, I'm leaving" and then I thought "where will I go?" And it was very difficult for me. I used to bathe in the river; that was how you bathed, but there (in the foster home) you had to open the tap; I felt like there wasn't enough water, that water didn't wash me enough. So it was very difficult. Aguapanela (sic) every morning... very different, everything changed. And the problem ... I had difficulty writing... it was very different, another very difficult stage for me. Because I've always wanted to, by studying (sic), I've learned something. So I studied all night. Writing my name was a big problem. I made this teacher cry. She told me, she taught me for about three years and told me, "write this" and what I did was like a scratch and a stick. She'd say (sic): "Write down everything you lived through there, all the names you know." And I said: "Ah! I don't know how to write that." And so she was running out of patience and then she told me: "You can do it." And after that, add, then 2 x 2, learn the table.

"I'm leaving" is perhaps the phrase we hear most in the PHT. Almost all youth ex-combatants want to leave. They don't belong here but elsewhere. And when they get to that other place, they don't belong there either. It is an itinerant life of not belonging anywhere, not belonging to any family. This account of Mariana's life after she reached the program reveals not only her difficulty in entering the institutional world of home and school, but also the challenge for both foster parents and teachers as they accompany these young people in their process. Mariana's difficulties, and those she created in these homes, have been many. She has been moved repeatedly, like almost all the young people participating in the program. Adapting to a conventional family is difficult, as is the family's adaptation to these young people. They are all aliens and outsiders, each with their own world.

I was obsessed with arepas. That day I was in the home of the Tutor Mother and she showed up with a package of arepas... And when I got to the lady's (referring to the foster home) there was an arepa on top and so what did I do? That's an arepa, so I grabbed the arepa and stuffed it under the pillow where I slept and the lady couldn't find the arepa and said: "Where is the arepa?" And I said: "I don't know what an arepa is." And she said: "But I just left it here." I don't know... I pretended not to know, and in the night I ate the arepa and it was the best food of all they gave me, the best. (Is it still what you like best?) No... I don't like them so much anymore... So she realized I stole the arepa and said: "Why do you steal the arepa? What about money?" I didn't know what money was; I only recently got to know about money and I didn't steal money (sic), or the bread she put out. I stole the arepa, and then she said: "You eat a lot of arepas so we'll have to buy more" and so whenever she served anything I ate the arepa first ... And fish... I was obsessed with fish... (When did you begin to eat without worrying?) Two years ago, I think, or less, about one year. I eat everything. I don't like arepas anymore. I don't like aguapanela anymore (sic). Or fish. For the girl (referring to her daughter), every time he comes (referring to her daughter's father), he brings red fish. One day he brought a big fish called Bocachico and the lady where I live, she stews it, but I don't like it much. I hardly look at candy anymore, and I stopped picking up stuff like that. I got used to it now.

Clearly, the foster mother understood Mariana's reason for taking the *arepa* and, instead of punishing her for an alleged "theft", she realized it was the food closest to her world and tried to better meet this need. Relationships inside foster homes are complex. Mariana has remained in the same home for some time now, where she experiences difficulties, especially in caring for her daughter, and in her relationship with Alex, another ex-combatant who lives there.

Despite all this, Mariana does not regret being here. She no longer wants to leave as much as when she first arrived. She believes she's better off than in the armed group. She feels sad that her comrades can't have the same opportunity, and she regrets that they have remained in the jungle. The PHT continues to search for her birth family. She has learned new strategies to protect herself from risk and from the discrimination attaching to having belonged to an illegal armed group.

- Two years ago I saw my brother. He came here and I met him. I didn't know him.
- And how did they find him?
- Through Family Welfare.
- And what happened with your brother?

- Well, he came and he gave my phone number to my birth father and he called me one day... Like I told him: never ever say I was a guerrilla, ever. They can know that I'm your friend, but not his daughter, and when they ask a question, you say you have a friend, because you don't know where or what can happen. I tell my brother not to say I'm here, and when he calls I say, "Oh, I'm in Bogota." Yesterday he called me and I said: "I'm in Cali." And he responded: "Oh, I'm also here in Cali," and then I said: "What do you mean? (Laughs). My brother always tells my dad that I live here, but I told him: "I don't stay here; I travel a lot."

From the time of her capture until the present (five years), she has taken part in the Colombian government's Reinstatement in Civilian Life program. She hasn't seen her father again, or her comrades. From that moment on, and still, she misses the sound of the bush, of the fireflies, the frogs, the wind and the trees moving in the wind. She misses stealing chickens and fishing with her father. She misses the way he took care of her. She misses her pets and her dog, her personal bodyguard. She doesn't miss his screaming or scolding or punishments. She doesn't miss the long nights on guard duty. She doesn't miss loading her rifle, or walking for days. She doesn't miss the bombs or combat, or the deaths. Sometimes she tended the wounded and that's why she wanted to be a nurse. She thought she could do a good job. And now she wants to be a lawyer and defend the rights of indigenous people.

I would like to talk Indian, yes, but I'm afraid of going there. For example, I'd like to make a career and help the Indians, to go there, because I'm still one of their roots, but it scares me. Because what I would like is to look for my dad right now. But I also feel a doubt, and I have a daughter now, so it can't be crazy (sic), because I have to look after her.

Epilogue: Her Desire to See the Commander Again

As shown in the following excerpt, Mariana's internal dialogue with the commander continues. She would like to explain what happened. This is another piece of her life that is incomplete. She'd like to tell him that she did not betray him, that she was captured against her will, that she now has a daughter, that she has made an effort to study and will graduate from high school this year. The dialogue with the commander has not stopped, nor have her questions: What did he feel when they

killed or captured his bosses? Every news story she sees on TV, every advance in the peace process, is a reason to converse with him silently, to hope she might see him again.

- Still the only thing I wanted in my process is to talk to him.
- Have you had any news of him? Do you know what happened to him?
- No, my dad was 60 when I grew up. He was already old. I remember he was older. He had been with the guerrillas for about 40 years. Vicky, do you think I can see my dad again someday?
- Is that what you want?
- Yes, I do, but it's very difficult, right?
- Yes, Mariana, it's very difficult.
- Yes, and he wouldn't recognize me; I'm so different than when I was there...
- Really? Sure. But maybe he would be very proud of how you are now...
- Oh, he wouldn't like me, because he thinks I betrayed him. That I said something, or I'm here for something.
- Yes, that's possible.
- Besides, how can I go back if I have a daughter? I have to think about her.
- That's right. He doesn't know he's a grandfather. What will he think of that?
- I don't know. Do you think he's really still alive?
- It's hard to know that.
- But just the same, not because I was his daughter, I still suffered. Anyway he beat me; all that was missing was for him to kill me, but he never did. I do have to thank him. And so I'd like to see him and tell him that... Of course, he might go kill me, because that's what guerrillas do. They say (sic) if you leave and go back there you can't go back with them. And now that I've wanted to ask him: "How does it feel to know that they killed your power Raul Reyes, and Cano, and they arrested Karina?" You know what he said about Karina?
- What did he say about Karina?
- He said Karina was a beautiful queen, and she's so ugly. And I'd also like to know what he thinks about that... or what power he feels, because when he was next to Karina, they grabbed each other when they danced! For him there was no other woman more beautiful and I used to say: "That old woman with that ugly nose of hers." No, Karina for him was the smartest woman, the most power you can have (sic), "the love of my life," is what he used to say.
- And so that's what I have to say about my story (we give each other a hug).

Thus ends the story of Mariana, the commander's daughter. An amazing, moving and human story. A story that for me constitutes an ethical and political argument against war: despite the importance of war in their lives, and while acknowledging the value of this experience for them, the depth with which it has burrowed into their hearts and their identities, recognizing all they learned from it, understanding the complex

situations that led them to join an armed group, knowing that it was also a form of resistance and a way to survive neglect and even worse forms of violence and that they found in war not only death but life as well, acknowledging the close links that bind them even now to these armed groups, observing how they remain warriors without weapons and survivors rather than victims, brave souls struggling to get ahead in a strange, unknown world, despite all this, the lives of these children and young people should never have been exposed to such harm, suffering and death and they should never have been used to inflict harm on others. Their lives should have been cared for, valued and protected by other adults, by the State, and by a more caring and compassionate society.

6

The Green Zone:

Dialogic Practice on the Margins

Dialogue, more than conversation, is an act of love.

D. Patterson

This chapter takes its name from a title that Eduardo, one of the youth ex-combatants who participated in this research, wanted to give to the workshops. In one of several failed attempts to come up with a name, Eduardo said they should be called the G*reen Zone*. It caught my attention immediately, but the other participants rejected the name, explaining that, in the armed group, the phrase had another connotation, something like a combat zone. He never wanted to provide any further explanation. In any case, this chapter uses Eduardo's title as a tribute to the relationship he and I built together.

The first time Eduardo attended the workshop, he walked all the way from Neira, a township 18 kilometers from Manizales. Because the walk took him four hours, he didn't have time for lunch. I brought him lunch during the next session and from this point he began to trust me. Eduardo was one of the workshop's most difficult kids; he refused to take part in some activities, interrupted the sessions, offended his peers, threatened to not return, and continued to miss the armed group he had left behind. His father was a commander in the National Liberation Army (ELN, for its Spanish acronym) and he grew up admiring this world. He was here because he had been captured by the army, but constantly felt out of place.[87] Perhaps the name G*reen Zone* was his way of making himself more comfortable in a college classroom, completely alien to him and to all the young people present. Eduardo enjoyed the workshops and attended from start to finish; despite the difficulties and his threats, he always came back.

Once, I received a call from a social worker in the program telling me that Eduardo had been missing for 48 hours. I later learned that he had been stopped on the street without identification and was taken to the Infantry Battalion. Once there, he lied, hiding the fact he was an ex-combatant and part of the PHT, saying instead

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[87] The information about his father and his capture was taken from his medical history in the CEDAT files.

that he wanted to be a soldier in the Colombian Army. They shaved his head, cut his nails, and dressed him in camouflage. Everyone was happy. When the program director and social worker located him and went to pick him up, he didn't want to leave the Battalion, and they didn't want to let him go. But he couldn't stay because the youth in the protection program sign an agreement to renounce all weapons. If they violate this agreement, they lose all program benefits. After this he returned to the workshop. The day he returned I invited him to have a cup of coffee and tell me what had happened. He didn't say a word.[88]

During the month of October I had to travel to the Netherlands. I said goodbye to all the youth, especially Eduardo, fearing he would leave the workshop if I weren't there. In fact, I presented each of them with an award acknowledging what each had brought to the workshop. When Eduardo received his award he was moved, saying he would "frame it and save it as long as he lived".[89] Shortly after I left for the Netherlands, Sandra, the graduate student associated with the project who would replace me during my time away, told me that Eduardo had not returned. So I wrote him this letter from her email address.

Netherlands, October 23, 2012

Hi Eduardo:

I am writing to you from Holland. I came here to continue my studies. I have good teachers that help me do my job. I've always loved studying and traveling better than anything, so I am fulfilling my dream. But to progress in one's studies one must work hard, be disciplined and consistent. Holland is a beautiful, small country, completely flat. There are no mountains or jungles like in Colombia. And I really miss the mountains. There are four seasons here: winter, spring, summer and fall. In the winter it's very cold and it snows. It looks like all the trees have died, but actually they're alive, just waiting for spring. In spring everything is green and blooming; it's very beautiful. Then comes summer; it's hot and everyone is on vacation. It's the most joyous season of all. Then comes the fall, when the leaves change color, from green to yellow, red and brown, and fall to the ground. Right now it's fall here. Here's a picture to give you an idea.

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[88] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. August 2012.
[89] This and the other certificates that were awarded are included in *Talleriando* 26. Cartography, Animals and Acknowledgements, September 25, 2012.

This is a forest next to where I'm living. I go there to walk or ride my bike. The bicycle is a important means of transport in Holland; everyone has a bike and rides it to school, college, or for pleasure. I like this a lot. There is a parking lot for bikes at the University and it's bigger than the parking lot for cars. What do you think of that?

Figure 7. Photo from a forest in Tilburg, NL.

And how is school? And your foster home? And your friends? They told me you haven't been back to the workshop and I think it's a real shame. Not only because of all you'll miss if you don't go, but because of what your colleagues will miss if you're not there. I know you invited Leo, the new kid. For example, it would be important for you to be at the workshop to share this activity with him. The workshop is a place to learn, but also to have fun, to feel good and be with friends.

Eduardo, I would really like you to answer me this letter to know how you are. You can write something on paper and give it to Sandra, who will send it to me. Or, if you have an email address, reply to this address: victoria.lugo@ ucaldas.edu.co.

I send you a hug, Vicky

This was Eduardo's immediate response:[90]

I can't write from my email because I forgot my address. And thank you very much for the note. I'm really happy you are studying and don't worry because I'll go back to the workshop and continue to move ahead with enthusiasm. You are a very nice person with everyone; that's what counts in this world. I appreciate it, really. And thank you very much for everything you have done for me; that really touches my heart. You're like a mom for me. I wish you much happiness, Viky. I love you a lot. Lots of luck.

Leo, my foster brother, says hi. We miss you. Come back soon. I love you like a dear mother and I love that about spring and autumn and the snow. It all sounds great. Eduardo. Enjoy all that. A thousand blessings.

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[90] I had to edit the spelling mistakes to make it understandable; at this point Eduardo was just learning to read and write.

I read this message with tears in my eyes. I was much moved. This was my response:

> Eduardo:
> I'm so happy you're going to the workshop and that you got my letter. I hope you don't miss any more of the workshop. Your note also touches my heart. I think you have lovely feelings. I didn't realize Leo was your foster brother. All the more reason to go with him to the workshop and help him a lot at this early stage in the program. I'm going to take your advice; I'm going to study and really enjoy all of this. A hug. Vicky.[91]

As can be seen, both the certificate and the letters sought, as suggested by White (2006), to expand Eduardo's territory of identity, giving him reasons to understand he was important to me and to everyone in the workshop, trying to restore his sense of appreciation for himself. It was valuable to him to realize he was important to someone, which responded to the fact he was alive, that his life was part of another's, even when that person was far away. Eduardo was committed during the last phase of the workshop. He was active, never absent, and didn't threaten to stay away again. We were able to build a relationship of respect, even in the midst of his disrespectful relationships with others; a relationship in which he followed the rules, despite his anomie, mainly at his foster home. On several occasions I had to reprimand him sternly and he responded sweetly, nobly. I thought Eduardo needed authority, exercised lovingly and acknowledging everything he is. I believed the relational situation inside the workshop, the *Green Zone*, could serve as an example of how he might behave outside.

In December 2012, the workshop came to an end and the social worker that was important to him left the program. He began having trouble with epilepsy, a condition that had never been diagnosed much less treated. In early 2013, he committed a serious fault at his foster home and was banned from the program. We hugged each other as we said goodbye and he took my phone number with him, promising to call if he ever needed anything. Our time together had been too short.

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[91] All these letters can be seen in the *Talleriando* 30. Make-Up, Jargon and Letters, October 23, 2012.

A friend posted the following story in Facebook: "Women in one African tribe, when they decide to have a child, sit under a tree and concentrate until they hear the song of the child who wants to be born. After listening to the song, they return to the man who will be the child's father and teach him the song. Then, at some point while making love in an attempt to conceive the child, they sing its song, inviting the child to come. While pregnant, the mother teaches the child's song to the people around her, so that when it is born, the old women and others around her can welcome it with its own song. As the child grows, whenever it falls and is hurt, or when it does something good, the people of the tribe honor it by singing its song. Tribesmen sing to the child on another occasion also: if the child commits a crime or displays socially aberrant behavior he or she is called into the center of the village and surrounded by the community.[92] And they sing his or her song. The tribe realizes that the proper way to correct antisocial behavior is not through punishment, but love and recovery of identity. When one recognizes one's own song, one no longer desires or needs to cause others harm."[93] I think this is what we tried to do with Eduardo, to expand his territory of identity, but we didn't have enough time. We didn't know his song, couldn't find it, and couldn't sing it together.

But besides the tribute to Eduardo, the name *Green Zone* refers to the dialogic space created in the workshops that allowed for the construction of new meanings, stories and images, which was the goal of this research. This *zone* really is a physical, emotional and relational space that arose among us and allowed us to know each other, to transform ourselves and the youth, to move forward in their processes of recovery and restoration. The *Green Zone i*s both an area of group activity and the results of this activity in all of us. As McNamee & Shotter (2004) affirm, when someone performs an action, this action cannot be attributed entirely to the individual, because these actions are partially formed by the actions of others. Our dialogic actions, our *Green Zone*, belong neither to the youth nor to me; it is truly "ours". This reality or

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[92] Similar to the story narrated previously about the indigenous Colombian community that refers to these youth as "disharmonized".

[93] Published by Nathalia Aguirre, October 26, 2013. A video is also available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTEIWVGGsNw.

dialogical space is experienced as an external reality or as a third agency, with its own ethical demands and requirements.

The *Green Zone* is a dialogic practice that I have positioned on the *margins* because this is where the youth are located socially, excluded from Colombian society.[94] They have never been the *center* of national attention, or the *focus* of programs and policies. Marginal can also mean on the fringe, on a tightrope, on the border between what is legal and illegal, between military and civilian life, somewhere between pride and shame. Those who do not behave according to standards, expectations and conventions are also considered marginal. These youth are part of this group: their behavior is not easily predictable, no one knows what to expect from them. Those who adapt to the rules, expectations and roles obtain recognition from the group or society. Others, like these youth, must fight for recognition from the margins.

The dominant is located in the center, the alternative, on the margins. There is a certain freedom on the margins, the freedom of not having to meet the expectations or give in to peer pressure or conform to standards. On several occasions I observed this freedom in them, the freedom to be unconventional. A goal of this research is to present an alternative to the dominant discourse on child and youth ex-combatants in Colombia. We meet on the borders of their world and mine. We are on the borders of a world, in principle, unknown to me, and of another, completely unknown to them. The intersection of these two worlds creates a special activity that is neither mine nor theirs; it is joint, the *Green Zone*. In many ways, the world to which these youth belong seems much more accessible, closer to mine, than other worlds. It is perhaps precisely because I am on the margins myself that I feel I can reach them, touch them, and that they came into my life forever. "That common space creates a zone of shared relevance for each of us. An intersection that becomes sacred."[95]

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[94] I owe a debt of thanks to the excellent presentation made by Dan Wulff and Sally St. George called "A Margin-Filled Life" in Mérida (Mexico), March 23, 2012. Many of my ideas regarding margins are based on this presentation and on the reflections it generated in my work.

[95] Dan Wulff and Sally St. George. Conference "A Margin-Filled Life" in Mérida (Mexico), March 23, 2012.

Dialogue as an Emerging, Uncertain and Ongoing Process

According to Stewart & Zediker (2000), there are two different conceptions of dialogue. One they call descriptive and another called prospective. The descriptive understands dialogue as a fundamental characteristic of humanity, referring, in other words, to the irreducibly social, relational or interactional nature of the creation of sense, the dialogical character of human life. In Bakhtin's words, "life is, by nature, dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue, ask questions, listen, respond, agree, etc." (1984, p. 293). Bakhtin's dialogue is an ontological concept. Shotter (2011) shares this view by considering that, as human beings, we respond spontaneously to the spoken word, in a way that is considered an embodied activity, and that is always expressive towards others. Something unique and new is always created between living beings that meet. According to Stewart & Zediker (2000), dialogue provides different types of contradictions: stability/change, integration/separation, and expression/non-expression. These contradictions create tensions inherent in the dialogic process.

In the *Green Zone* neither the youth ex-combatants nor I could completely control what was happening; the emerging nature of each workshop created new situations, unrepeatable conversations, understandings, agreements, contradictions and disagreements. We swung constantly from integration to separation, expression to non-expression, stability to change or chaos. My position as a researcher in this regard consisted of allowing things to flow as freely as possible, without establishing too many principles or rigid rules that might impede the spontaneity of relationships, the flow of conversation, or the expression of emotions. This also meant I had to remain attentive to the process, present and available, while unable to anticipate what was coming. The questions in the air around me that helped provide me with some guidance were: What can we achieve together? What conversation can take place based on what is happening here?

I really needed to be attentive to the richness of every moment of interaction, every opportunity to engage in conversation. I was convinced of the need to abandon

my position as an expert, which meant not being in control. This is new for me and, I think, for these youth. I come from an academic tradition where anticipation, protocol, planning, and the project are highly valued. They have come from armed groups where performance standards, responsibilities and activities are clearly established and must be carried out in strict order and according to schedule. We all felt uncomfortable and one way or another had to learn to tolerate *uncertainty.* I was never sure of what would happen in the *Green Zone*. I experienced firsthand what Sheila McNamee, my advisor, told me several times: "It is more important to prepare than to plan."[96] It was more important to be prepared than to strictly plan activities, which almost always had to be altered for one reason or another. Preparation refers to orientation, expectations, the kind of "language games" in which one is involved (McNamee & Shotter, 2004). Never in my life, as a teacher or psychologist, had I faced a situation so fraught with contingencies. I couldn't be sure whether the activities I'd prepared could be accomplished, if the youth were going to show up or how new situations would arise. This meant taking risks, withstanding the associated stress, remaining open to unexpected changes and, especially, to situations within the *Green Zone*, which were opportunities for starting conversations.

If this flexibility hadn't existed, this openness to the unexpected, the G*reen Zone* would not have been feasible, because the rules would have easily been broken and the complexity of the youth's situation would have surpassed any framework. Any attempt to build a dialogic space with youth ex-combatants must adapt to the *roller coaster* that is their lives here and now; otherwise the effort is wasted. Some of the most wonderful dialogues occurred unexpectedly, when only one of the girls from the morning session showed up and we sat down to talk about her life. This was possible because I was *present, attentive and willing to listen to her story* and, especially because the relationship we had built allowed for it. The emergence, the uncertainty, and the openness to new issues were all crucial to the creation and maintenance of

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[96] Notes taken in consultation in Merida (Mexico), March 23, 2012.

the G*reen Zone* and, especially, to ensuring it remained a space of *co-evolution* for everyone.[97]

Uncertainty is also something that happens on the margins, on the edge of what is certain. In other words, total uncertainty is unbearable; it is resolved through the contradiction between stability and change. The youth and I were able to tolerate uncertainty because of the continuity and permanence, and the stable yet limited principles we established. The following principles helped me to withstand the uncertainty: while I tolerated the fact they didn't always attend the workshop, I couldn't be absent (if for some extreme situation I couldn't be present, someone known and accepted by them had to be present to perform my role). I couldn't be late, even if they were. If they left before the session ended, I remained until the end; if their attention strayed, I always tried to be attentive and to remain focused*.* Although the process was uncertain, my presence and availability had to be reliable, permanent and seamless. This in turn was an example for other teachers and students. The fundamental principle of continuity was: "The workshop is always there, no matter how many youth show up." The G*reen Zone* always had to be *open, ready, running, a reliable space and time*, to make sure they felt it was somewhere they could always return to, like home, the place you can always return to. The stability was not dependent upon the planning of activities, or rules, or authority, but on the openness, availability, and continuity in space and time, and the openness of dialogue there. The G*reen Zone* was never closed to anyone; no matter what happened everyone could be part of it.

To ensure the youth could always return, the stability and openness had to go hand in hand with flexibility that allowed them to come and go. They come and go in their daily lives (foster homes, the program, the armed group, families), fleeing, saying goodbye, some never to return. We had to accommodate this, which led them to feel that G*reen Zone* belonged to them, was theirs, and they defended it and considered it a sacred space. So said one of the Program's social workers:

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[97] Concept taken up by: Seikkula, J. & Arnkil, E. (2006). I define the process as a co-evolution because not only young people but everyone involved, and even some who observed the process from outside, were transformed.

> ...the workshop has helped provide Lucy with a form of expression, to feel recognized, and has given her a place of her own... it has been a place that welcomes and calms her and feels like something of her own. She feels no pressure there... and she hasn't given it up (the *Green Zone*). She stopped going to many others, but not this one. This one is sacred to her.[98]

Continuity and flexibility were essential: everyone was allowed to enter at any time, participation was voluntary, and there were no attendance requirements, meaning that if they failed to show up, they were not *removed* from the project, and they were always welcome, even after an absence of weeks or months. This naturally increased the uncertainty; I never knew how many or who would show up, aside from the few who always attended. This affected the training process enormously: we were constantly bringing those who had been absent or were new to the space up to date. We were never certain of achieving training goals. However, and contrary to what some might think, the attendance rate for the G*reen Zone* far exceeds that of all previous program initiatives.[99] We worked continually during a full year and could have continued; it was what they wanted most.[100]

At times, when I felt I was losing control of what was happening completely, that we had been absolutely overwhelmed by the *chaos*, when I felt the G*reen Zone* wasn't feasible, it was because certain teachers or assistants were not fulfilling their obligations and commitments: they were late, didn't provide the materials or equipment necessary for the workshop, the room wasn't clean and orderly, they left early and didn't respect prior agreements, they were ill or more scattered and emotionally unstable than the youth.[101] It is sometimes easy to confuse flexible agreements with a lack of responsibility, or improvisation with a lack of preparation. While I recognize that chaos and disorder can be an innovative force capable of

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[98] Comment by Juliana Morales, social worker in the PHT, during the focus group evaluation conducted in CEDAT. December, 2012.

[99] This can be seen more accurately in the analysis presented to CEDAT in the partial report issued in October, 2012.

[100] A year after the G*reen Zone* had ceased to function, in December (2013), Johny came to visit Manizales again and asked if he could return to the camera workshop. He was hoping it was still open and operational.

[101] All my thoughts on the subject are contained in *Talleriando* 12. Disorderly Body Shadow Performance, May 15, 2012.

producing creative results, I don't believe the G*reen Zone* could have existed without establishing a safe, reliable, continuous, ongoing and stable territory.

As I said earlier, the G*reen Zone* faced various contradictions. One of them, the contradiction between stability and change described above, created uncertainty but also forced us to develop strategies for tolerating this uncertainty. Another was the contradiction between integration and separation. After belonging to an armed organization, most of the youth ex-combatants feel comfortable in a group; they like to be with others, enjoy their company. The group for them represents organization, discipline, unity, and *esprit de corps*. If they commit a wrongful act, the idea that "we are all one" is indestructible. Loyalty to others in the group is unquestioned. Many expressed that what they liked best in the workshops was being with their peers. Sharing the space.[102]

> Alex: What did I draw? I come here because I'm here to have fun, to enjoy life, you know? The guys come too, and I really like to hang out with them. I'm happy to come. I feel like a little kid here; I have fun, I like being with the guys, having a good time. I'd like to stay until this whole thing is over (laughs).[103]

The girls especially said they enjoyed the company of the men, playing roughly with them, and I witnessed several romantic and sexual relationships develop in the G*reen Zone.* The first was between Daniela and Santiago. This relationship was present for a long time; they held hands, sat on each other's lap, caressed, stared at each other and laughed together. When Daniela wrote her story she spoke about Santiago and how jealous she was of him. Later, this relationship broke down. Santiago told me sadly that Daniela had broken up with him because of jealousy. After this happened, the G*reen Zone* became a place for dirty looks and sarcasm, where they no longer wanted to work together, all while trying to get the group to learn together. Neither of them, however, withdrew from the G*reen Zone*.

Lucy and Johny were another couple. They openly expressed their relationship. Johny defended the relationship territorially: no one was allowed to get close to Lucy

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[102] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure, December 20, 2012.
[103] *Talleriando* 23. Trees and Names, August 28, 2012.

and she constantly made him jealous with Eduardo and Camilo (the youngest and the most flirtatious of the group). Lucy at times refused to be filmed by Johny, but allowed Eduardo to do so. And Johny wouldn't allow Eduardo to film him because he was jealous. And Camilo almost always defended Lucy from nasty remarks made by Johny or Eduardo. Because Daniela and Johny were such good friends, Daniela would occasionally use him to make Santiago or Lucy jealous. So, when someone would say "I don't want to work with so-and-so" or "I don't want so-and-so to film me" (the camera played an important role here), it was because something was happening that I could only sense and had to figure out in the course of the session, talking to one or another, in order to properly understand the situation.

We also witnessed the rise and fall of the relationship between Elena and Ernesto. From the first day Ernesto entered, Elena noticed him and began a suffocating harassment. At first he accepted her because she is attractive and seductive, but he gradually tired of it, to the point of openly rejecting her. This affected both their attendance; they wouldn't come if they knew the other was there. They spoke ill of each other. During the workshop in which they drew silhouettes, Elena approached Ernesto's drawing, done with great care, and wrote: "Ernesto hates me." He was angry and I called attention to her disrespectful behavior.[104] Unfortunately, Ernesto left the program soon after. Apparently he returned to the armed groups, leaving us with the memory of his smile and his beautiful drawings. Elena continued to the end.

We also witnessed the most authentic expressions of friendship such as Alex's repeated support of Camilo or his solidarity when Camilo was admitted to the institution for drug addicts. And enmity and conflict also existed. The women especially swung easily from one extreme to another, even during the same session. The following is an example of a feud between Elena, Tatiana and Sofia. Tatiana and Elena complained about a comment Sofia had made during a conversation we had at the end of a workshop regarding group commitments, blaming the two girls for the group's lack of discipline. Sofia's response was aggressive and Elena complained to me. I met

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[104] *Talleriando* 13. Silhouettes, May 22, 2012.

with the three of them at the end of the workshop and each presented their version. I was particularly interested by Sofia's comment: "I'm not forgiving her until I can hit her."[105] I told them this type of behavior was not tolerated in this space and told Sofia specifically that she could never threaten or hit anyone in the G*reen Zone*. I later heard that Sofia had apologized to both girls. For Sofia, attending the workshops was both difficult and important. Like Jaime, the special institution where she studied wouldn't allow her to attend. She felt rejected by her peers and wanted more than anything to participate. The others' rejection was due also to the numerous fights she had had with the girls. This type of event didn't happen again between them. I can honestly say that this was the only event in which Sofia behaved in an inappropriate manner and that the professionals' predictions and warnings regarding her never came to pass.

The integration/separation contradiction was also apparent in my relationship with the youth. Maria asked me one day at the end of a session why I didn't adopt her since I had only one son and a big house.[106] This touched me enormously, especially because I had never witnessed loneliness like Maria's. Her mother died when she was two; her father gave her to a neighbor family to be taken care of her, and he joined an armed group. Later, she joined the group looking for her father, but he had already deserted. Currently, she knows nothing about him or her siblings, knows nothing of her cousins, nephews, uncles or grandparents.[107] Maria's request filled me with sadness and guilt. A week ago she invited me to a gathering of families. Because she has no family of her own, she is allowed to invite someone special to her. It wasn't until that day that I was able to explain that, more than a mother, I could be a friend, someone she could trust and count on for what she needed. We made a commitment to call each other more and spend more time together. I don't think it's enough for her.[108]

This tension was constantly present in the G*reen Zone* as the young women vied for my attention. How was I to respond to their demands? I tried hard to make

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[105] *Talleriando* 17. Camera, Breathing and Agreements, June 19, 2012.
[106] *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life, July 17, 2012.
[107] I became privy to this information through a review of her medical history. Maria was among the young women least willing to tell us her story. Her loneliness was reflected in the map of her relationships (See *Talleriando* 3. My Relationships, February 28, 2012).
[108] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. Family Meeting, Santágueda Recreation Center. November 2013.

everyone feel that they were important and deserved my attention and care. This manifested itself in the amount of time I gave them to speak, in assigning turns for speaking, in special attention and acknowledgments, in the questions asked and the way I looked at them, in sharing activities with everyone and in the distribution of materials. I participated in all activities with them in the *Green Zone* and this was an important factor in our integration. It allowed me to share their emotions, to laugh with them and listen to their conversations, to watch ourselves in the videos, on TV, to inhabit the relational micro-world of the *Green Zone*, and they began to see me not only as a teacher or a psychologist, but as another classmate.

The expression/non-expression contradiction was also present throughout the process. As stated earlier, those who experience trauma often lose their voice. This is especially true when the trauma is due to war, where silence, obedience and rigidity of body are the favored survival strategies. "De-anesthetizing the body" was a key to expanding the expressive possibilities.[109] Given their passage through armed groups, the youth reached the program with complete body armor, rigid yet docile bodies, claiming to be emotionless, insensitive bodies that didn't cry, bodies that march instead of walk. They stand firm with stiff knees instead of slightly bending them. They are careful of every step instead of walking casually. It was important to release these bodies, make them more flexible and willing to be touched, to awaken them. The director of the PHT put it this way:

> ... And Adriana Lucia ... I think that opening up, which is so difficult for her, has also been important... building other things, opening up, continuing to earn trust and build the confidence in herself, which has meant so much to her, primarily her desire to be there, her fear in the beginning of opening up, relaxing, letting go of her body, and then to let herself go during the process, I think it was very important to her.[110]

Perhaps the most rigid bodies, those most marked by their passage through the war, were those of Eduardo and Johny. They refused to be moved. They complained

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[109] I thank Claudia Tamayo, a psychologist at the PHT, for putting it this way. Focus Group, December 2012.

[110] Comment by Juliana Morales, a social worker at the PHT. Focus group, December 2012.

continually and didn't want to dance or run or lie down, much less close their eyes for any activity. They were terrified of closing their eyes, dropping their guard, and risking becoming aware of their bodies or their breathing. Instead, they enjoyed performing exercises that involved the use of physical strength, competing to see who could do the most push-ups or squats, activities that showed off their masculinity. Nevertheless, by the end of the *Green Zone*, we managed to motivate them to make clay puppets and participate in the artistic makeup session where, like most of the other young men and women, they enjoyed touching each other's faces, changing them into other faces, and allowing their peers to touch them. They displayed a sensitivity that no one would have imagined behind such rigid bodies.

From the beginning I feared the telling of war stories. Not so much what they might say, but the others' reactions to these stories, which I feared I wouldn't be able to control; and not just the youth's reactions, but those of the other teachers, students or assistants as well. I feared discriminatory reactions that might re-traumatize or victimize. I think I protected them, and us, so this wouldn't happen. However, several painful stories were told, spontaneously rather than premeditated, and our response as an audience was attentive and compassionate. But their stories weren't only about war; they told tales of love, heartbreak, dreams, abandonment, mistreatment and abuse as well. Both individual and collective stories were shared. Each of them, at some point, had the opportunity to speak about their lives and to listen to the stories of others. Complete life stories, as in Mariana's case ("The Commander's Daughter"), and Daniela's ("Looking for a Dad"), and Adriana Lucia's ("To Be Somebody in Life"). Stories told in drawings like those of Tatiana, Ernesto and Santiago; relational drawings that told family stories. Everyday stories told through acting exercises by Adriana Lucia, Cielo and Mariana; the collective stories of Eduardo and Julio about the trees and animals in the jungle. Daniela and Maria's imagined stories of the future, or stories of fairy godmothers that grant wishes. The stories told in the letters written. Parts of their lives were expressed and other parts were narrated elsewhere, outside the *Green Zone*, in more private spaces. Still others we never knew. Some of the young people opened their lives and their worlds to us; others did not.

Expanding their possibilities and ability to tell stories allowed the youth, and those of us who listened to them, to relate the events in their lives in the context of a different meaning. This occurs within the framework of actual experience. Relating these facts implies structuring perceptual experience (images at times disassociated from words), organizing the fragments of their stories (scattered puzzle pieces), connecting memories, recalling certain pieces they thought had been lost, and being able to narrate meaningfully and coherently. The way events unfold in the stories promotes the perception that the world is changing, that each story has multiple perspectives and versions. This is critical for children and youth who have been to war.

Another contradiction with regard to expression/non-expression had to do with the way the video cameras were used. At least one video camera, and sometimes two, operated continually by the audiovisual instructor, the two assistants, or by the youth themselves. At the beginning, several youth felt shy in front of the camera. I felt the same way. However, with the passage of time, we got used to them, some of us quicker than others, to the point of talking, waving, gesturing, or posing for them. The camera became another observer, a mirror in which we saw ourselves and others, a mediator as we began expanding our possibilities of expression. Some of the youth, especially the men, enjoyed watching what their peers were doing more than participating directly in certain activities. This was useful for the activities they disliked, such as dancing or theater. The videos they recorded show the things that most aroused their interest, the kind of relationships made possible by holding the camera, and the way that others responded to this circumstance. Filming and taking photos is a form of expression used by them, and all of us. Our joint activity was recorded there and we were able to observe ourselves and others. At the same time, some of the youth used the camera as a refuge from having to express themselves directly with their bodies. In these cases, the camera acted as a mediator for those with difficulties of expression. The camera allowed them to observe with minimal participation, while performing a function considered important and communicating with others through the camera.

Finally, I can say that the G*reen Zone* allowed for the expression of many voices; the area constructed by everyone involved was *polyphonic.* Some of these voices spoke out loud, others were embodied experiences, and still others were internal experiences, because the right to non-participation, non-expression, was also observed. In music, polyphony refers to multiple, simultaneous voices, independent but also interdependent. I refer not only to the voices of those individuals present, but to the many voices in each of us, the voices that inhabit us, the voices we believe are ours but perhaps are the hidden voice of the other speaking through us. And these many different voices took part in the construction of new meanings. Each participant brought to the G*reen Zone*, in one way or another, his or her network of relationships, the different audiences with which they communicate. When I asked the youth on different occasions about the people close to them, these people entered the conversation and the echoes of their voices were present. This conversation affects the youth's internal dialogues, those held in the *Green Zone,* and those they had outside it, with the people they are close to.

> During the workshop on mapping relationships, Camilo barely had time to finish drawing everyone in his family. I said: "Draw the most important" and he replied: "They're all important." Camilo's map seems to me the best expression of how conversations are transferred to those they are close to, of how a request for a certain activity becomes a polyphonic dialogue. Each circle includes a picture, a name, and a few words directed at that person. These are the texts written on the poster:

Figure 8. Map of relations by Camilo, February 2012.

These are my beloved grandparents. This is my uncle, the person who loved me most in my life.

I love you mommy, my very young mother. This is the mommy of my soul; without her I wouldn't be alive. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't be alive. She saved me and helped me escape the armed group. Thank you, Mommy; I owe you my life.

From the Nacional (soccer) team. I'm Camilo, the beautiful daddy.

This is my aunt, who I love most.

This is the time spent in the armed group. Me and my girlfriend. I'm here because of my mom, who saved my life. I owe her my life.

Hey, cousin, you should stop beating your little sister. I love you with all my heart. I'd give my life for you.

This is the puppy that I will soon have. I love you, puppy. I love you, little puppy.

My uncle, when he was in the armed group, in the Army I mean. The damn vultures.[111]

As Seikkula & Arnkil (2006, p.2) put it: "One is in a network of relationships even when only two people are present. We form those relationships all the time, as the voices of others echo in our conversations." Not just the voices of family, but those of trained professionals as well. From inside the G*reen Zone* we speak to other professionals and they speak to us through the youth. As well as to the foster homes, their friends, their families. This is an expression of polyphony: from this zone we spoke to other audiences.

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[111] *Talleriando* 3. My Relationships, February 28, 2012.

The *Green Zone* became an example of methodology for the trained professionals working in the PHT. In the final evaluation we performed with them, they stressed this point: the collaborative structure allowed the youth to remain. They thought of this space as their own and defended it. And so, instead of the difficulty experienced in the past, the youth's desire to "flee, escape, leave",[112] it was now a question of how to address, sustain and resolve this issue. Trained professionals in the PHT realized that there are other ways of relating to youth ex-combatants, which may more effectively bring about change and transformation. This eventually resulted in a training process for the entire team of professionals constituting an expression of the *Green Zone* for other external audiences.[113]

The Collaborative Architecture of Dialogic Practice

As I said earlier, dialogue can be conceived as either descriptive or prescriptive. The above section deals with the descriptive conception. The prescriptive conception, according to Stewart & Zediker (2000), refers to dialogue as a goal achieved through certain ethical choices. Even if we assume the dialogic concept as ontological, that life is responsive, it is also recognized, specifically in daily communication, that one can act dialogically or monologically. In other words, dialogue is not a permanent activity, but instead a special and particular quality that is achieved in certain kinds of relationships, a real possibility, a potential. Spontaneous responsiveness can recognize or ignore the other. It can become reality in a monologic or dialogic setting. In the monologic setting, the central guide for the activity is located within the individual. In the dialogic, the speaker relates to the social field, constantly adapting to the statements of the others present. The answer is never final, but provisional, opening ever wider perspectives. The focus in dialogue is on the border (the margins), the area between us, where we find people.

Conversation, therefore, can be monologic or dialogic Seikkula & Arnkil (2006). The former consists of statements that communicate the speaker's thoughts, without

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[112] Claudia Tamayo, psychologist at the PHT. Focus group, December 2012.

[113] This experience will be described in more detail in another publication, as it exceeds the scope of this dissertation.

adapting to the listener or the environment. Often, this kind of talk has the effect of silencing the other through domination or control of the available means of explanation. The dominant players impose their singular visions of the situation on others. Although there is always a response, none of the participants are really listening to the others or recognizing them as legitimate interlocutors. Anderson & Goolishian (1992/1996) express it well when they say that a person can speak *to* another (monologue) or *with* another (dialogue).

The G*reen Zone*, besides being a physical, emotional and relational space belonging to us that unfolded in a spontaneous, uncertain and constantly changing manner, as presented in the previous section, was also a space constructed intentionally and that can be presented as a result of the relationship with the youth ex-combatants. As H. Anderson (2013) sees it, dialogic practice requires a design, a collaborative architecture, to be possible, to become a living option and not simple rhetoric.

The collaborative design of the G*reen Zone* had its foundations in the way the youth ex-combatants were seen and *my position as a researcher with regard to the listener, response time, dialogic time, and the future, proximity to everyday life.* These foundations are visibly expressed in the construction of the physical space, time management, the use of language, the preparation, the way agreements were reached, decision making, the focus, and others.

As I stated in a previous chapter, I see the youth ex-combatants (the other-for-me) as survivors rather than victims, brave people capable of surviving war in the midst of extreme hardship. Despite the insecurity and adversity, as Butler (2009/2010) puts it, these lives deserve to be mourned; they are lives worth living. Getting to know the lives of these youth ex-combatants allowed me (I-for-me) to understand that survival depended fundamentally on relationships with others. Their existence did not depend on themselves alone but on the relationships that preceded, maintained and endured them. At the same time, I came to understand that although they may have lost some of these people before or during the war, they survived these losses. In

other words, it's not the relationship with any specific person, including their parents, that makes their lives possible; it is their relationship with another specific "you", which can even be "Another", or "me". [114] The disappearance of these "Others" in the lives of youth ex-combatants threatened their survival. And yet they managed to move forward, because "Others" appear with whom they can relate, and I count myself among these "Others." "Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its resurrection party" (Bakhtín, 1979/2000, p.116).

My own survival as a human being is also supported through my relationship to them, because I exposed myself to them and they came into my world to transform it forever, and from now on I will live differently, having learned the limits of pain and suffering, humiliation and anger produced by mistreatment, abuse and war. They survived physically; here are they with their scarred bodies, but their social survival, the possibility of being recognized, is constantly threatened. While I recognize the strength they demonstrated by getting out of the war alive, I sense the fragility of their lives now that they have left the war (Other-that-is-not-me). It was fundamental that the *Green Zone* should acknowledge that the lives of youth ex-combatants are worth living, that the circumstances they have experienced have a meaning and rationality worth understanding and sharing, so that they and we can learn from their lives. To do so, they need us to let them speak, they need to be truly heard, to fully express themselves and participate in social conversation, and even be allowed to discuss the conditions of their self-acknowledgement.

Determining who the youth ex-combatants are is an ethical stance. As Wittgenstein (1953/2008) suggests, we can't talk about ethics, we can only exercise them by examining the assumptions inherent in the limits of the language we use. Ethics is a constant exercise in thinking about how we construct meaning, how we relate to one another, and how we explore new relational spaces, such as the *Green Zone*. This reflection provides the limits of our description of the world and all possible actions. It is ethics in action that allow us to recognize our relational responsibility. Am

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[114] Based on Bakhtin, M. (1979/2000).

I responsible only to myself? Am I responsible for youth ex-combatants and for what has happened to them and to others who have born the brunt of our war? Is what we are in Colombia necessarily linked to them? Could I exist without their world? What are the boundaries that set us apart or bring us closer?

According to McNamee (2007), the challenge in life is to find a way to approach the "Other" (including the "Other" considered immoral) as "Another" both coherent and rational inside his or her own community of meaning, reaching beyond their differences. I found it extremely challenging in the G*reen Zone* to consider the youth ex-combatants as coherent, rational partners, to distance myself from my assessments of what is right or wrong, who is a good person and who is not. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the *Green Zone* was that the youth ex-combatants did not feel they were being judged. Whatever story they told, my response, in principle, and gradually that of the other youth, was to legitimize it as interesting, worthy of being heard. Whether the most mundane stories of getting up in the morning, a pet, or a fight with a sweetheart, or of painful loss, like Daniela losing her friend in the war, or of Maria's terrible loneliness, the stories were heard; there was a space for them. There were no good or bad stories. No story was more interesting or more important than any other.

Returning to McNamee (2007), humans build different moral orders, different positions or ways of being in the world, which are taken for granted as necessary to maintain a good life. Moral orders emerge from the social conventions implicit in sustaining social order. We operate within moral orders whenever we state what *ought to be,* to ourselves or others, for a given action or group of actions. These moral orders are not static, however, but updated in our everyday interactions with others, in the way we justify our actions, representing a moral order, the expectations taken for granted, the way we believe things should be (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). And each is no more solid or permanent than the communication patterns that created them. Moral orders arise from interactions with others. They are created, not discovered. The following is an example of this possible creation:

A 15 year-old boy with the same name as my own 13 year-old son attended the first workshops we conducted. When I heard him speak for the first time, presenting his map of relations, it was as if my own son were talking: his love of soccer, being with friends, and, in the center of the map, a girl who takes his breath away. On this map he wrote: "I'm a very happy person. Daniela is a very beautiful girl. My mom is the most important, along with my dad. I love them all. Daniela is a semi-girlfriend." Upon hearing this presentation I couldn't help but think that if my son had been born into different circumstances in life, he might also have ended up in the war and so he isn't really so different from them. I also thought that this young boy, despite having been to war, survived as a young man with much in common with other people his age, like my own son. What is different about their lives? It's not exactly a question of one being good and the other bad. [115]

My daily relationship with the youth ex-combatants allowed me to deconstruct some social discourses about them, to question the way they have been appraised from the expert's perspective. The *Green Zone* expanded our ability to coordinate the multiple, diverse and conflicting moral orders we were involved in. We all had an opportunity to turn away from our well-rehearsed performances, the well-coordinated rituals born of our academic or war-born communities. We also experienced moral conflicts that were not resolved (such as Alex losing one of the cameras), but this never threatened our ability to "keep the conversation alive." As McNamee says,

More challenging and more humane is finding a way to bridge these differences. The challenge we face is to take this understanding of how communication processes construct moral orders and use this same attention to process, not content and not individual moral character, so we might bridge these moralities thereby providing some way to continue the conversation… Dialogue, as a very special form of communication, places our attention on coordinating multiple moral orders. I would like to suggest that dialogue is a way to move beyond the oppression of one moral order over another (2007, p. 11).

To assume that youth ex-combatants are valid interlocutors whose lives are worth living demanded a change in the way I saw myself as a researcher and psychologist. The first of these changes meant making an effort to build a collaborative relationship with everyone, with the young people, the teachers, the students and the assistants, as a framework for any dialogic practice that might emerge. A *collaborative*

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[115] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. February 2012.

relationship, according to Anderson (2009), refers to the way we orient ourselves to be and act with, and respond to others, so that everyone shares a link and in joint action. The joint action of teachers, students and auxiliaries was, on the one hand, to prepare the sessions, and on other to participate with the youth in the *Green Zone* with all that this implied.[116] Every one of these people was also responsible to a broader institutional framework such as a public university, a PhD program, the PHT, or a state institution such as the ICBF, with all its conditions and rules.

A collaborative process does not emerge naturally; it must be constructed through dialogue, listening, commitment, and time. It's not something that simply appears just because we want it to. It has to be motivated and driven through many actions, conversations, movements, words, and invitations, which don't always seem important enough to be included in a research report. I remained on hand to listen to everyone's demands, needs, and expectations, even conflicts that could jeopardize the process. Each group had its own characteristics, demands and expectations that had to be coordinated and synchronized in order for the process to evolve. I assumed the role of *communicating bridge* between these groups, inside and outside the *Green Zone,* not only because of my extreme commitment to the process and the amount of time I made available for it, but especially because of my willingness to hear, receive and handle complaints from almost everyone involved in the *Green Zone.*

There were exceptions, such as when the second group of students left because "we didn't meet their expectations," or Julio's frustration over not being able to make a video of his story, or Andres' poor performance digitally monitoring the *Green Zone,* or the impossibility of Manuel continuing, despite all efforts, or the frustration we felt when the drawing workshop couldn't take place, or the fact that Adriana Lucia never got the "book" with photos of her hair and makeup work, and probably others I don't know about or forgot. When I analyze these unmet expectations, which basically become frustrations, I think it was the coordination process that failed. I think

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[116] I made a great effort to ensure that the joint action would also cover the reflections on what was happening in the *Green Zone.* To this end I created the "*Talleriando*" strategy, as presented in the chapter on methodology. However, this was not possible with other teachers. Collaboration is also an invitation to voluntary participation; sometimes this invitation is not accepted.

sometimes the coordination between us became "sedimented", in the words of Gergen, reiterating exchange patterns, patterns of behavior resulting in the freezing of meaning: vicious circles to prove who among colleagues is right; manipulative behavior patterns that generated aggressive reactions among the youth or on the part of teachers; simulations for personal gain; excuses to avoid taking responsibility for failing to do something; easy promises made by teachers in public and never honored; to name only a few. However, I believe that almost all the expectations of everyone involved were met because the actions of certain people helped establish the actions of others (co-constituent coordination) and we strove to make sure that "thanatopic" coordination, which leads to the death of meaning and the destruction of the ideas of others, was never present (Gergen, McNamee & Barret, 2001).

Building a relationship of this kind meant I had to make use of prior learning, not only as a researcher and psychologist; it also meant unlearning practices I had traditionally used and testing new forms of action with youth ex-combatants. Ultimately, it meant constructing a *performance* or staging inside and outside the G*reen Zone* that would allow dialogue to emerge along with transformative action. As a psychologist, I was trained to *listen* carefully, a skill I have maintained and that has proven useful in both personal and professional contexts. However, I believe that most psychologists listen from the expert's position, looking for the key information needed to make a diagnosis, from the position of the keeper of the knowledge needed to interpret the lives of others and determine what should and should not be done. I don't want to entirely discredit this position because I recognize that in certain contexts and in circumstances it is necessary and useful. However, in the G*reen Zone*, whose primary interest was to allow for the emergence of dialogue and the young people's stories, this position was clearly not called for. For research purposes, the "expert" position created an asymmetric, hierarchical, authoritarian relationship that would separate me from the youth. I had to learn to listen differently, to listen, as H. Anderson (2009) says, to learn about the history of each person, to understand what is being said.

A life worth living is reflected in a story that is worth being heard and that awakens a genuine interest. There can be no genuine interest in knowing if I believe in advance that I *already* know everything about that life, about the story to be told. This is what H. Anderson (2009) refers to as the position of "not knowing". It is a critical attitude that implies a mistrust of one's own expert knowledge and an attitude of curiosity about the other's life. The other is the expert, the one who makes it possible for me to learn more, stay informed, and learn from him or her. This does not mean that expert knowledge is not part of dialogic practice. It refers to the place occupied by this knowledge, and to the possibility of creating spaces for the other's knowledge and wisdom, making them part of the relationship and not concluding too quickly that we understand. Adriana Lucía recognized this: "The fact that others listen to you is really important." [117]

Besides abandoning the expert position and assuming one of "not knowing", the narrative therapy of double-listening (Denborough, 2008; White, 2006), or what I call multiple listening, also proved useful. Listening is transformed once you understand that there are no "single stories", but diverse stories within what seems to be a single story. Not only do you hear the story of the trauma but the response to this trauma, and the effect of this response on the life of the person, and on the lives of others, as well. Not only is the story of the narrator heard, but also the stories of those who speak through him or her, and through the social discourse. Single stories, and their single listeners, generally correspond to the stereotype of the dominant discourse.[118]

The response is critical to the process of listening from a position of mutual learning and inquiry. A good listener *responds* during conversation, responds to the other's statements. This was something else I had to learn. I had been trained, as a psychologist, to respond with a "hmm", to ensure emotional neutrality. As a researcher, I was to remain a non-participatory observer, or if I was a participant, to

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[117] *Talleriando* 13. Silhouettes, May 22, 2012.

[118] I acknowledge here the impact of Chimamanda Adichie's conference regarding the danger of a single story on this work. To consult this conference go to: http://sinsistema.net/blog/el-peligro-de-una-sola-historia-chimamanda-adichie/

limit my involvement for evaluative neutrality, to avoid a researcher's bias. From a constructionist perspective, dialogic practice requires response during the conversation, and because the course of the conversation is unknown, the response cannot be prefabricated. All responses, whether words, questions, tone of voice, posture, movement, gestures, looks, laughter, and even tears, occurred spontaneously during conversation and as part of the listening process. Listening could not, therefore, be separated from the response; they are the same dialectic continuum. But if the response is guided by this type of listening, it is one interested in knowing more, clarifying, expanding and better understanding the story; questions seek to uncover details in the story, not to confirm what is already known.[119] Questions are open-ended and do not presuppose correct or incorrect answers. Neither does the response attempt to establish what "ought to be" according to my own moral order, but instead tries to understand other moral orders in order to coordinate them (Shotter, 1993/2001).

Another key aspect of the architecture of the dialogic space was time management, or *dialogic time* as some refer to it (Seikkula & Arnlkil, 2006). Its main feature is the pause, to let the other finish his or her idea with sufficient time to express thoughts and establish the internal dialogue allowing the person to organize ideas. Ideas emerge in the process of talking; they aren't there, ready to be expressed. One might say it's a kind of thinking out loud in which we recognize our own thoughts as they are enunciated to others and we adapt them to what we have just listened to, which is a complex process. Often the youth were asked to speak in front of everyone. It was difficult for some of them; however, given time to organize their thoughts and express their fear of speaking in front of others, they slowly found words, constructing their ideas publicly. This is why dialogue is understood as a public forum. The pause was also critical when I spoke. It gave me time to organize ideas, to better tailor the questions and the answers to what the youth expressed.

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[119] For an example of this, see: *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life, July 17, 2012.

Dialogic time also refers to each person's unique conversational pace. Some, like Eduardo, spoke briefly; others, like Alex, began speaking and seemed to make public addresses. Others, like Elena and Santiago, only spoke when ask a direct question. The G*reen Zone* had to adapt to everyone's different rhythms. And, it was difficult for them to learn to take turns speaking. The idea of separating speech from listening comes from Tom Andersen (1991/1994) in his proposed reflecting teams. The idea is that when someone speaks, others listen, in order to foster internal dialogue and avoid the tendency to comment on each of the other's statements, interrupting the flow of speech. I didn't make a point of asking them to raise their hands before speaking; instead I asked them to respect the fact that their peers were addressing everyone. The idea was to stress listening, allowing the speaker to finish before speaking, and sometimes to assign turns.

Another conclusion I reached in relation to time refers to the time processes can take and the time young people, and perhaps all us, need to make changes in our lives. The onset of the G*reen Zone* was a difficult period: training and preparing the group of teachers and students, inviting to the youth, establishing appropriate schedules for everyone, the water shortage in the city at the time the workshops began, and coordinating a program filled with rules and conditions. This requires work and patience and does not arise spontaneously. We worked for a year and looking back now I think time was short. They repeatedly said, "We want to continue the workshops", but all projects have limited time and resources. We couldn't remain in the G*reen Zone.* Ironically, they wanted the workshops to continue but some of them were often in a hurry, asking to leave before the session was over because they supposedly had other important matters to attend to. Especially Alex, Eduardo, Johny and Lucy. It was important for them to learn to wait, to stay put until the end of the session, to not run away or escape, to stay. And most of them did manage to stay. Others who left returned. Camilo, in particular, had to learn to wait; from the time he arrived he would ask for his snack. He had to wait up to two hours for it, but learned to wait and I learned to hold off giving it to him right away.

In regard to time, I realized that change does not come overnight for some young people. I'd like to tell Daniela's story because it best illustrates this idea:

> Just over a year ago, Daniela and her father found each other after a lifetime of searching. She had been told her father was dead but was never entirely convinced of it. He had made every attempt to find her but had failed. He realized she was alive after receiving a call on December 24, informing him that Daniela had separated from the armed group and was now under state protection. A year ago, he attended a meeting of families. Everyone was very happy; they enjoyed the meeting together, talked, and got to know each other. He wanted to give Daniela his surname because she had taken her maternal grandmother's. Everything was set for them to go to the notary when at the last minute Daniela said she wasn't going. We were all very surprised. Her father could only shed tears and return to his village. When I spoke with Daniela she said: "I can't love a father overnight. I was born of the earth and air, not of any person." I interpret this "not being born of any person" as meaning that she doesn't know what it is to be a daughter or have a father and however nice this father might seem, she needed time to understand their relationship. A month ago, a year later, her father returned and they went to the notary, both of them willing: he wanted her to take his surname and she wanted to change her first name to Daniela, a new name for her new life, for the plant that has "just begun to grow", the phrase with which she ends her history.[120]

An additional resource I intentionally introduced into the collaborative architecture of this dialogic space was *focusing on the future*, as McNamee (2007) recommends. The danger of allowing the past to settle, reifying history and therefore making it static and unchanging is immense. I had to learn this too since, as a psychologist I was trained in a model that focuses on the past to explain what happens in the present and predict what will be in the future. This meant I had to break with a deeply rooted way of understanding how we as humans construct ourselves. In the G*reen Zone*, more than anywhere else in my life, I realized that the past is always a story, that this story of the past is updated constantly in our conversations with others. We made no attempt to avoid conflict or the past. In fact, the stories of most of the youth are about their past, but I made a point during conversation to ask questions about the future, to incorporate activities that required them to imagine, to open up the past that holds them and seems incapable of change to new possibilities. We spoke not only about the

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[120] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. November, 2013.

future, but about a *positive* future, reviving hopes, dreams, and ideals forgotten during their passage through the war.

The primary aim of this deployment of skills and strategies was to make the *Green Zone* an adequate space for dialogue in which the youth ex-combatants could feel safe and not threatened. Basically, I wanted them to *trust* us and to trust in the physical space we set up. I think I did everything possible to become a host in a space that was an unknown for them, so they would always feel welcome as my guests, as in Derrida's metaphor of unconditional hospitality (2000). I think most of the youth always felt welcome. Cielo cut out an image from a magazine and wrote: "I like coming (to the workshop) because we share there, as if we were a family". [121]

Everything I mention in this chapter contributed significantly to building a relationship of *trust*, something difficult to achieve in the lives of these young people, as I've said, not only with me but, progressively, with each other. But this trust isn't necessarily established forever; they, like I, question it constantly. They were constantly testing the limits of this trust, carefully interpreting the reactions to this testing, and if the responses weren't consistent, coherent, continuous and permanent, their trust began to weaken again. I was kept up a careful evaluation of how our trust was developing or weakening, of the opportunities that cemented it, or the ways in which it might suffer. Building a space of trust is essential to any dialogic practice and more so when dealing with youth who have experienced and survived extremely traumatic situations. A social worker with the PHT acknowledged the way we managed to build a trusting relationship:

> …so (the youth) don't speak of Vicky the psychologist, or Vicky the mother… Vicky isn't cataloged as a friend, or a mother; Vicky is all these things, but at the same time she represents trust. [122]

Initially, we established few explicit rules: a) they were in the *Green Zone* because they wanted to be there; participation was voluntary and they could leave whenever they

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[121]*Talleriando* 13. Silhouettes, May 22, 2012.

[122] Comment by Mariela Mahecha, social worker at the PHT. Focus group, December 2012.

wanted; b) in the *Green Zone*, young people were not forced to do anything they didn't want to do. If they refused to take part in an activity, they were welcome to sit and watch their peers, or use the camera to record them. If they didn't want to speak, they didn't have to. They could keep silent or refuse to answer any questions; and c) everyone was to arrive and leave on time. From the beginning, I understood that for the youth to take part in the *Green Zone* there mustn't be too many rules, conditions, requirements, threats or sanctions.

> Daniela told me after the first motivation session that she wasn't going to participate because she didn't enjoy any of that --dancing, acting, drawing, taking photos, etc.. I told her it didn't matter; she could just sit and observe what her peers did. She came to the following workshop and took part in all the proposed activities, even those she said she didn't enjoy. Within months, she began to come both in the morning and in the afternoon; even though it was the same workshop, it was different, because only women attended the morning class and men came in the afternoon. Daniela was among those who participated most in the Green Zone. She occasionally served as a monitor and remained committed until the end of the process. She had just needed to feel free to decide which activities she wanted to take part in and that she had a right to opt out or remain silent.[123]

Only after I was sure that the young people felt comfortable in this space and began to experience *trust* in our relationships did I dare talk about group rules. A student of social work and practitioner in the PHT had the following to say about her experience:

> I think its strength lies in that possibility of relating, the possibility of feeling loved, valued, a sense of belonging to the space, to the people in it. Because they are themselves inside it; they feel free because they don't have to follow the rules all the time, "do this, do that, if you don't do this then ta, ta, ta". They are what they are and they don't have to pretend. That's what it is; it's not a simulated relationship; it's a relationship based on what they are. I think this is fundamental. [124]

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[123] *Talleriando* 1. Statues, December 2, 2011.
[124] Comment by Daiana Garcés, student and social work practitioner PHT. Focus group, December 2012.
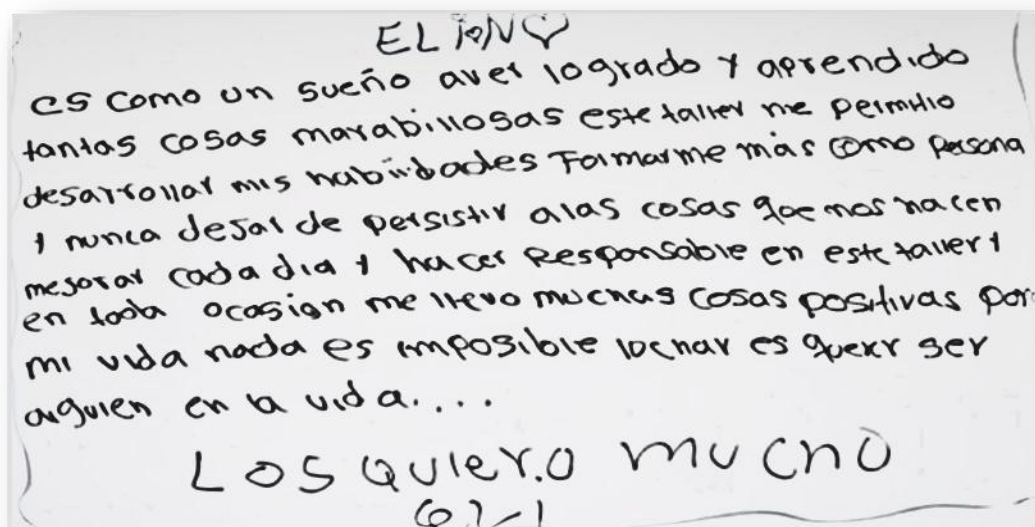
The Green Zone as a Restorative Process

Figure 9. *Green Zone* Evaluation by Elena, December 2012. [125]

Anderson (2003) has suggested that dialogue is intrinsically transforming in the sense that participants are engaged in an activity that is alive, new, and cannot help but be changed. Transformation is understood as modification, difference and movement. The changes produced may be minimal and lack drama, imperceptible to the external eye, since they refer to ways of relating differently or new meanings created during conversation. In the G*reen Zone* we took the risk of acting differently, which allowed for modifications in the way we related to others, inside and outside the zone. It opened the doors to new connections in the way the youth see themselves, understand the meaning of their actions with regard to others, and connect with one another. As McNamee & Shotter (2004) suggest, transformative dialogue can create new identities, relationships and stories. This is what I mean by restoration.

These modifications were never measured or evaluated based on a given parameter. I was only able to assess them based on observations and reflections made

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[125] "It's like a dream to have achieved and learned so many marvellous things. This workshop allowed me to develop my skills, become more of a person, and never stop persevering in the things that make us improve every day and to be responsible, here in this workshop and always. I'm taking away many positive things for my life: nothing is impossible, fight for what you want, become somebody in life. I love you all a lot." (Elena, December 2012)

during the year in which the G*reen Zone* operated, on statements made by the youth regarding what they learned and what was important to them in the two evaluation workshops that took place, and on observations by people who didn't participate in the G*reen Zone* but who came into close and constant contact with them, like the PHT professionals.

In preceding paragraphs I mentioned the changes we had to produce during construction of the G*reen Zone*. I will now focus specifically on the most important changes, at least those I was aware of, regarding the lives and identities of the youth ex-combatants.

Restoring a Sense of Worth Regarding What They Are and What They Can Become

In the evaluation workshops conducted with young people in the Gr*een Zone* the word most often pronounced, drawn and used in stories was *respect*. In other words, what they most valued about the G*reen Zone* was the feeling of respect. This meant their lives, their stories, their futures were considered important. They were appreciated for what they are (as amply supported in the previous sections), and this helped them value their stories from an appreciative framework and to begin to recognize the value of their peers' stories as well.

> Alex: What did I learn?
> Vicky: Yes, what was the most important thing for you?
> Alex: I learned many things. I learned to respect other people. I learned teamwork. I learned about things I didn't know from other people, you know what I mean? I learned that everyone has problems, dreams, and goals, and that they are achieved through effort.[126]

And so it is possible to observe an interesting cycle of how, by building a relational space that valued their lives, expressed in each of their actions, words, gestures, looks, activities, etc., allowed them to progressively recognize the value of their own lives, to recognize that their lives can be valuable to others, and that the lives of others are

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[126] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure, December 2012.

valuable to them, as Alex stated. It was important for them to realize that their lives are valuable to others who are important to them (teachers, psychologists, assistants and others). One of the girls in the morning workshop had this to say:

> ...So why did I draw the heart? Because I think when you share with someone, well, you feel love, respect, joy and friendship, right? The fact that someone listens to you is very important. What else? I'm happy to come to the workshops, although sometimes I don't come, but I like to come. What else? There is respect in this workshop, and that's very important. [127]

I think this was evident in the Tree of Life workshop, in the emotion they felt when I handed out the certificates,[128] in the stories they told and the conversations we had, and in the countless gestures, words, looks, and comments that are impossible to recount here in writing. As well as in the change in Eduardo's tone of voice when he talked about the animals he knew so well in the jungle, or in Elena's joyful smile when she presented her tree of life and everyone asked questions, or Maria's happiness when everyone said that the portrait she made of Daniela (with a black and green background) expressed wonderfully both her joy and sadness, or the powerful hug from Cielo after we all joined her at the funeral mass for the grandmother she dearly loved. This was also evident in Camilo, because the G*reen Zone* recognized what he was, his individual characteristics, and enriched his own version of himself, going beyond the hyperactive, aggressive and rude boy he considered himself in many other areas. One student and practitioner at the PHT said the following:

> ...what others always saw in him (Camilo) and what annoyed others about him, was his outgoing, joyful, annoying character... In the workshop these were seen as positive qualities, and elsewhere as negative. But there, he changed the way he saw himself. It was a good thing there. So that's what he is, and to see him in a positive light really contributed to his training, his self-esteem, to his self-image and the way he can project that image in a positive way towards others. I think that was fundamentally important to him, because he wasn't like that anywhere else.[129]

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[127] Comment by Adriana Lucía. *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure. December 2012.

[128] Similar to those I gave Eduardo. Juliana Morales, a social worker with the program said during the focus group evaluation that some of the young people hung their evaluations on the walls of their rooms for several months.

[129] Comment by Daiana Garcés, student and practitioner at the PHT. Focus group, December 2012.

Restoring their sense of what they are is recognizing that their lives, their stories, have value. It is an attempt to repair the damage done to their self-images and, above all, to their sense of what they can become. I think this is the most important, most profound and most lasting restoration.

I think Daniela' story best illustrates this transformation. As I mentioned earlier, while participating in the G*reen Zone* Daniela went from not wanting to do anything to attending both morning and afternoon sessions, and even becoming a *monitor*. The audiovisual media teacher once asked her to write down her story. She tried but couldn't do it alone. So I offered to serve as her scribe: she dictated to me and I wrote it on the computer. We wrote it in five sessions. The resulting story was "Looking for a Dad", several excerpts of which have been included. This story became a treasure for Daniela; she showed it to several people and it became, most importantly, the golden key in our relationship. After this she always said: "They'd better not ever ask me to tell my story; I already told Vicky everything."[130] Later, we recorded her story together in a video. I asked her questions, which she answered in front of the camera. I then interviewed her father and titled it: "Looking for my Daughters."

Almost a year after the workshops came to an end I invited Daniela to participate in the Seminar in Social Construction, Narrative and Colaborative practices with the PHT staff.[131] That day Daniela arrived half an hour early, specially dressed and groomed. We performed what White (2006) would call an "identity definition ceremony". First, all the participants (Daniela and the other professionals and practitioners) viewed the video of her story "Looking for a Dad". She hadn't seen it until then. Next, I interviewed a psychologist and a social worker in front of all the participants in order to highlight particular features of Daniela's story, pictures of her identity (values, achievements and dreams) and their impact on the life stories of these professionals. This was the story of the story. Then, I interviewed Daniela in front of everyone, guided basically by the same categories and questions. The story of the

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[130] Comment by Daiana Garcés, student and PHT practitioner. Focus group, December 2012.
[131] The one mentioned when I referred to polyphony and dialogue with audiences outside the G*reen Zone.*

story of the story. Finally, we watched the video of the interview of Daniela's father and each of the participants wrote her a letter to take home about how they imagined her in the near future.

I wanted to try this exercise with Daniela because I believed the group was ready to respond to her story in an appreciative manner. By this time we had created a relational space that valued Daniela's life and story. But I also hoped that the responses of those present would confirm to Daniela the value of her own life outside the G*reen Zone* and that she would recognize her story as valuable to others and capable of transforming the lives of others as well. Daniela's response could not have been more beautiful. Despite her shyness, she sat with the others and watched and was moved, even to laughter, by the video. She was transformed into an audience of her own life. She listened to the stories of both Sandra and Claudia, whose lives were linked to her own in certain ways, such as having lived without parents, the loneliness, the decisions made at an early age, the longing for roots, or being in a position to forgive an absent mother. She was moved by their stories. She was part of an audience viewing the stories of others. She stood up in front of everyone, into the center, and answered my questions humbly, serenely, in front of an audience. I was also able to express my admiration for her joy, solidarity, generosity and simplicity and tell her how her story allowed me to understand why a girl would go to war, how those who die can be remembered, and I was able to thank her for having contributed so much to my work and to my life.

Finally, she told us all that she was willing to tell her story to many people so that other children wouldn't have to experience what she had. She realized her life could change the lives of others. She thanked us for having dedicated an entire morning to listening to her story, talking about her and writing to her. She didn't think "such busy people" had time for that kind of thing. Daniela, therefore, went from being a young woman who wouldn't allow herself to be filmed by a camera to wanting to speak publicly about her own life; from feeling profound hatred for her parents to accepting her father's affection, changing her name and surname, and letting him into her life and allowing him to help her; from feeling tremendous guilt for the death of

her friend to beginning to understand that she could honor her daily by keeping her promise to leave the armed group and make a life for herself; from believing she had almost nothing worth valuing to acknowledging that she is someone who cares for others, shows solidarity, and wants to learn to cook in order to please, nourish and care for others. I believe Daniela was able to make progress towards restoring her sense of who she is and what she can become.[132]

An Enriched Perspective of Time Lived and Yet to Be Lived

> The fundamental problem with dialogue
> is how to help others to remodel,
> recreate, what they have been in the past,
> to train them to face
> what they can become in the future,
> with hope and not fear, terror or despair.
> John Shotter
> (1993/2001, p. 184)

The G*reen Zone* helped youth ex-combatants position themselves differently on the time line of their lives. With regard to the past/present, it became apparent to them that painful stories are not the only stories, not necessarily the most important ones in their lives, and that they can learn from these stories. They also caught a glimpse of the importance of recovering their roots (basically through the Tree of Life exercise), their culture, customs, ancestors as necessary and useful sources of knowledge and wisdom. Most of them recognized the importance of their families and parents, their friends, their childhoods, their own children, as support for their existence. It was important to recognize the talents and strategies that helped them face different situations in their lives (as seen in the following chapter). And to recognize the people who have provided a helping hand in the past.[133]

With regard to the future/present, the youth ex-combatants were able to catch a glimpse of a better future. We spoke about their dreams and ideals and situated them in a possible near future with regard to vocation, profession and family. By speaking

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[132] Final report written for the Seminar in "Social Construction, Narrative and Collaborative Practices." Presented in December 2013.

[133] See: *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.

about their dreams, they could see what they most value in the present: finishing their studies, having a job (nurse, cook, actress, beautician, truck driver). Often they'll use phrases like "get ahead" and "be someone". Travel, travel the world, and be free. Have their own home, their own family, their own business. It's as if everything they had up until now was borrowed, didn't belong to them. I believe the *Green Zone* was able to give some hope, to help them believe in the possibility of rebuilding what was destroyed, creating new narratives of possibility. The fictional stories they told made it possible to join their time lived to a single time: although they speak of people who don't exist, of future time, of events that haven't yet taken place, they refer to the way the present is interpreted and the things from the past that are constantly updated.

Daniela wrote the following story in another of the program's relational spaces. It illustrates extremely well what a fictional story can show us:

> When I get to be a few years older... I'd like to have a daughter and call her Maria Alejandra. It's a pretty name and the man who will be her father likes it too. I've always liked names with Maria in them... I imagine her as a little girl who plays, laughs and grows up without weapons. I'd like her to tell me all her fears, anything she wants to tell me. I'd like to pay attention to her and because I'm her mother, I'd always believe her. Maria Alejandra, now 8 years old, has all her mother's support. Her mother would never doubt her, not even if it were a case of rape. Maria Alejandra is loving, easy-going and cheerful. As she grows, her mother teachers her to cook and the child goes with her when she goes out to sell the products they prepare at home...[134]

This is nothing more or less than Daniela's story. And yet, she has positioned herself as the mother of a girl who will not live her story. It is therefore clear what must be changed about her life, what must be different. Daniela positions herself in the future as a mother, with a child who is she herself, who she protects from what happened to her in the past. So Daniela believes she can indeed change her life and the lives of others, that life can be different.

All the activities mentioned opened the youth up to the possibility of exploring other possible worlds, opening the dark, closed room they believed their lives were shut up in, believing in a less predictable world. For example, after watching the video

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[134] Story borrowed from Chamorro (2011, p. 79 - 80).

of *La maison en petits cubes* or *Presto* about a magician's rabbit[135], they surprised themselves during activities like the stop motion workshop because they believed it was magic.[136] And it was: the magic of creativity, of other imagined worlds, which to them were new. It was difficult for them, when we made puppets and had to manipulate them, for the puppet to speak to the puppet master, and for the latter to reply.[137] They had to make an effort, become two people at once, to speak with themselves as if they were other people. Look at the puppet, speak to it, speak for it, and make it walk and laugh. This is the world of fantasy, fiction, desire, freedom; a world of fairy godmothers where you can wish for things.[138] It's the world of Body Shadow Performance, where light becomes image, causes the image to grow or shrink. It's the magic of light and movement. The spectators could only see our shadows, never our frightened faces, and created their own illusions based on the shadows. They saw a single image even though there were five people inside it. We were able to create another imagined world, another magical and possible world, a world that is not just the painful past.[139]

Re-Constructing a Sense of "We"

As mentioned previously, youth ex-combatants have a strongly rooted sense of the group. Their comments in the *Green Zone* evaluations centered mostly on the teamwork, on being together, living with others, collaborating, being able to share with others, having fun with their peers and friends, the joy of getting together.[140] However, the "we" constructed inside the armed group is the "we" of an *esprit de corps*, of obedience, the obligation of sticking together to survive, needing each other, the other who is neither completely a friend or an enemy, but someone who can violate your trust at any time.

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[135] "*La maison en petits cubes*" can be viewed at: http://vimeo.com/15486115 and "*Presto*" at: http://www.metatube.com/es/videos/38546/PRESTO-Pixar-in-HD-Short-Film-Walt-Disney/
[136] *Talleriando* 19. Lizard on Roller Coaster, July 3, 2012.
[137] *Talleriando* 16. Puppets Alive? June 12, 2012.
[138] *Talleriando* 9. Ana, the Fairy and the Future, April 17, 2012.
[139] *Talleriando* 10. Body Shadow Performance I, April 24, 2012.
[140] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure, December 2012.

The "we" in the G*reen Zone*, therefore, had to be different. First, we built a *"we" that acts jointly*. We staged different collective activities in which the youth were forced to join their bodies, their hands, or their words to perform an action presented together. They had to coordinate, converse, touch one another, and argue. At times certain natural leaders like Camilo or Andres stood out in the group and organized the others. Leadership was recognized not through authority, like in the armed group, but by having good ideas, by being able to convince others, by being able to listen and coordinate. On many occasions, none of them took a leadership role and instead they asked for help from others. At other times, no joint action could be achieved; they appeared to be doing something together, but weren't really. Everyone was drawing on their own side of the paper.[141] The Body Shadow Performance proved to be the biggest challenge; a show conceived and acted out by everyone. This was a victory for this "we". The joint action of "we" in this case was neither permanent nor stable but we managed to create "we" moments in which we were able to coordinate a certain activity, each of us responsible for the process and the final result. As participants in the G*reen Zone*, we came together to cooperate in the development of new visions of reality, imaginary moments (like fairy godmothers). As "we the participants" moved towards a common goal (shadows puppets, for example), we redefined the other and created a foundation for the conception of a "we" that could act jointly.

We also created a *"we" that remained present in the conversation*. In the G*reen Zone*, we were constantly asking the youth to use different rules in conversation and they slowly assumed a more appreciative attitude, even in the midst of others' disrespect. One of them once said in an evaluation:

>...we got to know each other and to know our peers' stories, to create stories, and understand each other's expressions. The workshop helped us pay attention when other people are speaking. [142]

Increasing their capacity for narrative expression also provided the youth ex-combatants with more resources for relating to others; it is through stories that we

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[141] Like Santiago and Fabio in the social cartography workshop, September 25, 2012.
[142] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure, December 2012.

convince others of who we are and who we can become. It is through these stories that we become intelligible in the social world. As the youth's vocabularies increase, as they acquire new syntaxes and new meanings, they acquire a wider range of relationships and others, therefore, see them differently.

Inside the *Green Zone*, the sense of mutuality was understood, first and foremost, as respect and genuine interest in each other, as a relational activity, not an individual internal characteristic. It meant being considerate, showing consideration for the other's worth and communicating this consideration through one's attitude, posture, gestures, eye contact, and words. In concrete situations where someone *disrespected* another, an audience was held in which a conversation with those involved focused on the situation, emphasizing the words used, the form of communication with the other, and possible alternatives for putting a stop, even temporarily, to this type of action, as in the case of Sofia mentioned earlier. When during group discussion someone said something that offended another, an opportunity arose to learn about respect, about listening, in a discussion that gave them a chance to speak and analyze the situation and possible solutions, and decide what was best for everyone.[143] Not to establish what *should be*, from a hierarchic position, but to expand on the ingrained ways of acting in situations of conflict with others. This was not, however, learned immediately and once and for all. Situations arose up until the very end in which the youth disrespected each other, or made hurtful or rude comments. But the conversation was never interrupted, and we used this mechanism faithfully to understand what was happening and to experiment with different behavior. Rorty (1980, p.394) suggests that "moral conflicts are not easily resolved and, in many cases, cannot be resolved. They cannot be perhaps be resolved, but they can be discussed more humanly, more respectfully, and clearly at least, so that conversation can continue." As Wittgenstein (1953/2008) put it, we were able to "go on together."

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[143] For specific examples of this see *Talleriando* 10. Body Shadow Performance I, April 24, 2012.

For the youth to completely understand respect as a relational activity they had to take some control over their impulsive reactions. We held diverse conversations about acknowledging emotions and understanding them as a relational issue. In this process, emotions are denaturalized and an attempt is made to take them out of the biological framework ("I get so mad it just goes to my head and I can't do anything about it"), or a gender framework ("men are like that"), or the genetic framework ("my dad was the same way").[144] I believe this aspect, the "we" that continues with conversation, lays the foundation for the conversation about reconciliation with them.

We also built a *mutually sustained "we" based on solidarity*, being supportive and helping others. When Alex lost the camera, we all agreed to contribute some amount to buy another one because the cameras had been lent to all of us. The money never appeared, but I don't think it was because they didn't want to contribute; their foster mothers controlled the money and were against the idea. During many activities, the youth helped each other, especially those who didn't know how to read, write or draw. Many hands and eyes were prepared to help their peers, which made the youth feel like they could emotionally support each other and wielded a collective power.

This feeling was apparent during the conversation about the Forest of Life, when we brought together everyone's Tree of Life. Adriana Lucía said that the main threat to the forest, meaning to each of them, was discrimination, and that they could help each other by "showing solidarity, not thinking we're better than anyone else and always sticking together." [145] This sparked an interesting conversation about what the youth felt threatened by, the damage done to their *trunks*, and how they could defend themselves. Different ideas were discussed regarding revenge for injuries caused, forgiveness, justice, and religion. Some of the girls counseled others as to what would be best. This is the best example of a "we that provides mutual support".

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[144] This entire conversation is included in *Talleriando* 10. Body Shadow Performance I, April 24, 2012.

[145] *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life, July 17, 2012.

The staging the Body Shadow Performance was another example. Everyone felt it was important to show their work to their birth families during the family meetings. As a demonstration of solidarity, all of the youth were expected to attend the presentations, even if their family was not present at the meeting. And they did. They believed that together, by mutually supporting each other, they could give joy and provide entertainment to others and, at the same time, achieve a certain amount of recognition for their effort from their families. A social worker with the PHT put it this way:

> ...it was a chance for the youth to show something of what they'd accomplished to their birth families... having something to show for what they had done, something they were proud of, all the work it took to put together the presentation... I think this was a great source of pride for them to be able to present something to their families. [146]

I think that by reconstructing a mutually sustained "us" we laid the foundations for the possibility of helping each other, of making reparation to others. This should be the next step in other *Green Zones*: to make reparation for the damage caused to others and contribute to the conversation about living together better. Cielo put it this way: "It was important for me to have attended the workshops because everything I learned can be used in my own future and taught to others."[147]

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[146] Comment by Marcela Gómez, social worker at the PHT. Focus group, December 2012.
[147] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure, December 20, 2012.

7

Memories of Resistance

To be hopeful in bad times is not just a foolishly romantic.
It is based on the fact that human history
is a history not only of cruelty, but also of
compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.
What we choose to emphasize in this complex history
will determine our lives.
If we see only the worst,
it destroys our capacity to do something.

Howard Zinn
(2007, p.270)

As stated before, I see youth ex-combatants as survivors of poverty, abuse, oblivion and war. This chapter highlights some of the skills, strategies, knowledge, learning, reactions, values, and actions adopted in defense, protection and resistance that I identified through my relationship with them and that, one way or another, demonstrate their strength, ability to adapt, and possibilities for recovery. I looked for these memories in their metaphors, unusual responses, analogies, interruptions, imaginative ways of speaking, gestures, movements, repetitions, omissions (what is not said in words), and in pictures and drawings, which were all part of our experience in the G*reen Zone*. I intend to provide a space for their voice, more directly, without too much analysis on my part, merely taking charge of the selection and organization process and the titles that follow, and including a few comments.

At the end of the chapter I have included the *I poem* entitled "Daniela's Voice." This poem grew out of my analysis of Daniela's story "Looking for a Dad" based on Gilligan (2003- see chapter on methodology) and consisted of four different listenings. I have taken the second listening only, the speaking voice, which carries the melody, resides in the body and culture, and includes the voices of others in her life. I selected from the complete story all the phrases beginning in the first person and presented only the pronoun and verb, and sometimes a place, an object or a person. The poem covers the full story, from beginning to end, and the subtitles are intended to guide the reader.

I hope these memories can help us to learn from these youth, acknowledging their responses to the trauma rather than its effects; valuing what was preserved

above what was damaged; acknowledging the people who have come to their aid, the multiple resources they possess, and the magic of their words, stories, drawings and photos.

"Esthetic"

N: Hi Pablo, how are you?
P: Great, really great.
N: You seem happy.
P: Yes, I'm doing great, happy.
N: What makes you so happy?
P: Everything, everything is going well. Everything is going great. *Esthetic*.
N: *Esthetic*?
P: Well yes, where I come from people say *esthetic* when they're doing great. It means very well. For example, if someone asks you "So how are you? You say *esthetic* or *esthetically*.
N: As good as it gets.
P: Yes, as good as it gets.[148]

Dealing with Poverty

"GIRL OF HEAVEN" (when the boots drowned in the water) [149]

...my father had just died. He had left me a brand-new pair of boots. I was wearing them for the first time and I went to a creek and one of the boots drowned in the water. It drowned and I ran home to tell my mom: "One of the boots drowned!" "You'll have to go barefoot" (she said) and I started to cry because what else could I do? I had to wear my cousin's shoes. She'd stay at home, or I'd stay home, and we'd take turns because what else could I do? Later they gave me another pair that lasted until I was nine. Plastic boots. I was about eight or nine years old and my toes really hurt because they were so tight and then one day my grandmother said: "Honey, I have a surprise for you" and I thought my mom was back but it was new boots. It was so great! And they came all the way up to here (points to her knee) I was so happy...[150]

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[148] Testimony borrowed from Aguirre, N. (2010, p. 131).
[149] "Children of Heaven" by Iranian director and writer Majid Majidi is the story of a brother and sister who must share their shoes to go to school.
[150] Story told by Adriana Lucía. *Talleriando* 24. Adriana`s Flees, September 4, 2012.

Finding "family"

Finding a new family when no other exists

Maria: This is me, this is my mom, this is my supposed dad, these are two friends, this is my little sister and my little brother, and that's all.
Vicky: What do you mean, your "supposed" dad?
Maria: Well, he pretty much gave me away so...
Vicky: What about your mother? She seems to be closer in the drawing...
Maria: Yes, because I never knew her. Well, I knew her but I don't remember her because she died when I was two or so...
Vicky: So who was your family?
Maria: Well, *they* were (pointing to the armed group).[151]

Making Pets the family cannot be found

Vicky: Can you tell us the story of that rabbit?
Alex: It's a rabbit I have in my house, a rabbit that I love a lot and I feed every day, every morning.
Vicky: His name is King?
Alex: I call him King because he's like a king to me. He's like my white prince. Because he's white. I love that rabbit so much. He's the love of my life, the engine in my life. I do all I can for him because he's already so big and heavy and very naughty.
Vicky: How do you take care of him?
Alex: His food... I give him rabbit foot, carrots... He eats anything really. We do alright. And as for my family, well they're far away... It doesn't matter; I don't care about having a family. I know I have family, that they support me... I have an angel that is my mother, who helps me get ahead.
Vicky: What about those leaves with the very important people, who are they?
Alex: They're the important people in my life. Like I said, the rabbit, my parents, my mother who is in heaven, rest in peace.
Tatiana: But a rabbit isn't a person (laughs derisively).
Vicky: But it's somebody important...
Alex: He's my daily inspiration. I work hard every day. I wake up every day with my head held high and I think about what I have to do and my friends are people who give me a hand, no matter if you're feeling low, they encourage you to succeed.[152]

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[151] *Talleriando*3. My Relationships, February 28, 2012.
[152] The youth draw the "Tree of life". They wrote the names of the people most important to them next to the roots of the tree; the rabbit was placed here, as it can be seen in the next page drawing. These were the Alex' words when he presented the drawing to his peers. *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life, July 17, 2012.
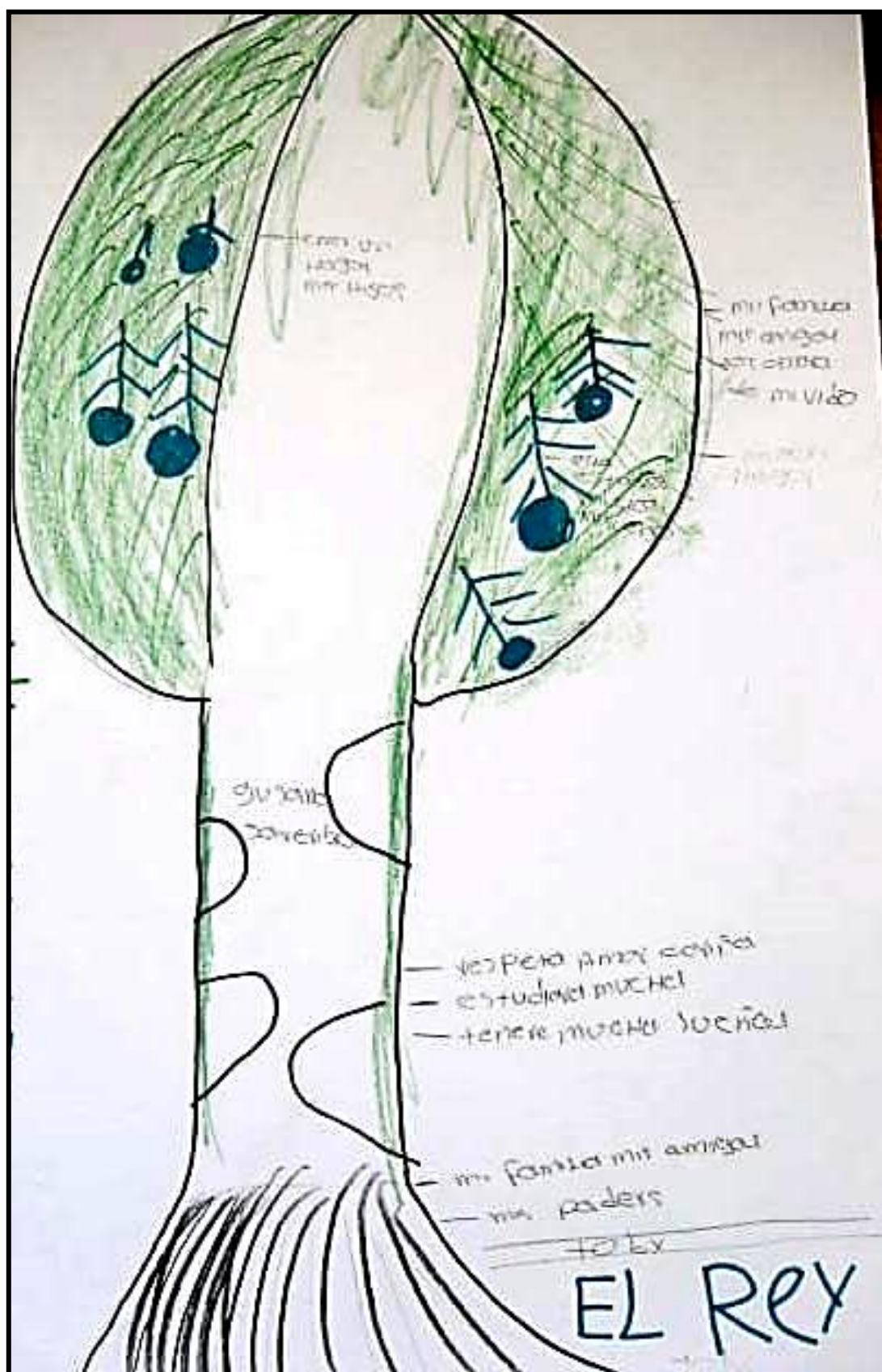
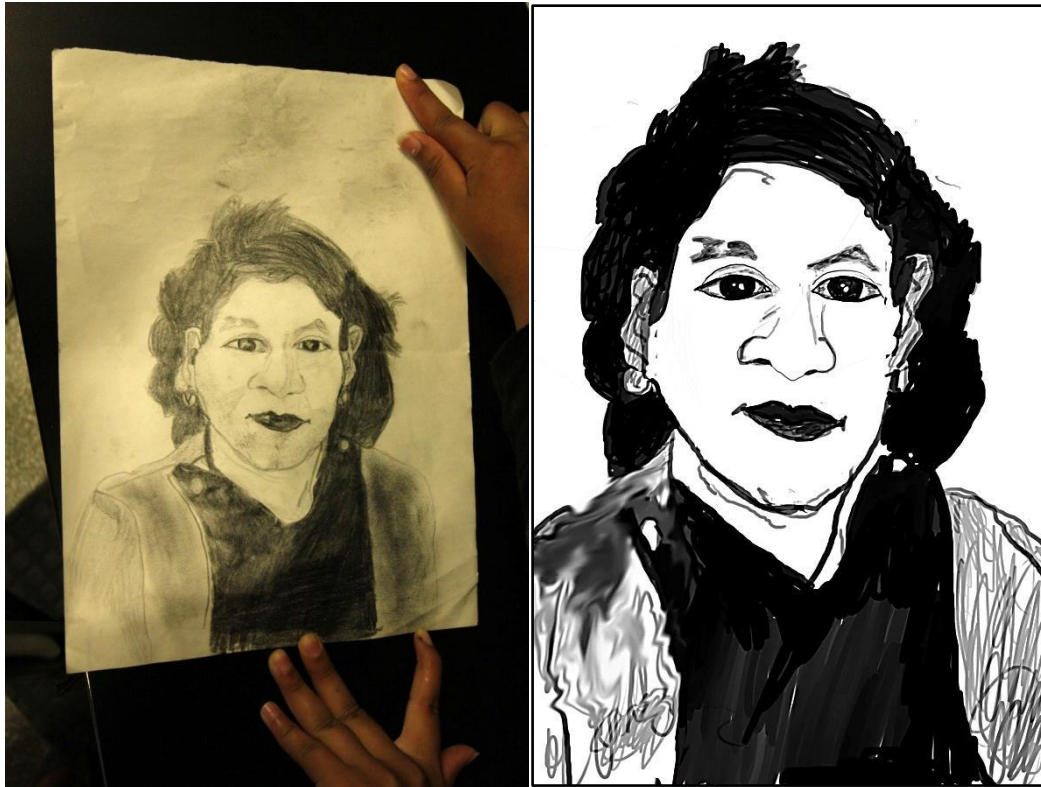Figure 10. The tree of life by Alex. July 2012.

Figure 11. Drawings by Tatiana. October, 2012.

Finding each other

Tatiana was captured in combat. From the time she entered the program she began looking for her mother. She supplied all the information she had, but was never able to locate her. She drew the town where she lived, but no, her Mom wasn't there. She looked for her on the Internet many times, but nothing. She wanted to put her own picture on the Internet so that her mother would find her but couldn't, for security reasons. After two years, a woman in a remote village filed a missing persons report with the police: her daughter was missing. After searching for years, she had given up hope and went to declare her "missing", like so many others in Colombia. The official searched the computer records for the name the lady gave him and said: "Ma'am, your daughter isn't missing. She's in a state protection program." Tears fell from the eyes of everyone in the program, including me. Because at moments like that, what we do seems to make sense. The registration system worked, even in that distant village. The official was efficient and friendly, and did as he was supposed to. Unlike so many others who had told the woman: "Fill out this form and keep checking back" or "the network is down; there's no way of knowing" or sent her to stand in a long line until closing time, or the office would be closed for no reason when she got there on Monday. Then Tatiana said: "The thing is, I didn't find my mom, she found me. She'd been looking for me all that time." [153]

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[153] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. November 2012.

Escaping

Escaping abuse: resisting domination

Vicky: That was the first time you ran away. What about the second time?

Adriana: When I told the man who lived my mom that another man had come to the house... I would have been better off not telling him anything because he told my Mom she shouldn't let anybody in the house, or let men come to the farm... and my mom grabbed me and... "Adriana Lucia! Come out of that house and come with me!" and I said "no way"...

Vicky: And that was the second time you ran away?

Adriana: I ran away with my little sister. I packed up my clothes and got to my uncle's place and he said: "No, honey, I can't have you here now."

Vicky: The same uncle as the time before...

Adriana: No, I just didn't know where to go. So I picked up my suitcase, really worried, and went to my other uncle and he took us in and we stayed there and had a great time. That happened on Mother's Day... I stayed there and my uncle said he was going to send me to another town but that he'd keep my sister because she was the baby and that he'd send her to school. He said we'd both go to school. Then my mom showed up and they sent me right back to the farm. My uncle said he was taking us on an errand, but he was lying… It was my mom. I almost swallowed my tongue.

Vicky: So what did your mom say when she got there?

Adriana: What did she say? She just gave me this look, and that look said everything. She said "back to the farm" and I said "no." I mean what for? And another option was to join the group (armed)... and when I turned 12 or 13 I joined the group.

Vicky: And that was the third time you ran away?

Adriana: Just like that. And even though it was hard and everything... I don't regret it.

Vicky: Why not, Adriana?

Adriana: Because thank god I was there. I didn't do anything bad. I think it would be very hard for a person to know they had blood on their hands from killing another person... well, I was there and it was a hard experience but I got out.[154]

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[154] *Talleriando* 24. Adriana`s Flees, September 4, 2012.
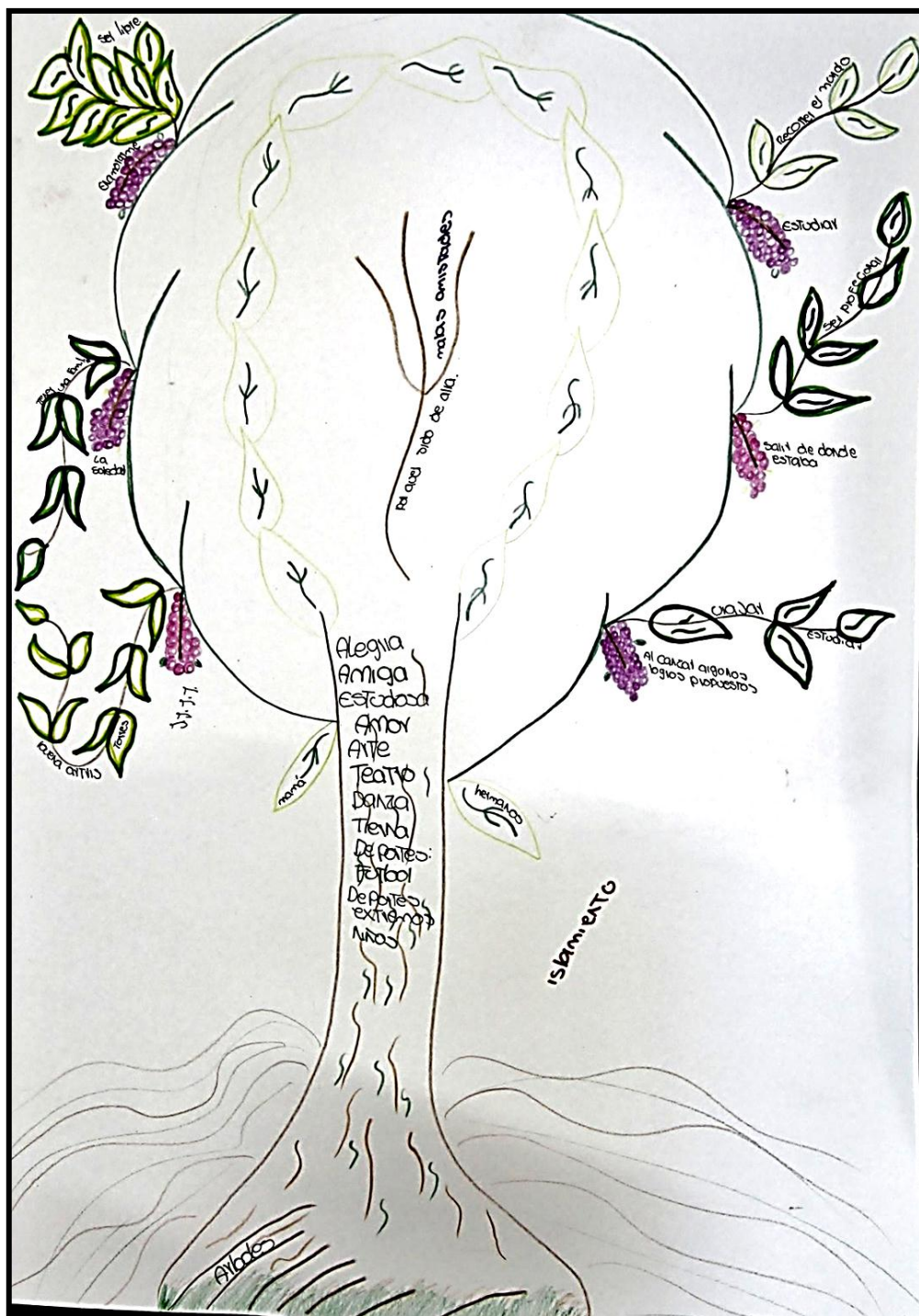
Escaping the Armed Group: Facing the Fear, Getting on with Life

Figure 12. Maria's Tree of Life drawing. July 17, 2012

She wrote that "getting out of where I was" is an achievement in her life. [155]

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[155] In the drawing of the tree of life, the fruit represents achievement. *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.

I climbed into a hole, took off my uniform, and left my rifle in the hole. And I just ran away and didn't care about tigers or snakes, or worms, or bombs or anything. I just ran like crazy. I was the kind of person who used to get tired doing nothing, but not this time. I ran and ran and ran. I got to a plain and I lay down in a tree and started to cry because I was alone. And I asked God and my uncle to show me the guerrilla's tracks. I heard the sound of a chainsaw and since they'd taught us the compass points, I knew it was to the south. I went that way and found a ravine, crossed the ravine, went across it, and there was the river. I walked along the stones and found tracks left by the army. I recognized them because army boots are leather, not rubber like guerrilla boots. I said to myself: "That's not the footprint I want; I'm looking for guerrilla footprints." But I followed the trail anyway until I came to a village where there were militiamen guerrilla fighters. I was almost naked. And a man said to me: "What happened? Are you hurt?" Right when I got there the army came by and the old lady where I was didn't say a thing. She hid me. I spent 15 days in the village, in the home of a son of a guerrilla. I stayed there because they knew me. [156]

Vicky:	So how did you run away?
Adriana:	I was sent on a mission, to collect what they called the "vaccine", you know what I mean? With the boy I was with, who finally collected the money and we ran away with it. But it was really scary.
Vicky:	So it wasn't so difficult?
Adriana:	No, because the only ones at that camp were us three: the leader, the boy, and me. So it was easy but risky. It was still really hard because I had to walk a lot to get away... some really steep foothills... But nobody knew we were runaways. We were in civilian clothes and when we got to the village... I was so scared... I saw all the police and my heart beat like that... So I was really scared. I got out of a car and right there, in front of this really cute police officer… but it was a better idea to look at the devil than look at that guy (laughs). I got home and then I was very happy because I saw my little brother... When all of a sudden there were police all over the place... And I thought, "damn," but I wasn't afraid... I was like normal. When this police officer comes up to me and says: "Girl, you're under arrest"... I thought I was going to die. That was terrible.
Vicky:	How did he know?
Adriana:	They already had me on their black list and they found out a girl was staying at the house... It was really hard.
Vicky:	So it was because you'd gone home?
Blanca:	No, to the village. When that policeman said "to the station" I thought "what a stupid death" because they always tell you that if the police get you they'll kill you... Oh my god... I was eating a lollipop at the time... the kind the Chilindrina used to eat... I never ate one of those ever again (laughs). [157]

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[156] Excerpt from Daniela's story 'Looking for a Dad'.
[157] *Talleriando* 22. Adriana's Life. August 21, 2012
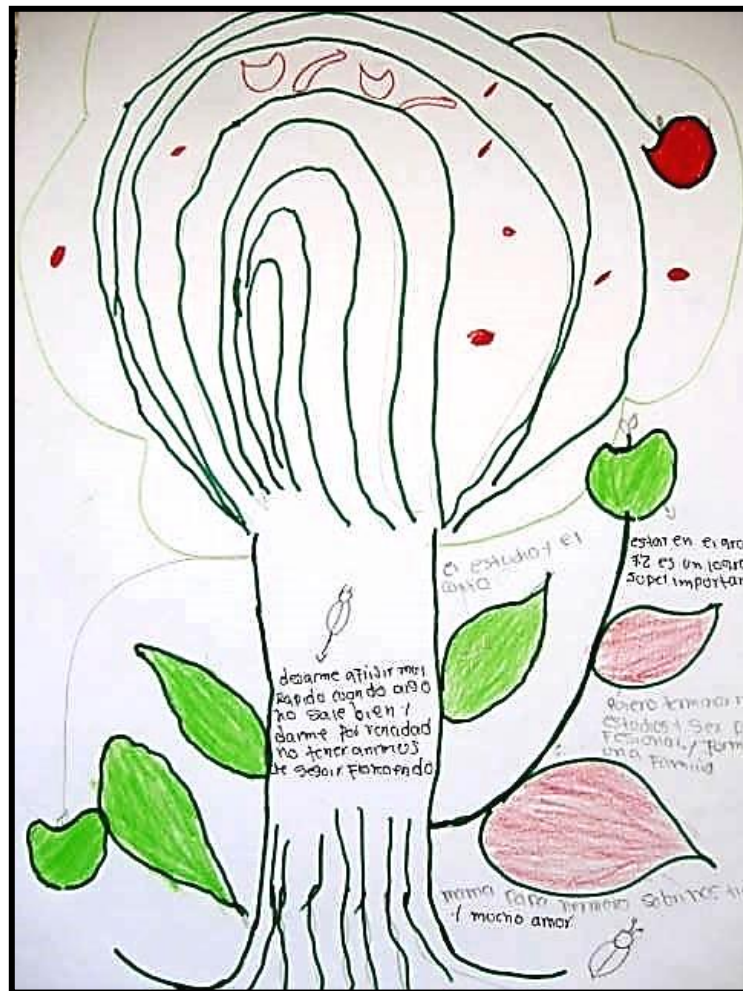
Figure 13. Elena's tree of life drawing. July 17, 2012.

Elena:	Another achievement? Having gotten out of there and deciding to change my life.
Vicky:	Leaving the armed group is an achievement?
Elena:	Yes.
Vicky:	Does anyone else consider this an achievement?
Several:	Yes, of course, obviously, etc...
Vicky:	Who, for example? Eduardo, do you consider it an achievement?
Eduardo:	(Shakes his head no)
Vicky:	Not for you? So what is it?
Eduardo:	A failure. (Daniela raises her hand)
Vicky:	Yes? It was an achievement for Daniela too? Why?
Daniela:	Because we got away from where we were, you know?
Julio:	It's an achievement because you wanted to stay alive and you thought about how to get out and you got out...
Daniela:	In my case, it was really difficult. [158]

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[158] Elena's presentation of her tree in front of the other G*reen Zone* participants. *Talleriando* 21.Tree of Life. July 17, 2012

Surviving in the Bush

Eduardo:	...And the southern mountains. This is a mountain; this is another, and another, and another, and another.
Vicky:	So big, so many mountains, and very big ones.
Eduardo:	Yes... the sun, clouds, this cloud looks like a nanny goat (laughs). The flowers turned out so pretty... the grass... Look, look...
Vicky:	Is that grass is dry?
Eduardo calls	Yes, it's dry grass. There's a snake, a river and a "marmoset" like Julio them.
Vicky:	Another "marmoset"? What does a "marmoset" look like?
Eduardo:	It's small...
Julio:	With a white face.
Eduardo:	But there's another one with a white face they call the "capuchin."
Julio:	Yes, it has a white face, like a goatee.
Vicky:	That small? And where do they live?
Eduardo:	In the bush.
Julio:	And they stick together.
Vicky:	Lots of them? Do they make a lot of noise?
Julio:	30 or 40 of them will band together.
Eduardo:	Like parrots.
Vicky:	What other monkeys have you seen?
Julio:	There's this one monkey that's always snorting... when one of them gets lost, they all start snorting really loud.
Vicky:	The others look for it?
Julio:	Yes, it's a black monkey.
Vicky:	What other kinds of monkeys are there?
Eduardo:	The mantled howler.
Vicky:	mantled howler monkeys? Do you have any monkey stories you could tell?
Eduardo:	Yes, you raise them.
Vicky:	How do you raise a monkey?
Eduardo:	You give it milk.
Fabio:	I don't like monkeys because one bit me right here (pointing to his stomach). I was playing him when he bit me right here, near the navel.
Vicky:	What other animals have bitten you?
Fabio:	A snake.
Vicky:	Really? How?
Eduardo:	I got bit by a snake.
Lucy:	I know because a snake bit me. It feels like a sting. At first you feel a

	burning sensation and then it feels like your blood starts to boil blood and your leg turns black... black, black and swollen. And you start to bleed through the scar... through the bite. If you wait too long you start to bleed from your ears, your nose, and your mouth.
Vicky:	How did you survive that? What did they do to you?
Lucy:	Nothing... this old man cured me. He was a healer.
Vicky:	But what did the old man do to cure it?
Lucy:	Hmmm? How should I know?
Vicky:	Don't you remember? Were you unconscious?
Lucy:	No, it was one of those guys that heals with prayers.
Julio:	There was this woman who got bit by a snake and I saw a guy chop up some scallions and chew them... and the lady with her leg all swollen... and I saw she had some of the chewed up scallions under her leg...
Vicky:	Now, Eduardo, tell us how you got bitten by a snake.
Eduardo:	I got bit by one that looks like an Anaconda.
Vicky:	A big one?
Eduardo:	Yea, it bit me in a place I can't show you. I was sitting near a plantain tree and when I stood up it bit me and left its fangs in me. I started to pass out, I saw some people... then I passed out and they took me to a healer.
Vicky:	Did the healer cure you?
Eduardo:	But I don't know how.
Vicky:	What about tarantulas?
Eduardo:	The ones that are like this?
Vicky:	Yes, have you seen any?
Eduardo:	Yes, they're really pretty. They're kind of blue.
Vicky:	So they're small? Can you pick them up?
Eduardo:	Uh-huh... you mean with your hand? No way! They bite like a snake. They have fangs!
Julio:	Those are the ones some people pick up... some people... and they make pets out of them!
Eduardo:	But this one is like a snake... it has fangs.
Fabio:	But it you don't taunt them they don't hurt you. If you stand still.
Vicky:	What other animals do you hunt in the bush for food?
Eduardo:	Lots... lowland paca (guagua), nine-banded armadillo (gurre), rabbit, collared peccary (tatabra), wild boar, capybara (chigüiro), peccary (saíno)...
Vicky:	Is collared peccary like capybara? Is it the same thing?
Julio:	No! collared peccaries are bigger.

Eduardo:	It´s like a pig, but different from a capybara. And when it gets scared it smells terrible, like piss.
Vicky:	Is capybara meat tasty ?
Eduardo:	Yes, a capybara can weigh up to 4 or 5 kilos... they're big.
Vicky:	And what's so good about lowland paca, Daniela?
Daniela:	I don't know...
Eduardo:	It's delicious! Lowland pacas weigh around four pounds... they're really small. They're like this (using hands to indicate size).
Julio:	I've only ever seen the gold ones.
Lucy:	The other one is brownish... and white.
Fabio:	Yea, they have stripes... they're kind of like capybara too.
Vicky:	Which one has the white stripes? The spotted paca?
Eduardo:	There's the male ("macho calaverudo") which is big and then there's the female ("frijolita"), which is small.
Julio:	And then there's the little hen (gallineta).
Eduardo:	It's really pulpy... the breast is delicious.
Lucy:	Hey! What about turkey? There's the one with a crest that looks like a rock.
Vicky:	What? Which turkey?
Julio:	The kind of turkeys... the mountain turkey.
Lucy:	It snorts... really loud, right?
Julio:	Yes, and you can hear them from far away.
Lucy:	People start to hunt them in October.
Vicky:	Why in October?
Lucy:	It's the month when they come out to sing and you can find them easier.
Eduardo:	And because it's summer.
Lucy:	And it's a rare animal.
Vicky:	Is it good?
Lucy:	Yes, it's like turkey meat.
Julio:	Lowland paca`s meat is so rare that if you take it to town you can sell it for twice as much.
Daniela:	Yes, it's really yummy... delicious.
Vicky:	What else can you eat?
Daniela:	Monkey...
Eduardo:	Monkey meat is yummy... when you season it right. You add color and chop up some garlic, onion and stir it up.
Daniela:	First you smoke it.
Eduardo:	I use to kill them and skin them and then the next day I'd chop up onions and garlic... all that good stuff... real tasty. Then I'd dump it in a bowl

	and stir it up and I'd leave it for a week and then I'd fry it up and it would be delicious. It tasted like chorizo.
Lucy:	And iguana tastes like chicken.
Eduardo:	And then there's caiman (badilla)...
Vicky:	You can eat caiman?
Julio:	I ate some iguana tail, but fried, and it tasted delicious.
Vicky:	Hang on a minute... how do you catch an iguana? And how do you cook it?
Eduardo:	I'll tell you because I've eaten everything.
Lucy:	You boil and tear the meat into strips, then sauté it.
Daniela:	And iguana eggs are yummy...
Eduardo:	And turtle eggs. Caiman is harder to hunt. You have to shoot it at least twice in the head, right? (looking at Julio). We hit one once, about two meters long, in the head, and it turned over and over... really nasty. And we only ate the tail... you only eat the tail because inside it's full of things that really stink.
Fabio:	Then there's almizcle...
Lucy:	Once there was one of those "tegu" that are black and long... near Caguán... the ones with a fin on top... but they're not iguanas... Me and three girls and this guy went...
Eduardo:	A black tegu (lobo pollero)...
Lucy:	No, one of those that eat chickens.
Eduardo:	That's what I said... a chicken eater (laughter).
Lucy:	It peeped out at me and the thing just stared at me... And I ran away and that animal bit me on my pants, right here...
Vicky:	So what's a black tegu like?
Julio:	The hen has her chicks real close by and can't do a thing about it... she's got them right there and the tegu eat them.
Vicky:	How do they eat them?
Julio:	Eating them! (Laughter) They hunt them and where there's one, others in the pack show up.
Eduardo:	I used to kill them and eat them.
Lucy:	And there's a fox called the Gray fox (zorro tigrillo). That animal is fast! It's striped, like a tiger.
Vicky:	Eduardo wants to ask... has anyone killed a tiger?
Lucy:	I had a tiger. I didn't hunt it. I raised a tiger. We found it. I think somebody killed its mother. He was all underfed, skinny, and we raised it on milk and it grew up and they grow attached to people. I also raised a bear...
Vicky:	An anteater?
Lucy:	No, an anteater will claw you and kill you.

Eduardo:	Maybe a Congo bear... they're big.
Lucy:	Yea, those bears grow to be real big. I raised it and you can tell them apart by their tails.
Vicky:	Has anyone else raised a wild animal? Or made a pet out of one?
Eduardo:	I've raised Spotted pacas (tinajas).
Vicky:	You made a pet out of one of those wild beasts? How do you raise one?
Eduardo:	You get it young, and feed it, and they become tame.
Vicky:	Don't they attack you once they grow up?
Eduardo:	I think they see you as a mother. I think...
Julio:	Tigers can turn on you... when they get hungry...
Lucy:	No, tigers don't turn on you. The one I had... we went for two days with no food and we couldn't feed him either and he mewed and came to us and brushed up against us and drank water and howled like a baby but he never bit anyone. You'd throw him a piece of chicken bone and he couldn't even eat it. [159]

Learning from inside the War

Vicky: What did you learn as a guerrilla?

Daniela: I learned to be humble, to not care about things. Some kids leave the group and want to be like kings. I learned to be humble about food: if rice was all there was, I ate rice. Back in the group I realized I did have family, but they never supported me. While I was there I wanted to confront my mom, ask why she was like that with me, and my grandmother too. I learned to respect people, to swear is to disrespect someone, and I also learned to take care of my things, because if you don't take care of them, they get stolen or lost. I learned to cook: stew, beans, fish, everything. You don't love yourself there, you love your gun most of all... it can save your life. There is a schedule for cleaning guns. There they tell you that your gun is your mom and dad. I had a boyfriend there. It has to be with one person and not a bunch. I learned that in there too, to respect the couple.[160]

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[159] Eduardo's presentation of a drawing by Sofia and Daniela. Conversation with other participants in the *Green Zone*. *Talleriando* 26. Cartography, Animals and Recognition. September 25, 2012.
[160] Daniela's Story: "Looking for a Dad".

Figure 14. Photo of Elena in the *Green Zone*. March 13, 2012.

Learning to be quiet, silent, unseen, unnoticed, to hide

This looks like the mask of calm and silence. Body position, head looking down at the floor, eyes off in the distance that express serenity, introspection, some sadness, and nostalgia. You can see the expressive potential of the body, not just in the face and hands. I am struck by the contrast between the white and your cinnamon-colored skin and your hair; the pink background of the window that keeps us from knowing what's behind the glass, or what's behind the mask.[161]

Learning not to cry, hiding emotions

I was handed a shotgun used to kill animals and was told it was to kill a bird. And the hole was already. I didn't know what for. When they got to her, they tied her up and I asked why she had come with us. They said: "This is the bird you're going to kill." When we got to the hole, the girl told me to give her a hug and a kiss and to do what she told me to do: "Kiss my baby a lot, tell my mom the guerrillas killed me, and promise me you'll leave the group." The commander told me that if I cried he'd kill me too. And I didn't cry. A tear escaped and I wiped it right off.[162]

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[161] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. March 30, 2012.
[162] Excerpt from Daniela's story: "Looking for a Dad". It's very similar to one presented in the Human Rights Watch report, "You Learn Not to Cry": "I had a friend, Juanita, who got in trouble for sleeping with several guys. We were friends since we were civilians, and we shared a tent. The commander said it didn't matter that she was my friend; she made a mistake and had to pay for it. I closed my eyes and fired, but I missed her, so I fired again. The hole was right next to her. I had to bury her and cover her with dirt. The commander said: "You did that very well, even if you cried. You'll have to do it many more times and you're going to have to learn not to cry" (2004, p.35).

Vicky:	Julio, of all your abilities, of all the things you know how to do and learned in the armed group, which are the most important for your life that can be used and be taken advantage of in your life?
Julio:	Well, I learned that when you're going to do something, you should think first.[163]
Vicky:	What good came out of being there for you?
Adriana:	Learning to value life... there's a saying there, that half your life has been bought – that your life is hanging by a thread. So, yes, to value life... not be so sure of yourself... When they say: "Go!" you go, right away. Above all, to value life, and family, because when I was there they'd say: "Who knows when you'll see your family again." That really hurts... So just the sharing... Sharing is great there because it doesn't matter if it is or isn't... It's really nice because you have friends there... As for the rest, well, where I was they were very supportive. You were always thinking of your buddies... So that's how you learn to be more aware of others, to have more empathy, and what more can I say? I appreciate having been to a lot of different places... Because wherever I went, people treated me very well. The women would say, "Oh, look at the girl, the girl this and that..." It was great because even though I was in one of those groups, people weren't afraid of me. So that was very important. Instead of pushing you aside, they thought of you and that was also very important to me. And being able to sit and talk to the women... Having that... just the fact you could talk with people was so important. And what else? That's about all.[164]

Resisting authority

Lucy didn't want to give me her purse at one of the G*reen Zone* workshops. Despite my express, direct and repeated requests, she wouldn't give it up. I had to give in. I realized later that she was carrying her most prized possession: a new cell phone that also played music. [165]

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[163] *Talleriando* 21. The Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.
[164] *Talleriando* 24. Adriana´s Flees. September 4, 2012.
[165] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. April 10, 2012.

Figure 15. Photo of Lucy in the *Green Zone*. April 10, 2012.

Figure 16. Photo of Eduardo in the *Green Zone*. February 14, 2012.

Not forgetting: The body´s memory	
Eduardo:	Today I wanted to dress as a civilian.
Vicky:	What do you mean?
Eduardo:	Out of uniform... this is like school camouflage.[166]

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[166] *Talleriando* 2. Printer or Tree. February 14, 2012.

Coping with Loneliness and discrimination

This is Susana, my rabbit. I put her there because she misbehaves with me. She bites and scratches me. So I hit her, but then I regret it. This trunk is my refuge... when I feel sad; I hide there so no one can find me and so I can be alone. María

Figure 17. Photos taken by María, 2010.

I chose the theme of loneliness for my photos because I want to show the world how many people die because society isolates and neglects them. María. [167]

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[167] Photos taken at home, during the *Desvincularte* program led by David del Campo and Daniela González. Manizales. PHT, 2010.

"We're not all like that"

Vicky: Have you ever experienced, because you're young, for example, adults who say things about you, like that you're irresponsible or don't follow the rules? (Daniela raises her hand.)

Daniela: Some people were badmouthing us once in a bus, going downtown. This lady was badmouthing this boy who studies at our school... She said that we were irresponsible because we didn't give a damn about anything. What she said really hurt, but I didn't say anything and instead spoke with the people at CEDAT.

Vicky: Was she is a foster mom?

Daniela: Yes. That hurt because we're not all alike. Some are spoiled, but we aren't all spoiled.[168]

For example, someone might ask: "Are you at the university, or going to school?" That's always the question when you get to this stage... when you first arrive. "Are you from here in Manizales?" And you say: "Well, no, I'm not from Manizales... I'm from here or there..." And then they start: "So why did you come here to Manizales?" And then you say: "Well, because I have more family here and I liked Manizales more because it's got such a great atmosphere..." Then they're silent and go "ah..." (Response). Then you start to also ask if they have any kids or if they live with their mother, and you try to get them to trust you and things like that.[169]

The war was an opportunity

Vicky: What could you say to people about that? About that discrimination? If you could tell someone about it... anything?

Adriana: Well I'd say this: if you're in a place like that, it's not because you like guns, or because you like to suffer... it's because you're using those means. I'm talking about myself, because I wanted to go to school and be somebody in life. But in my heart it wasn't about picking up a gun or killing... never. I mean, the reason you go there is because you're looking for more opportunities. I mean, look, if I hadn't gone there, who knows where I'd be right now.

Vicky: Why, Adriana?

Adriana: At home I never would have had the chance to go to school or I would've, like they say, already had a kid. I'd be, well, living on the farm, living in a whole different environment and I wouldn't be preparing myself for a better life, to be somebody in life. So I'd say it's like a chance you get... even though its unlegal (sic), like they say, like that saying about everyone choicing (sic) the good path or the bad path. So I think it's inside you. [170]

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[168] *Talleriando* 3. My Relationships. February 28, 2012.
[169] Conversation with Mariana. *Talleriando* 3. My Relationships. February 28, 2012.
[170] *Talleriando* 22. Adriana's Life. August 21, 2012.

Vicky:	And how do you handle that situation in your everyday life, when you meet someone new?
Adriana:	For example, I don't think the fact that you've been "in there" necessarily means you're a bad person. There are civilians who are worse people than we are. So I think, like they say, I'm more of a pro when it comes to that because my life comes first, and if I don't love myself then nobody's going to love me. Me first, it's my skin before anyone else's... it doesn't matter if it's my best friend or whatever... I come first. The thing is, if you mention the guerrillas then people get all upset or scared or whatever. I mean, it's really alarming. So I think it's better to just not say anything. Things are better that way.[171]

Others Who Save Our Lives

	My Dad Was My Hero
Adriana:	I was really happy while my dad was alive because my dad was like my hero... He always protected me. I only remember one time that he whipped me... because I disobeyed. I was like the plague... I think that was the first and last time he ever hit me. And he never beat me again. But my mom... she hit me for everything. And my dad spoiled me. My dad brought me meat, rice, and gave me *aguapanela*... When he'd come home from town, he'd bring me lots of candy and I'd said: "All for me!" (Laughs).
Vicky:	You were saying a while ago that your dad is with you at very important times in your life, right? What others besides the ones you've already mentioned?
Adriana:	For example... when I feel lonely I think of him and it's nice because it's like I think of him and he gives me strength to keep going. I always say my dad is reflected in me because, for example, because my dad was like, how do you say... very sociable with people, always helping them out... He couldn't let anyone come to the house, for example, without offering them a glass of water. He always treated everyone the same, no matter where they came from. He was always very polite with everyone. So I think I'm like that, I think of myself like that a lot because I can't... it's like they say: "we're all the same".
Vicky:	Do you feel that way too? That your father lives on in you... in the things you do?
Adriana:	Always... The way I am... that's how my dad was. And what else? That's all.[172]

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[171] *Talleriando* 22. Adriana's Life. August 21, 2012.
[172] *Talleriando* 22. Adriana's Life. August 21, 2012

Once my grandmother sent me to the river to wash dishes. The dishes were slippery and I wasn't paying attention and I dropped one. My uncle was teaching me to swim so I jumped in after the plate and a crocodile was in the river and my uncle was fixing our canoe and he saw the bubbles a crocodile makes when it breathes. He saw when it raised its head above the water and got in the canoe and pulled me out and said: "forget about the plate." My grandmother scolded me about the plate and he stood up for me. He said we could buy another plate but not another little girl.[173]

Adriana: That was really scary. And when we got to the jail... ay! I got this real tough guy, like they say (laughs), and I couldn't even talk I was so scared and there he was, this tough guy... I remember he had a mole right here (pointing to her left cheek). I'll never forget because he was so hard on me.

Vicky: How do you mean?

Adriana: Because he said if I didn't tell the truth he'd hang me (laughs). Look, those people committed a lot of injustices and I was scared to death.

Vicky: Did he interrogate you?

Adriana: Yes. He was like "if you don't tell the truth I'll hang you" and I was thinking "what a sad way to die" (laughs).

Vicky: But you didn't say anything?

Adriana: No, I couldn't even talk. Imagine someone telling you they're going to hang you and I was like "what a sad death I'm going to have." That's how it was but then a while later this nice policeman came in. Not nice physically, but when I saw him I felt all calm and I felt my dad's presence. When he said: "Honey, how are they treating you?" I felt my dad's presence and I was able to speak to this guy. I felt more relaxed with this one. But I felt my dad's presence and wherever that guy is now, may God protect him from all evil and danger. Because I felt my dad's presence and he was like my dad because he stayed with me the whole time until they handed me over to Child Welfare. And he kept bringing me snacks. He took care of me and when they handed me over to Child Welfare I never heard from him again. Wherever he is, may God shine on him because he was someone very special at that moment and I felt my dad's presence. And when that man came in everybody was more polite. Even that old asshole treated me better.[174]

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[173] Daniela. "Looking for a Dad".
[174] *Talleriando* 22. Adriana's Life. August 21, 2012.

Enjoying and Caring for the Body

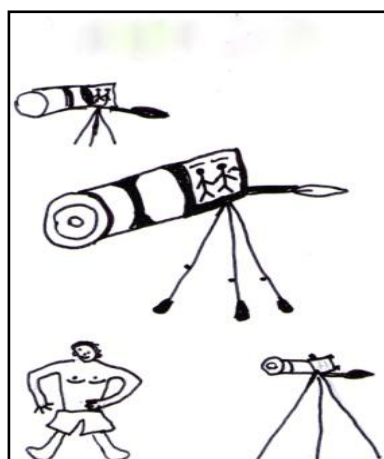|	
Figure 18. Photo of Fabio. August 28, 2012.

Figure 19. Drawing by Santiago. August 28, 2012. | Vicky: I have a drawing here by Santiago.

Sandra: How nice!

Vicky: Santiago draws really well. This looks like a real drawing. So we have cameras here... what else?

Santiago: This means being strong.

Vicky: You mean all the exercises we do? Or what else?

Santiago: Yes, you have to be strong in life. Not let yourself fall whenever you have a problem. If you have a problem at school, not let yourself fall behind.

Vicky: What does that have to do with this project?

Santiago: Well, because you make friends, who share and help out...

Vicky: Does this project help you with that?
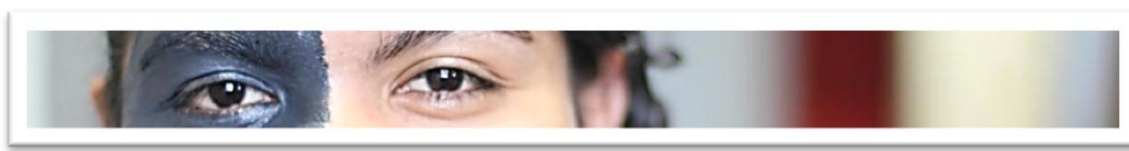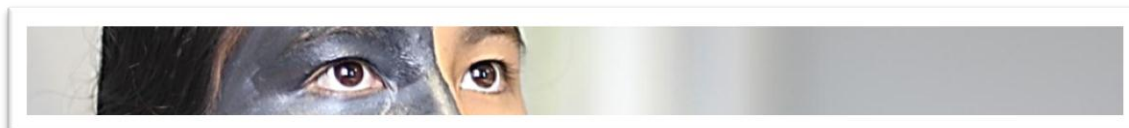
Santiago: Yes, to be stronger.[175] |
| Enjoying movement, music, and dance. Discovering the pleasure in being alive |
Figure 20. Photo of María in the *Green Zone*. March 20, 2012 |

[175] *Talleriando* 23. Trees and Names. August 28, 2012.

Observing the world: Hope and Fear

Cielo: I really enjoyed that. It really made me forget other things that I used to like a lot (I think she refers to guns). So it made me see like other things, other places.[176]

Figure 21. Photos by Tatiana, Johny, Camilo, Cielo, Fabio, María, Eduardo and Mariana.

[176] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure. December 2012.

Hands in the Air: Asking to be considered

Figure 22. Photo taken in the *Green Zone*. July 3, 2012.

Although they still stand like armed men and women, they feel the need to be in a group, participate in the conversation, stick together. They need a link that will help them integrate, become part of the circle. Here they are, with their eyes closed for a moment; they never want to close their eyes, "don't close your eyes," just like "don't cry." Keeping your eyes open is a strategy for remaining constantly alert, always awake. One eye closed and the other open. Always looking outward, at the danger of what's happening on the outside; not inward, not towards themselves, towards their intimacy.[177]

Figure 23. Photo taken in the *Green Zone*. October 2, 2012.

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[177] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. November 2012.

Ability to speak, narrate, make speech, counsel others, stand up in public

I just want to say that some people think life is easy, that life is rosy... you know what I mean? But it's not true. You go out there and the world eats you alive. You have to think first. I've spent almost six years struggling in this program and everything... but I've learned something from everywhere I've been. You have to honor your commitments. And, really, here we are in a program... They give us everything and we live as rich people... you know what I mean? But when we get out, nobody on the outside is going to say: "Here, kid, let me give you this." We have to be very smart and think about what we're doing. It's true that this thing (the program) creates many opportunities and we don't take advantage of them, you know what I mean? You should take advantage of them, but some people don't. They think "I'm rich, I'm a millionaire, with what I've learned I can go out there and take care of myself on my own" and, really kids, this is something you don't come across every day. One day somebody said to me: "Alex, you're so lucky." And I said "why?" "Because you really have people who support you" and I said: "Oh, yea, thanks..." But the truth is, in this program you have to earn that respect yourself. You have to earn that love yourself... I've been alive nearly 40 years now (laughter) and you can tell how old I am because I've learned so many things... I learned to pick myself up, I've fallen... For example, I was just in the Sun classroom and I came out and thought "Wooooow!" Then I said: "This new school is going to really hit me hard" but I'm already getting over it great... For example, I want to be great. I always dream big. I don't imagine myself in a little house like this (using his hands to show a small size). I dream about having a mansion, with my entire family there, having all the people I love most there and all the good things. Know what I mean? That's why we have to take advantage of all this. That's what I've been telling Camilo, who is the naughtiest one here. True, he's still very young, only 14 years old, but it's time you got cracking, kid. When I was fourteen I was a little wasp, but even though you're the youngest one in the program, you have to take advantage of everything you have and of everyone here. Maybe next year we won't be here anymore or new people will come in, or the program might end and we'll all be screwed. I'll say it again: life is not a bed of roses. You have to fight for everything you get in this life. Thank you (applause).[178]

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[178] Speech by Alex in the G*reen Zone Talleriando* 24. Adriana`s Flees. September 4, 2012.

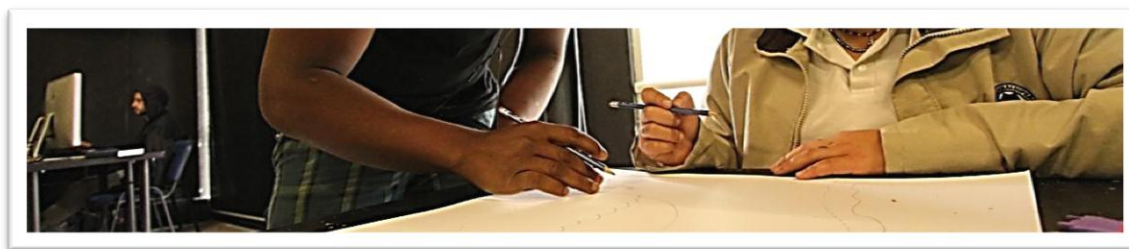## Building Collective Stories: Drawn, Narrated, Acted, with their hands

Figure 24. Photo of Alex and Lucy in the *Green Zone.* September 25, 2012.

Figure 25. Photo of María and Mariana in the *Green Zone*. March 20, 2012

Figure 26. Drawing by María and Mariana. March 20, 2012. [179]

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[179] A picture on the board during the Wolf Dancing Bachata workshop.

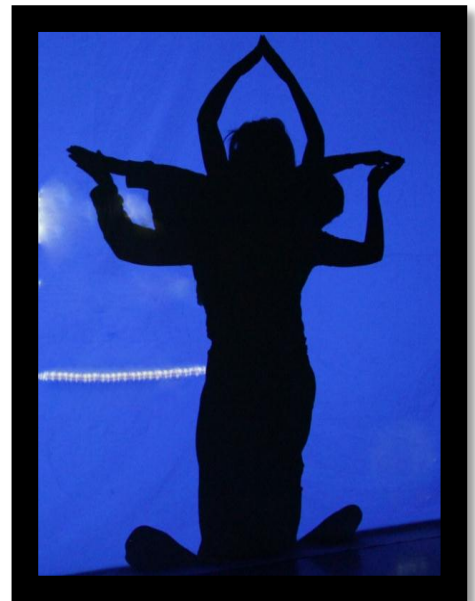Figure 27. Photos taken by the kids. May 29, 2012.

Figure 28. Photos in the Body Shadow Performance. August 21, 2012.

Laughing: Making Others Laugh

Figure 29. Photos of Johny and Alex in the *Green Zone*.

Maria:	And how old would I be, if I'm 19 now?
Vicky:	Let's see... 29. That old? (laughs) And what would Maria be doing?
Maria:	She'd be working as a bilingual secretary. I'm not living in Colombia... I'm living with my "little bald guy" (laughs). I have a one year-old daughter, I think... yes... And I go out partying on the weekend... Saturdays I party.
Vicky:	With your "little bald guy?"
María:	No...
Daniela:	With some other "little bald guy" (laughs).
María:	No, the bald guy stays home and takes care of our little girl and I go out partying on Saturday. Sunday night is family night... we cook out, we eat...[180]

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[180] Conversations about how Daniela and Maria will be ten years from now. *Talleriando* 10. Body Shadow Performance. April 24, 2012.

Figure 30. Photos of Jaime and Cielo in the *Green Zone.*

Figure 31. Photos of María, Daniela and Julio in the Green Zone.

I had a lot of pets. There was my uncle's dog, a hunter, he liked to hunt armadillos and *ñeques*. You could send him out to get a chicken and he'd go and bring it back. He was called Diomedes Diaz[181]. He was real big and beautiful. But he was careless and this big snake bit him. He came home and he was like all mad. He wanted to bite all of us. He looked at us and just dropped down dead. Then I had a chicken that laid a lot, a whole lot of eggs. A snake killed it too. And at the mine I had a puppy, a little black puppy that was very beautiful. My grandmother had the male and she fed it a lot and it died... she overfed it and it was so full it died. They didn't feed my little female so much and it survived. Her name was Shakira.[182] I loved that dog. Where I come from they kill dogs all the time, they poison them. My dog grew up and she's a mother now. Shakira is still alive and her owners are *paisas*. I'd love to have a pet. [183]

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[181] Name of a Vallenato singer from Colombia's Atlantic coast.
[182] Name of a female Colombian pop star.
[183] Daniela. "Looking for a Dad".

Figure 32. Photo of Camilo and Vicky in the *Green Zone.* Abril de 2012.

Daniela:	We're both working as nurses. Yes, she's going to get married too. I won't yet. Not until my prince shows up.
María:	That's so infantile... that prince stuff. He'll never come. He's not going to fall down from the sky.
Daniela:	What if he did fall from the sky?
Maria:	The only thing that'll fall from the sky is a bomb! Cut!!! (laughs).[184]

Caretaking

Alex: ...he's a kid who's still young. I love Camilo like a brother, you know? I love him best of all; I have the most fun with him, but sometimes when he's in a bad mood, he gets in a bad mood and he can be really impulsive at times. I've told him, "Camilo, kid, don't do that stuff, it's no good." I'm always on his case. I always ask, "How's Camilo doing?" because he needs someone on his case all the time. I love him like a brother, I'll say it again, but it's just that this kid is... I tell him, "Get going! Don't give up! Keep studying..." He's really smart at school. [185]

When I saw her the first time I told her to get lost... she had a baby. But she didn't pay any attention. She was living in another village with the kid's father. She left the kid with her mother and joined the group. I told her to go back but she said no; wherever I was, she was going. She also said her mom took better care of the kid. I left her alone and thought she'd change her mind later. We had to go through training together. Once I approached her and asked her to run away. We'd find a commander who'd send us both to some village and then we'd run away. But she didn't want to.[186]

Painting, Taking Good Care, Dedication, Attentiveness

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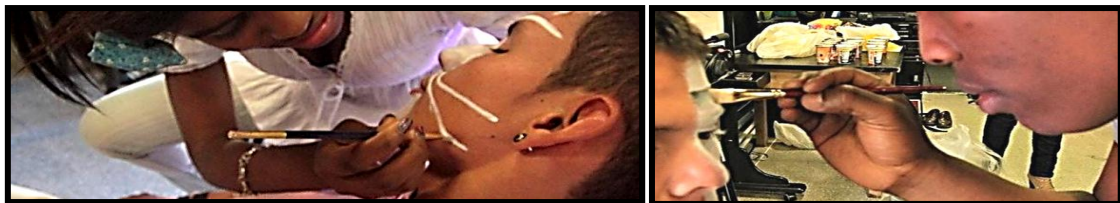
[184] Conversations about how Daniela and Maria will be ten years from now. *Talleriando* 10. Body Shadow Performance. April 24, 2012.

[185] *Talleriando* 21. Tee of Life. July 17, 2012.

[186] Daniela's Story "Looking for a Dad".
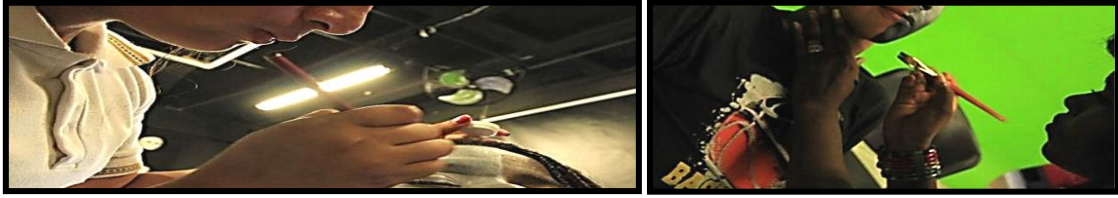
Figure 33. Photos taken in the *Green Zone*. Octubre 23, 2012.

Caring for their own sons and daughters: wanting their lives to be different

Vicky: If you were to think about having a relationship with someone in the future, what kind of relationship do you think about, or...?

Mariana: What do you mean?

María: Getting married...

Mariana: Well, not married, not right now because I don't think about that. Right now the important thing, aside from studying, is my daughter. I can't just marry anyone because I have a daughter and you never know who you're with, or what kind of problems you might have. But I'll just wait and see what happens because I'm building a life right now.[187]

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[187] *Talleriando* 3. My Relationships. February 28, 2012

To be somebody in life

> The best metaphor for the *Green Zone* was the tree. Because it was very close to their lives: they grew up around trees, ate from them, slept thanks to them, protected themselves from the rain and from animals. In the country and at war. They have been with them all their lives. They know everything about trees. [188]
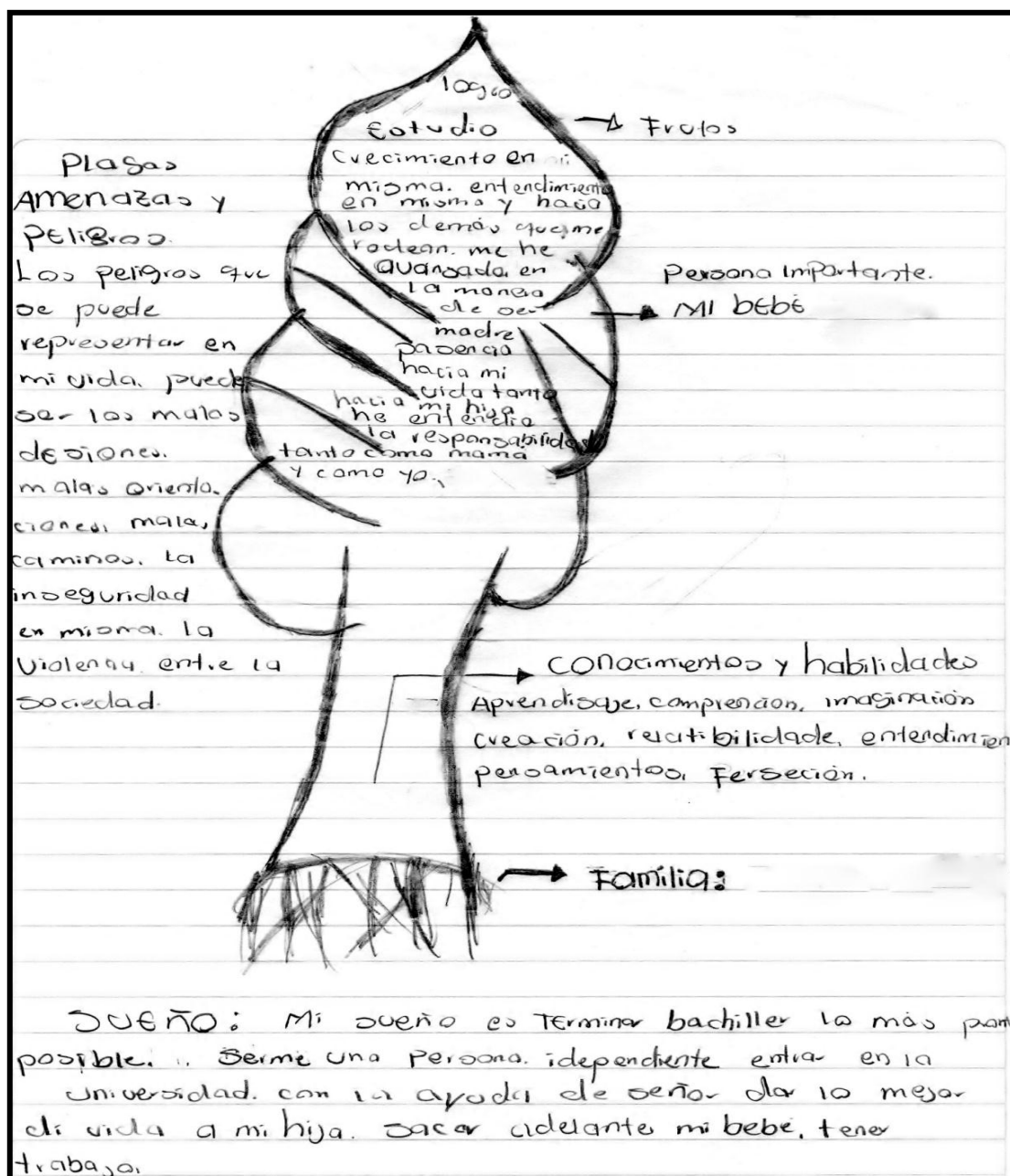
Figure 34. Mariana's tree of life drawing. July, 2012.[189]

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[188] Lugo, Victoria. Field journal notes. April 17, 2012.

[189] The tree's roots represent people in their family and community. The trunk, their skills and the things they've learned. The leaves, important people. The branches, their desires and dreams for the future. The fruit, their achievements. The diseases, the threats they face. *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.

Figure 35. Cielo's tree of life drawing. July, 2012.[190]

[190] *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.

Figure 36. Santiago's tree of life drawing. July, 2012.[191]

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[191] *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life. July 17, 2012.

Figure 37. Tatiana`s tree of life drawing, July, 2012. [192]

Learning to Read and Write, Learning...

"A handkerchief fell from the sky, painted in a thousand colors, and the tip of it read: little girl that I love." [193]
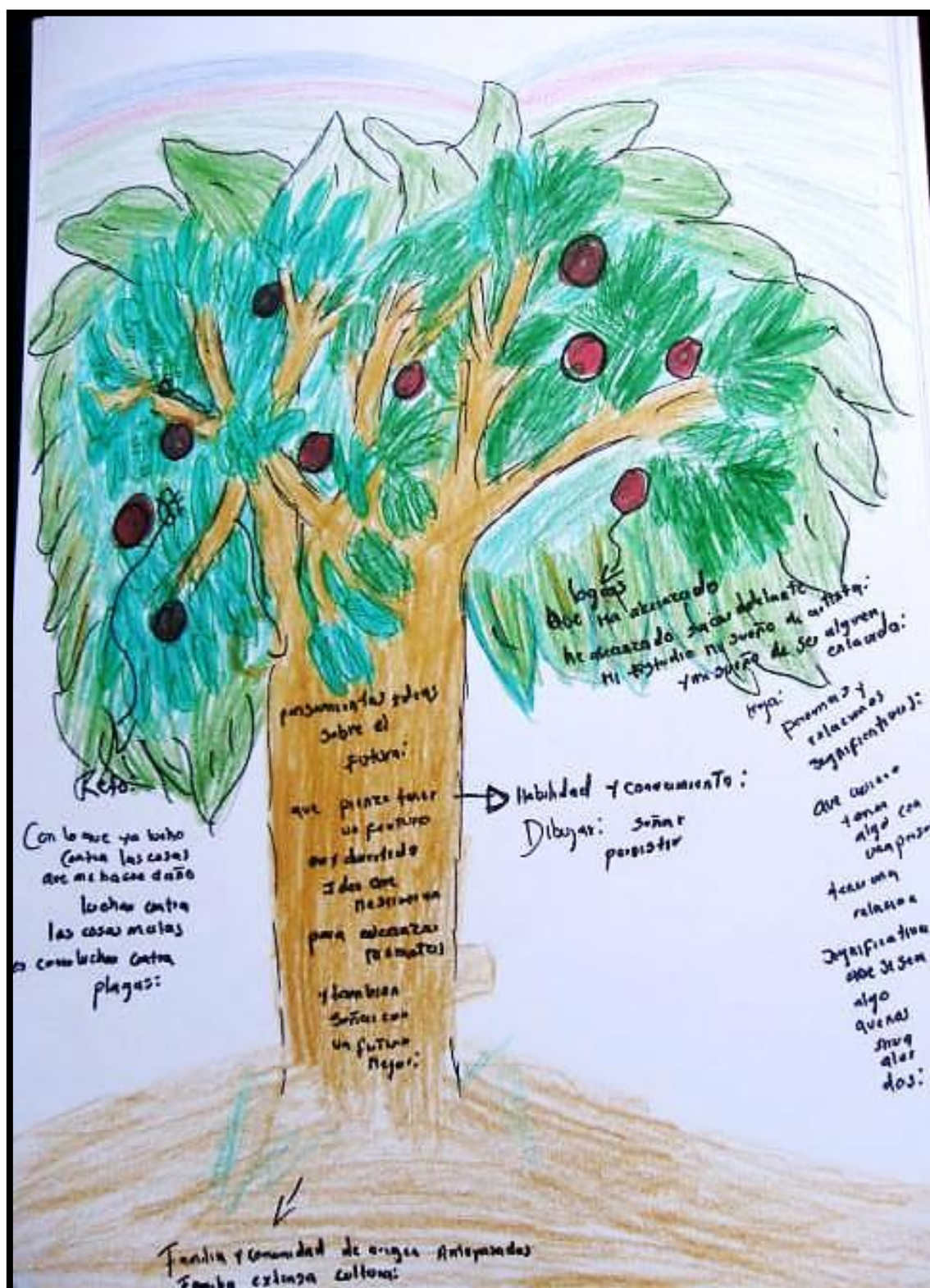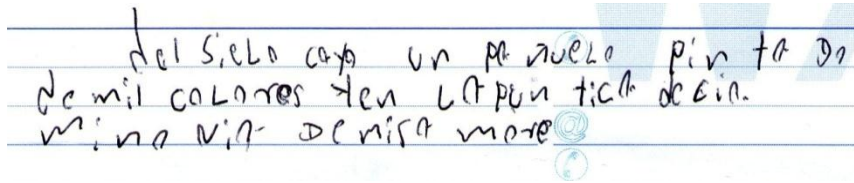

Dreams of Going to School, to College, to the University, to Work

Figure 38. Photos taken in the Green Zone. April 24 and September 25, 2012.

We've asked our fairy godmother to turn us into: Ernesto: I wish she'd turn me into someone else so I could have new experiences in life, and be a better person every day, and take advantage of every opportunity in my life. Cielo: I'd like to be a little girl again, to be with my parents and give them all the love in the world and take advantage of all the beautiful things in this world, and also to study and finish high school at a good age and go to college and choose a career that I like. When I'm a professional, to help my parents and thank them for everything they have given me and thank God for everything. [194]

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[193] Poem by Eduardo written in the G*reen Zone*. *Talleriando* 20. Helping Hands, Frustration and Poem, July 10, 2012.

[194] *Talleriando* 9. Ana, the Fairy Godmother and the Future. April 17, 2012

Learning to Cook to Care for Others

Figure 39. Photo of Daniela and Elena, backyard of Vicky´s house. September, 2013.

Learning to Drive a Truck

Figure 40. Photo by Julio. 2010

I'd like to drive across the country in my truck. Even better, the whole world. I'd like my work to take me to more places, cities, countries and landscapes.[195]

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[195] Photo taken during the *Des-Vincularte* project directed by David Field and Daniela González. Manizales, PHT, 2010.

To Strive, Persevere, Fight

Vicky:	What do you think makes this tree stand firm?
Alex:	Stand firm? A lot of effort and dedication so the tree doesn't fall. I'm a hard worker; sometimes I've gone through bad times, sometimes I've been through good times. To keep the tree from getting overwhelmed, from losing its branches, you have to work hard for what you want, you know? For example, you want to study... I've already been promoted to the next course and that's another accomplishment. I never imagined I'd make it that far, but there you have it! An achievement I never imagined I'd be studying with a music teacher who's a real gentleman to me... and I'm really studying for those people who gave me a hand. One day I'm going to give it back to them; I'll give back I with a lot of love and affection.
Vicky:	Come, I want to give you a hug. [196]

Vicky:	Why is graduation so important to you?
Adriana:	It's the greatest satisfaction of everything I've had to go through. Look, I've got my diploma! It's like a prize, for me and everyone else who has also worked hard for me. Because when they handed me my diploma, July started to cry and I said: "I'm not going to cry, I won't cry..." And when I had the diploma in my hand I started to shake. Because it's something that I never thought I was going to have... a high school diploma in my hand. And that's when you realize that however tiny... the important thing is to have hope and put all your effort into the thing you want... I feel very happy, because I believe you can get it if you really want... even though it was hard and everything... today I feel very proud. And that's all...[197]

Vicky:	Adriana, if we were to tell the story of your life, what would you like us to include in the story?
Adriana:	I'd like you to tell the whole story, because there are some people, I mean, for example, those who have everything and don't appreciate what they are given because of vanity. But, I've lived through so much and despite the bad times I've had, I've kept on going. It hasn't been easy to get here. Even though when I arrived I couldn't read or write, I didn't know how to get around in a city, and now look at everything I've accomplished... I mean, you can get ahead.
Vicky:	Is that the moral of your story? That it *is* possible to get ahead?
Adriana:	Yes, of course. I mean, I'm not from here. I'm from the jungle, you know? And it's very far away. It wasn't even close to a town. It took five hours to get to any other town. It took two days to get there. I'm not from right over there, or those farms over there... So just look where I'm from and where I'm going. You have to work hard. And despite your mistakes, you have to work hard. You learn, no matter if there is good or bad.[198]

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[196] *Talleriando* 21. Tree of Life workshop. July 17, 2012.
[197] *Talleriando* 31. Evaluation and Closure. December 2012.
[198] *Talleriando* 24. Adriana`s Flees. September 4, 2012.

Daniela's Voice

By Daniela & Victoria

As a Little Girl...

I grew up
I was born
I broke my arms
I thought
I didn't believe them
I thought
I was there
I turned 8

I lived
I realized
I went out on my own

I sowed
I cooked
I worked in the mine
I went in there
I washed gold
I panned
I looked
I worked hard
I carried it
I sold it

I was left on my own
I threw myself at it
I told him
I got sick
I didn't eat anything
I loved him very much
I followed him
I cried
I clung to the cross
I caressed the cross
I wondered
I saw a pretty red ball

"My Girl"

I remember
I got up myself
I beat myself
I took from him
I was jealous
I neglected myself
I let myself go
I remember
I learned
I had pets
I had a chicken
I had a dog
I want to have

He Was Everything to Me

I was the one he loved best
I didn't realize it
I didn't know
I didn't know
I missed him
I realized

I saw
I asked
I climbed a tree
I recognized my uncle
I didn't understand
I thought of nothing
I stayed home

I want revenge
I realized
I cried
I'd like to dream
I'd like to say
I want him to appear
I felt something cold
I thought to myself

Bed with blood

I slept in a thong
I recognized him
I managed to grab the chain
I broke his chain
I had no support
I went
I approached
I told the commander

Two Options: Man or Group
I approached
I wanted to go
I told him
I asked him
I turned 9
I approached
I told him
I wanted to go
I left
I told him
I looked
I approached
I told him
I wanted to go
I said yes
I found myself
I stayed asleep
I knew nothing more
I went passed the corner
I went
I went out wandering
I was there for seven years

I Couldn't Regret
I drank
I was bored all the time
I smoked
I arrived
I went out wandering
I was looking for food
I collected money
I picked coca
I trained
I walked at night
I practiced with a pretend wooden rifle

I Didn't Cry

I saw her for the first time
I told her to go
I told her to come back
I left her alone
I thought
I approached him
I told him
I asked him
I didn't know what for
I asked
I did not cry
I had my eyes closed
I fired
I had to show joy
I still say she is my best friend

If It Was Rice, It Was Rice

I learned
I want to face myself
I realized
I wanted to ask
I learned
I learned
I loved my gun

I had a boyfriend
I was on guard duty
I saw them come back without him
I loved him very much
I didn't pay any attention
I asked about him
I started to cry
I was unarmed
I turned 13
I am jealous
I've been close to men
I worry about others

I tried to run away
I was punished
I miss sometimes

Yes, I Am

I saw nothing
I went back
I said
I heard the talk
I heard the army's guns firing
I answered
I knew he was very bad
I ran away from him
I hid in a hole
I took off my uniform
I left my rifle
I took off running
I followed
I ran and ran and ran
I got to a flat spot
I lay down
I started to cry
I asked god
I listened
I knew
I went that way
I went down
I found a ravine
I crossed it
I got to the other side
I left
I found traces of the Army
I recognized them
I said
I followed
I came to a village
I was nearly naked
I stayed
I said
I worked
I was falling in love
I made friends
I said nothing
I said yes
I asked him
I didn't want to leave
I told them
I lied to them
I whistled at him
I said yes

I gave myself up
I ate no breakfast or lunch
I wouldn't eat
I said
I made friends
I realized
I woke up
I cried
I wanted to stay
I was happy there

They Took Me

I had my defender
I was there for 3 months
I made a good friend
I told them
I found myself
I got nervous
I stayed
I asked him
I appeared
I didn't want to eat anything
I got sick
I realized
I approached them
I asked them
I said I didn't like
I made many friends
I was going into a foster home
I was scared
I didn't even know
I got off first
I was alone
I got to the airport
I said no
I was very scared
I said yes
I was afraid
I was very afraid
I said inside myself
I wasn't able to eat
I took my
I kept
I always kept that in mind
I did not feel safe
I had never shared

I got in the boat
I stayed with the soldiers
I said no
I said: yes, that's me

I saw a friend
I called her
I hugged her
I said yes
I knew her
I spoke
I got used to it
I was a child
I went fishing
I ate it
I was happy
I ate the eye

Stop Being Nervous and Talk

I was scared
I was mixing up the times
I did everything
I managed all by myself
I fought with her
I was first
I wasn't registered
I stayed with the boy
I carried him
I was concentrating on him
I cried

I was getting used to it
I wanted
I wasn't happy
I cried

I sang to him
I started to get bored
I felt bad
I started to decide to speak
I told him
I started to cry
I felt afraid
I felt rested
I started talking
I said
I arrived
I wanted to stay
I said goodbye
I said
I learned

"This Plant Is Only Just Being Born"

I want to study
I want to be a chef
I'm starting to love
I want to have
I do not want to have
I want to tell
I want to help
I will fight

8

Final Thoughts

Being consistent with Social Construction, the ideas expressed in this dissertation and especially in this chapter do not constitute objective, true, essential or definitive facts, but are instead fluid and changing meanings constructed through the joint actions of those who participated in this inquiry. What we produced together can be considered neither objective nor subjective, but relational in itself, a co-product of the relationship, and is located in our culture, history and "language games."

This inquiry allowed me to appreciate more clearly the ongoing dialectic between deconstruction and construction. Deconstruction provides the possibility of another perspective, questioning what is presented as natural, normal, rational, obvious or necessary. This research has questioned some of the dominant discourses supported by social institutions (deficit, victim, protection, trauma, reintegration, disengagement) and the lifestyles associated with them. Deconstruction allows the local to be made what appears to be universal, and make multiple what is held up to be unitary.

On the other hand, and as a concomitant process, construction acts as an invitation to create new ideas and practices, to develop a different kind of conversation, one of social action that affects the various lifestyles. Thus, the range of voices expands and new realities are created. The best example of this was the creation of the *Green Zone* and its effects on the relational realities of those who participated in it. After completing this work, I believe there is great potential in Constructionist inquiry for understanding relational phenomena by integrating Deconstruction and Construction oriented through utility. The development of this type of social science research could help to bridge the gap between theory and practice, to expand the world's epistemological diversity by radically recognizing the plurality of knowledge, dissolving dichotomies such as research/intervention, subjectivity/objectivity, theoretical/applied research, participation/non-participation, and benefit communication and, possibly, complementarity between allegedly unreconcilable paradigms and methods. Based on the preceding, I wonder: What other kinds of inquiry, complementary to Social Construction, might be undertaken? How to contribute to the development of this form of inquiry/action?

In this final chapter I share both the main lessons learned during the research process as well as guides and orienting questions for inquiry/action, which I hope can be useful in future attempts to enrich alternatives for social change. I have grouped them together around two themes: ideas for keep working with children and youth ex-combatants and ideas beyond the scope of this work.

Ideas to continue working with children and youth ex-combatants

Sharing with youth ex-combatants, from the margins, allowed me to appreciate the particularities, multiple realities, and nuances of a world practically unknown to me and of which I had heard little more than strange allusions from outside sources. Their world is different from mine, given their diversity, their experiences, their passage through the war, because they belong to another generation, other territories, other cultures. They belong to other communities of discourse; they play other "language games." Despite these differences, their world seemed close to mine because the difference didn't originate in a belief that their world is inferior, illegitimate or less valuable.

And so, at the same time, I don't see their world and mine as being so different. We are alike in that we are all human beings whose lives are worth living and being mourned. They are much the same as others their age who share their dreams, needs and interests. They are like their siblings and neighbors in that they share the same right we all have to a decent life. Paradoxically, if we emphasize this equality too much we risk homogenization, invisibility, and a unitary vision. But, if we focus on the difference, we may lose sight of what we have in common. This inquiry allowed me to delve into the complex relationship and tension between equality and difference, its dynamic and continuous movement, which merits further exploration. How alike or different are we -- the participants, victims and bystanders of war? What are the boundaries of their world in relation to the world of those of us who never went to war? How to ensure that State policies and programs recognize both equality and difference?

Overcoming marginalization and discrimination

One of the conclusions I have reached in this process of inquiry is that perhaps the greatest challenge we face as a society regarding the transition of youth ex-combatants to civilian life is overcoming their marginalization and discrimination. The ICBF protection program, based on an individualistic and disempowering discourse, reproduces the cycle of marginalization to which the youth were subjected before the war, given the conditions in which they lived, during the war, given the illegality of the armed group, and after the war, given the fact they were separated from their families, their land and their culture, and, again, given their limited access to a dignified life.

The youth ex-combatants belonged to armed groups that, although they no longer necessarily espouse revolutionary ideals, are still considered criminals, terrorists or bandits by the country's most conservative factions. The elites continue to see them as a threat to the protection of their property and land. And victims of armed groups often focus their hatred and desire for revenge on youth ex-combatants. Having separated from their armed groups, their peers see them as deserters, and to members of enemy groups, they remain enemies. Members of the Armed Forces, their former opponents, still view them with suspicion and mistrust. The youth themselves become trapped in the same cycles of mistrust. The discrimination they now suffer for having been part of an armed group, in addition to occasional ethnic, class and gender discrimination, makes it difficult for them to take part in processes of education, work, recreation and cohabitation. This threatens their social survival and the possibility of rebuilding their lives in dignity.

In addition to the above, overcoming marginalization and discrimination has much to do with the value society places on their lives and the trust it has in their ability to become what they would like to be. To a large extent, this research aimed at helping them recognize their value, and at showing others, prospective readers, the multiple nuances of their experience, the diverse perspectives on their lives, in order

to demonstrate that they are much more than the stereotypes we have created, that there is more than a single history of the war and the trauma, that besides being victims they are survivors, and that through rational and very daring strategies they were able to overcome difficult situations, resisting domination and abuse.

To break with stereotypes, the youth ex-combatants must participate in dialogue with others near to them and in social conversation, recovering their voices, which is possible only if we allow them to speak, if they are truly heard, if we assume they have valuable things to contribute, if we are willing to learn from them, if their past as fighters and warriors is valued, if their present as civilians with the same rights as everyone else is valued, if we trust in what they can become in the right conditions. This research showed me that this is possible; it' is not just rhetoric. They must be allowed to participate in the national dialogue on reconciliation and peace, in the definition of policies for other young people like them who come out of the war, and in their own recovery programs. They need to be invited, involved in the processes of inquiry/action carried out *with* them and not just *about* them. This means *belonging.*

Building a sense of belonging is only possible for youth ex-combatants if those of us around them treat them as real authors of our reality. Only then will they feel that reality is as much theirs as anyone else's that they belong to a family, a community, a culture, a nation, and are not strange intruders. We have much to learn from their attempts to belong: strategies for finding a family, for creating a new family when no other exists, for joining a group, even if armed and illegal.

Regardless of whether or not the peace agreement is signed, our number one priority is to ensure dignified living conditions for the rural populations where these youth come from; in other words, to ensure real and equal opportunities for development in all areas. This is the State's debt, their great responsibility in the enlistment of children and youth in the war in Colombia. If these social, political and economic conditions do not improve, youth and many other survivors won't be able to overcome the marginalization, and it will be impossible to prevent (the guarantee of non-repetition) the same or new armed groups from recruiting them again. The

youth's stories helped me understand that war is a chance to "earn a living," "defend life" and "make a life for oneself." We need the State, and not the armed groups, to guarantee this opportunity, not through subsidies or benefits but through real transformation of their living conditions.

The stories of these young people and, especially, their families' stories, showed me the importance of recovering their land: they need to *return home and restore these links.* Some families are forced to hand over their children and youth under threat of being stripped of their land; the same children and young people become displaced upon entering the armed group and even when they leave it, since they can no longer return to their land. Dispossession and the inequitable distribution or monopolization of land, have been a source and a consequence of the multiple violence in the country. It is the deepest suffering experienced by the families of child and youth ex-combatants. The new Land Law (2013) has brought hope to many of them; however, they face terribly unsafe conditions in territories still dominated by armed groups. Youth ex-combatants and their families need to once again own their land, be able to work and live on it.

The restoration of these ties means rebuilding the sense of belonging to their land, their community, their ethnic group, their ancestors, their culture, their customs, and their language. They need to feel they belong, that they have roots and an origin. It is therefore essential for any initiative to take into account not only the youth ex-combatants but their families and communities as well. The ICBF program is perverse in insisting on including the youth who went to war but *not* their siblings or neighbors who, like in Camilo's story, face the same risks and live in the same or worse conditions of poverty. This *targeting* is unfair and severs family and community ties. All should be treated as survivors of the armed conflict and all are in need of recovery.

Family reunification is not always possible or desirable, especially when enlistment in the war was caused by abuse and neglect within the family. However, a link can almost always be reestablished with someone in the extended family or community, a helping hand to lend support, someone who knows at least a part of the

youth's story. This reconstruction of the link with their culture is especially important to indigenous and afro-descendant youth whose communities are strongly attached to their traditions and customs. Recovery of a home and restoration of these ties cannot be done individually; it requires the help of others, a network of hands ready to help and guide them.

Youth ex-combatants need to *return to school.* Some of them have shown an exceptional ability to progress in a short time, while others require more guidance. Either way, they all require an educational system that is flexible, open and informed about their reality, one that welcomes and accompanies them in a process that must forge ahead in an attempt to close the gap in the shortest time possible. The education system must undergo transformation. Returning to school also means having access to job training, whether technical, technological or university, based on their interests, skills and career options. The different skills learned at war and as farm workers must be recognized so that they can be used, valued, appreciated and potentiated in civilian life.

The importance of going back to school lies not only in the academic training and preparation for a job; it is important to them to *belong* to the social institution that is the school. It is also a matter of inclusion and belonging. School teaches us to coexist with our peers, to make friends, and to confront the everyday conflicts of coexistence. Their school cannot therefore be just any school; it must understand the process and accompany the youth ex-combatants and, especially, establish public dialogue with other members to overcome the discrimination to which ex-combatants are often subjected. Special, separate classrooms may not be necessary or desirable; more important are processes adapted to their needs and integration with other members of the school community. It may then be possible to envisage political education that helps these people understand the dynamics of the armed conflict and contribute to this dialogue at school, as actors in the war. Some of us could participate in this transformation, could benefit from it, and in passing ensure a better education for all.

Youth ex-combatants need to *live a productive life.* Equally as important as learning a trade or profession is the social opportunity of accessing the production system. Some of them can and want to return to their land and do farm work like their parents. If they receive training in this area, they will be more successful at this work. Schools offering agricultural training can contribute to this purpose. For those who remain in the city, it is essential that they overcome the discrimination to which they are subjected when applying for jobs or attempting to access banking services like loans for starting their own businesses. They have difficulty managing money and the financial compensation from the State is almost never used properly, going to buy luxury items they never had, such as a TV or stereo.

At the same time, they have worked for years, before and during the war, almost always without pay. They know how to perform tasks and stick to schedules, work in teams, carry out a plan, follow orders from a superior, and support their peers. They need spaces in which to deploy these skills and acquire those they lack. They must not be seen as any other school children. They have been at work for years, in the fields or at war, in legal and illegal enterprises, financially independent or dependent. However, the following aspect is crucial to their recovery: they must be economically useful and productive, able to support themselves and their families, and financially independent. We therefore need a more supportive and less savage economic system that will open its doors to young apprentices confident of what they can become.

Victims, Perpetrators, Warriors and Survivors

I have raised the importance of legal and social recognition of youth ex-combatants as victims in Colombia, given the complex situation that led to their involvement in armed groups, their subordinate position within them (which gave rise to all forms of abuse), and especially, the chances of recovery open to them when considered victims. Those who have most suffered the rigors of war have been the least recognized. I wonder: What others have remained invisible? Who else remains uncounted, not looked at, not reported or investigated or invited? I have brushed

against the limits of their suffering and shame. Never before have I approached the drama of war and death, abuse and mistreatment as I have in this research.

I was able, through their stories, and Mariana's in particular, to recognize the humanity of the perpetrators and understand that stereotypical descriptions of war are insufficient; they are totalizing discourses that deny the complexities of human life. This demands the recognition that every life has its own rationality and is internally coherent, even the lives of our enemies; that multiple realities exist beyond the single stereotypical stories; and that relationships, even violent relationships, are much more complex than they seem. Abusive relationships are much more complex than the narratives that give voice to them; they transcend the victim/victimizer dualism. The perpetrator/Commander's humanity stems from the fact that while he may be bloodthirsty, he is a loving father who builds a relationship of trust, learning, complicity and protection in the midst of war.

These narratives of wartime experiences revealed to me the mechanics of power used to dominate and subordinate through the disciplining of bodies and enforced practices, the manipulation of fear and anger to fuel the war, the imperative subordination of the individual to the organization, and the desensitization and dehumanization. I wonder: What else can this situation teach us? How does it teach us to know ourselves better? At the same time, the war enabled these youth to feel they belonged and gave them recognition and power. They discovered abilities; resources and skills they never imagined existed. They felt useful and valuable to the war by becoming visible, distinguishing themselves in tasks, actions, adventures and risks. They learned to act collectively and expanded their horizons. I had never thought of war as offering any benefits.

Mariana' story made me realize that the dynamics of relationships in war can lead a person to reflect on the precariousness of life, on injustice, power, survival, vulnerability, fragility, a warrior's responsibility, defending the lives of others, domination, protection, endurance, humiliation, responsibility for the death of another human being, moral obligation for the "face of the other," ethical resistance, solidarity,

using words in the face of threats and punishment, and being the voice of one's peers. Mariana taught me that it is possible to inject humanity into the heart of barbarism and helped strengthen my ethical and political arguments against the war.

As explained in depth before, it is essential not to overlook the risks inherent in the *victim discourse* as a builder, organizer and creator of realities. It places the recovery of youth ex-combatants and us as a culture at risk. It is a discourse that uses inferiority and subordination to infantilize youth ex-combatants, reinforcing the State's paternalistic and authoritarian position. It can also be associated with cognitive and moral deficits, war trauma, or warrior pathologies, leading youth to be regarded as trauma patients in need of rehabilitation. Any of these associations becomes an individualistic discourse that locates the effects of war in the individual and disempowers by detracting from their experiences as warriors and survivors, from the multiple relationships that enabled their survival, from the opportunities that allowed them to transform their reality, from the possibility of facing an ethical responsibility for the damage they caused to others, and from the contributions they can make based on their war experiences.

My experiences in this inquiry made clear the responsibility of psychology in the reproduction of the deficit discourse by qualifying predictable emotional responses as mental disorders; labeling highly strategic practices as irrational; typifying the effects of war as trauma exclusively; prescribing in a manner that underestimates abilities and resources; diagnosing based solely on deficit, with the consequential implications of weakness, instability, amorality and disability; and locating the causes and effects of war in the individual, thus producing self-weakening of the person, relationships and the community. This research is, for me and hopefully for others, an invitation to recreate and transform individualistic, essentialist and deterministic psychological discourses. It provided an opportunity for me to use new forms of speech in psychology and to approach to the study of how we treat each other as participants in communicative activities in our daily lives. I wonder: What must we do to transform psychology? How can we break this cycle of progressive sickening?

It is possible that everyone in Colombia, and not only youth ex-combatants, is a survivor in one way or another. We haven't, as some have claimed, been merely passive spectators or helpless victims of violent acts. This research has taught me that damage and suffering can be interpreted in distinct ways, can be told as a single story of the life of a community, its dominant story, or as one of some possible stories, including the story of how the community has responded to the same damage and suffering. All of us, to some extent, have resisted, demanded, defended, protected, and cared for. And so I wonder: Which story do we want to tell? What is the mark left on us as a community, the story of violence in Colombia? What have we done to address this? Where is the history of the resistance and dignity? What about the acts of heroism, defense, solidarity, demands, and vindication by those of us who are survivors?

Forget, Remember and Remain Quiet

The youth ex-combatants wanted to forget the violent acts they perpetrated on others and yet these acts reappear constantly, disguised in dreams and nightmares. Reconciliation with these ghosts becomes possible when they are able to talk about them, take ethical responsibility for harm done, thereby contributing to the reparation of others who have suffered, as in Mariana's story. This is only possible in dialogue with others, outside the courtroom and not exclusively in psychological clinics. Spaces like the *Green Zone* are necessary. We could learn from the strategies of indigenous groups who encourage dialogue following these events, a loving response from the community and the obligation to make reparation for damage caused to ensure "harmonization." We, as a community, would prefer to forget the painful events we have experienced and would often rather not talk about them or are unprepared to handle the stories. However, and fortunately, time and again they reappear in myths, in art, and in the collective memory, almost always through the voices of victims or artists.

Youth ex-combatants, like other survivors, have the *right to remember;* a right to know their suffering is not socially forgotten, to keep remembering until the harm

done to them has seen justice. Some believe their suffering cannot and should not be forgotten: *forgiveness* may obscure the acknowledgement of the events responsible for their pain and suffering. However, narrating these events over and over again in front of audiences who truly listen allows survivors to separate from the cycles of revenge and hatred, to locate the hurt and suffering as one of various narratives about their lives, to expand territories of identity, and to see themselves not only as victims, like in Daniela's story. Similarly, communities affected by war need to tell their stories, to interpret their collective experiences, to recognize the meanings they attribute to them, to invoke the pain in the company of others, to strengthen their multiple identities, to learn from experience, to regain their voice, and to be taken into account in the construction of history and justice.

This inquiry taught me that storytelling is an interpersonal discursive production. The text that is created is something that always happens between people and as such is inseparable from the cultural context where it occurs. The story always unfolds in the presence of an observer (present or implied), so that the story is continually recreated, and not only *remembered;* others play an active part in the narrative and, therefore, social acceptance of a narrative inevitably depends on dialogue. The way the story is told today transforms and updates it, and transforms both the narrators and the audience.

Similarly, youth ex-combatants, like other survivors, have the *right* to keep quiet or maintain secret what they don't wish to or cannot publicly reveal. Perhaps this is a form of protection from embarrassment or humiliation. Just as they need to be heard, they may also ask that their silence be respected. As in Mariana's story of her indigenous family of origin, or Daniela's when she entered the *Green Zone.* This research showed me that these youth, and possibly other survivors, need time to express themselves. Their lives are like puzzles broken into pieces that need to be reconnected and given meaning. They need time to mourn the dead that couldn't even be buried, the lost relationships, the scars, the suffering, and the diseases from not eating or sleeping well or from living in the jungle for so long. They need time to reconnect the multiple identities that have been superimposed, one on top of another,

to recover their names and regain some continuity in their lives. They need time to build new relationships that are reliable and safe and will remain in their hearts. They have the right to remain silent and keep private what they are not yet ready to publicly reveal. This has cultural roots. Some communities, such as indigenous communities, favor silence and communication with their ancestors as a means of recovery.

Ideas beyond the scope of this work: Open letter to the readers

Professor Kenneth Gergen has asked me: How readers might use this work in their daily professional practice, as researchers or as makers of public social policy focusing either on ex-combatants or others in similar situations? Well, I have written this letter to readers, hoping to expand the network of resources used in this process should they prove applicable to other realities and contexts.

I would especially like to address readers of this work with professional ties to persons, groups and communities whose existence has been affected by the serious harm done to them. My main objective, the one I find has the greatest validity and importance, is the *performative restoration of the meaning of the damage done and of survival*. What does that mean, you may ask? Rather than concepts such as reintegration, recovery, rehabilitation or reparation, at the end, I prefer the idea of restoration. I have borrowed several ideas from the art world and the work that has been done to restore cultural goods and works of art. I am grateful for the guidance I received from my dear sister-in-law Olga, a specialist in these matters. In the art world, damaged goods considered valuable are restored. This damage should not have occurred, should have been prevented, and must not be repeated in the future. But given that is *has* occurred, and that a valuable existence has been severely injured, this existence must be restored. Restoration, therefore, acknowledges the existence of the damage, draws attention to the fact, and simultaneously exalts the value of the objects that have suffered damage.

The value lies not only in object itself, in life itself for our case, considered a work of art that deserves to be lived and mourned; there is tremendous value in what this life can offer to others, to all of us, to present and future generations. So, by restoring a damaged existence, we restore that existence to everyone who, in the present and the future, can learn and benefit from it or from the community to which it belongs. This is why I understand restoration as a co-evolutionary process that affects everyone involved. Any restoration process implies a transformation of ourselves, everyone who, in one way or another, is related to these lives, all of us who believe that these lives, like our own, deserve to be lived and that we can learn from them; all of us who feel linked to them and somehow responsible for what happened to them and especially what can happen to them in the future. Restoration also means recovering the value of this existence through respect for its integrity, dignity, uniqueness, the transformations it has undergone over time, and its potentiality, so that this life can continue to evolve into something more and not remain trapped in the damage suffered; so that the community can also face the terrible harm done to it.

After much thought and hesitation, I decided to qualify this restoration with the adjective *performative*. You may criticize this choice, but for the time being it seems the best way to express my belief that restoration is, more than anything, a practice. As Butler (2002) affirmed, this practice is reiterative and referential and through it discourse produces the effects it names. This to me means that restoration is not achieved solely through the individual wills of those who suffer the damage or whose work focuses on it; restoration lies in broader institutional, disciplinary or cultural discourses. We inhabit, consume and produce these discourses in a given reality. We interpret these discourses; we are and we become within them, and occasionally we are able to create new practices, new *language games* with which to transform them.

Restoration is not an isolated, naïve or aseptic practice of the discourses that have created it and have the potential to produce the effects that they name. These discourses are created in the framework, in the setting, or on the scene where restoration as a social process and practice takes shape. Like a *performance*, restoration is a daily artistic practice, a form of improvisation using available resources

to respond to other people. Those of us who participate in the process see ourselves as actors, interpreters, or narrators of a script created together and performed in front of different audiences. Our voices, I repeat, are neither entirely our own nor entirely someone else's. They are steeped in and populated by the voices of the others who have spoken to us, by the discourses we consume and make our own, and that are joined through social practice to the voices of others to produce something new, something unexpected and uncertain.

Perhaps you are asking yourself the same question that occurred to me: What is it, actually, that is restored? Certain acts of violence, such as the material loss of property or land, can be partially *repaired*. If land that has been expropriated is later returned, this constitutes reparation of a loss. However, it is still only partial reparation since the violent act has had other consequences which are materially irreparable but could be symbolically restored, such as the links to neighbors, the production capacity of a plot of land, or the symbolic constructions linked to territory. This restoration requires hand-crafted practice, time, labor, and skill; it requires more than money. Other kinds of damage cannot be repaired, such as the death or physical mutilation of a loved one; these are irreparable. But even in these cases, it is possible and, above all, necessary that the meanings constructed with regard to the damage be restored: who is responsible, what does the damage represent, what are the consequences to the lives of those who suffered directly and those of others, and how does the damage affect identity and dignity?

This initial restoration of the meaning of the damage is challenged by remembering and forgetting. Despite the tremendous need to forget the acts of violence in order to protect oneself from the damage caused, the effort to do so is wasted because memories of the harm remain and are expressed in nightmares, dreams, through words and gestures, in drawings or negative thoughts. Paradoxically, it is equally as difficult to narrate what has happened, because the memories are broken up into scattered pieces and it is difficult to find the voice that can give them coherence and continuity. It is just as hard to forget as it is to remember.

During the initial restoration it is essential for people, groups, and communities to construct a voice that can narrate what has occurred in front of audiences capable of granting social legitimacy to the harm and the suffering caused; while suffering from the damage itself, one also suffers from a lack of acknowledgement of this suffering. The very act of narrating what occurred, telling how it impacted lives, customs and environments, brings with it the expectation of mourning; the very telling of the story transforms the meaning of the damage and, by always telling it *to* others (real or imaginary), *for* others, both the narrator and the audience are transformed.

And, as the memory of the existence of harm is being recovered, being made visible, recognizable to others, while all the broken and scattered pieces of the events that occurred are being gathered together again, a second restoration is needed: the ways in which one persists and resists the damage must be restored, along with the multiple responses to the acts of violence, the value assigned the lives in spite of the damage, the lessons learned through adversity, and survival itself. All of these must be restored, because despite the countless actions and practices carried out in response to the damage, they have become devalued and lost their importance. Even those who suffer fail to fully acknowledge those actions and practices, have forgotten them, but they survive in the alternative stories, in acts of caretaking and solidarity with others, and through the struggles, the defenses, their hopes and dreams. This is what I mean by restoring the meaning of survival. This is the key to reconstructing a new territory of identity that will make it possible for people, groups and communities who have suffered serious damage to move forward.

If you agree that this proposal is valid, the question that follows is, how can we achieve this? Based on my experience throughout this research, I would say that one alternative among many is the creation of relational, dialogic and narrative spaces grounded in coordination, collaboration, appreciation, reflection, and engagement, and integrating diverse narratives such as acknowledgement, deconstruction, joint action, uncertainty, polyphony, daily routines, and possibility. And by relational spaces I refer to a psychologist's office or a classroom; a psychosocial or artistic workshop or a community meeting; an informal conversation or a radio or television interview, to

name only a few. These spaces, these realities, are experienced as an external reality, or as a third agency with its own ethical demands and requirements. I think the things I mention in this letter could be applied to the aforementioned settings, as long as dialogue and narration are included in them.

Well, I'll begin, then, to unravel my story. I'd like to start with the various narratives and the relationships between them. The narrative of recognition refers to an appreciation of the injured persons, groups or communities as valuable beings whose lives deserve to be lived, mourned and narrated. Their lives, their stories, and their futures are considered important. This recognition not only confirms the value of their own lives, but the lives of others as well; the versions they have of themselves are enriched, along with the multiple versions of others, and the belief in what we can be as a community, of what we can become.

At this point, recognition is fueled by deconstruction, since it is essential to question all previously constructed discourse, all classification of injured persons as victims, orphans, unprotected, vulnerable populations, abused, mistreated, traumatized, mentally ill or beneficiaries. Like all human beings, people who have suffered harm are much more than the discourses that pretend to define them. Which resources are most useful in achieving this? Close involvement with their lives; an appreciation of details, of the alternative, of the unusual; constant and profound reflection on the assumptions upon which we base our actions, and multiple listening not based on a single story.

It is also important to acknowledge those who have suffered as valid and respectable spokespersons, cable of speaking and being part of an audience that also listens. This is a fundamental part of ensuring that dialogue and narration emerge. It is therefore important to enrich their capacity for expression and understanding, which has been affected by the damage; to experiment with new forms of communication; reflect on ingrained patterns of behavior that disqualify others; discover and manufacture skills and abilities for dialogue and narration; to develop multiple-listening conversational response skills. It is as important to narrate the experience of

harm and suffering as it is to listen compassionately. Dialogue and narration with people who have suffered are the result of a slow process; they aren't necessarily spontaneous.

When facing valid spokespersons, their narration is given credence; we respect their position and our own; we contextualize the expert knowledge expressed in clinical diagnoses and histories; we make an effort to understand better, to learn; we ask in an interested manner, we really listen, we actively exchange our views, stories and anecdotes. The interpretation of what has happened in their lives happens jointly, not from the expert's authoritarian position. In conversation, we remain attentive, present, and continuously and uninterruptedly available.

It is also important to acknowledge those who have suffered harm as valuable assets to our community, as valuable to "us". There is permanent tension between difference and equality, as I pointed out earlier, and it is important to position ourselves as equals, with the same rights and dignity, all belonging to a community, a society in which no one feels strange or foreign, while recognizing the many differences that make us unique individuals, from different territories, cultures, generations, communities of meaning, and walks of life.

Here the narrative of recognition intersects with the narrative of polyphony, multiplicity, the local and the diverse. We need to take what is presented as universal and bring it home, make multifarious what is presented as individual; recognize the many voices that are present in our lives, the many audiences we are addressing, the diversity of scenarios in which we act and improvise, and the multiple roles we play. The result of this recognition is the active and meaningful participation of this "we" in activities aimed at restoration through coordination, collaboration, observation and careful listening, and involvement in the realities of these individuals, groups or communities. Programs designed by the politicians in power at the moment, or carried out in other realities and contexts, must be discussed, reflected upon, and prepared from within the actual context, and with the participation of those directly involved.

The same is true of research; this is one way to resist colonialism, centralism and mere handouts.

And now, I'd like to speak about the narrative of the everyday. All restorative initiatives carried out with individuals, groups and communities who have suffered harm must be adapted to their daily lives, to their space, time, interests, styles, generation, gender, culture, and other important factors. Resources such as routines, rituals, play, metaphors, stories, celebrations, and the body have all proven very useful and make the relational space feel familiar, their own, while at the same time allowing for the inclusion of something a little unusual and novel, which facilitates the emergence of differences. This space is enclosed and familiar enough to protect their intimacy and respect their privacy, without being threatening. It feels like home, feels safe, like a place you can trust, because dialogue and narration center on the known. But at the same time, it must be open enough to allow for the introduction of something new, for other voices to be heard and other realities to be imagined. You wonder, perhaps, how this is achieved.

Well, I believe that the emergence of the new is due mainly to narratives of construction, uncertainty and possibility. The fundamental premise of Social Construction is that "we build the world and ourselves through our relationships." I witnessed the enormous potential in this relational metaphor. It is in the space between us, in the turbulent flow of ongoing social activity, in joint action, that we can restore what has been damaged and recover what was once valuable.

It is based on the recognition of the other as necessary for our own survival, of our interdependence, of how our relationships with others have preceded, maintained and sustained us, of our ability to respond to the other, to heed his or her call, ignoring neither gaze nor discourse, having a clearer idea of *restoration as joint action*. And joint action not only by those who participate in the restoration process, but including the centrality of the space "between us" that each of us has built with many others, which is related to and expressed in the stories told and in conversations. This relational reality demands the use of resources such as the coordination of different

moral orders, the meeting of opposites, ethics in action, relational responsibility, positioning in relation to the circulation of power, continuous transitioning from subordination to domination to resistance, and the discovery of power as generation and creation, even from the margins.

This relational space, what goes on between us, is by definition uncertain and unpredictable. We make many efforts to anticipate what may happen, to plan and structure. But social life, and in particular our relationships with the other, thrust us into the indeterminate, the new. By remaining sensitive to this condition, we can use it to benefit the restoration process. It demands of us the attention, flexibility, time, and patience required to sense what is new, what has only just begun to bud —in a word, a look, a gesture, a drawing, a movement—, which can fill up with meaning for all of us, and for the restoration of the meanings in play. What comes of developing this sensitivity? I'd say, observational involvement and reflection, reflexivity most certainly, the ability to look at oneself and others in a setting where improvisation takes place. It makes one aware of opportunities for something new, of the struggle to overcome ingrained patterns which on occasion cast us into vicious circles where meaning becomes frozen, and allows us to make timely comments and questions, or issue warnings that can be generative and, ultimately, to keep the conversation alive.

If we build the world, we may be able to recreate it. The narrative of possibility speaks to us of our trust that something new can happen and in the continuity of a timeline that includes the past, present and future. In creating opportunities that can generate new realities, especially opportunities to which we have never had access. The opportunity for different forms of conversation, of being listened to carefully or of listening to stories we never thought possible. For the meaning of damage and surviving to be restored, we must trust in the possibility of other worlds, that the history of the damage suffered is only one of many, that we aren't forever and definitively anchored to a painful past and can expand our horizons, our radius of action and movement, and broaden our domains. That this is at least possible. Perhaps the most important resources for this are the glimpses provided of the future through conversations, stories, fictional stories; reviving hopes, dreams and ideals; focusing

conversation not only on what we are but on what we can we become; using imagination to open the closed, dark room in which we believe we are living; and generating artistic expressions as alternative ways to communicate, evoke emotion, and produce narratives. The narrative of possibility helps overcome the inertia, paralysis, fatalism and hopelessness experienced by people who have suffered harm.

If I were to step back from this research, I would say that a third kind of restoration is necessary, one I only got a glimpse of, in which individuals, groups and communities that have suffered participate in the restoration and recovery of other individuals, groups or communities, near and far, friendly and adverse. This would be one way to contribute to the reconstruction of memory, justice and the restoration of others who have suffered. I suspect that this third type of restoration might do the most to contribute to the restoration of those who have suffered, basically by realizing that they are not alone in having suffered severe damage, that they can act collectively with others who are like them and at the same time very different, that they can build bridges between seemingly opposing realities, and that they can be helpful to the lives of others.

This third restoration borders on the goals of social reconciliation, which I understand as the progressive approximation of opposing narratives in order to live together, coordinate differences, and continue the conversation. Peaceful coexistence does not necessarily imply consensus and the absence of conflict; it means coordinating a community's different moral orders. A process of social reconciliation would focus on what we can do together and what this action would produce through public dialogue. I wonder then: What other forms of collective action are possible? Who still remains outside the conversation? Where are our reconciliation actions directed? How does power circulate within the relationships established here? Who speaks and who is listening? Which voices are not heard? How can we dance so that we coordinate our joint action? How might we stimulate this dialogue to make it concrete and not just rhetoric? The answers to these questions could lead us to understandings at the community level and to build bridges between isolated or supposedly enemy groups.

Based on my experience in this research, I would venture to suggest certain resources that could be used in a process of social reconciliation and that merit new processes of inquiry/action: Artistic and cultural expressions; restorative justice and public dialogues. All forms of artistic and cultural expression constitute an essential resource for promoting coexistence and reconciliation. Artistic processes, as mentioned earlier, facilitate the telling of multiple stories, allow for the development of complex forms of understanding and creative ways of not only reconstructing memory, but working collectively and expressing what is difficult to put into words.

Restorative justice could be useful in the transition toward social reconciliation as it deals with crimes differently than traditional retributive justice. First, it abandons the pursuit of individual punishment and includes both victims and communities in the discussion of facts, the identification of the causes of crimes, and the joint definition of sanctions. This process attaches great importance to the acceptance of responsibility, local construction of truth, and reparation on the part of offenders. Its fundamental goal is to restore to the greatest extent possible the damaged relations between victims and perpetrators. Inquiries into this form of justice from a social constructionist perspective could prove interesting.

Public dialogue might be a useful resource for reconciliation. Dialogue could help to rediscover the value of others' lives; to recognize and confront one's own suffering as well as the suffering of one's adversaries; to discuss and work together in the face of feelings of frustration such as injustice and impotence; to develop more constructive forms of relating; and, at the same time, to work collectively on the construction of a desirable future. Multiple forms of public dialogue must be created to allow for an approximation of opposing narratives and the construction of other narratives of possibility and conversations regarding our future must take place in order to revive hopes, dreams and ideals.

A reconciliation process needs to prioritize alternative narratives of responses to events that have caused damage. Inherent in stories of responses are skills, knowledge and values that show us what is important to individuals and communities,

survival strategies, forms of protection, caretaking and resistance actions, life skills, lessons learned, processes of struggle, recovery rituals, acts of heroism, defense, courage and bravery, solidarity, demands, vindication, mobilization and, finally, the countless responses and actions of survivors that make it possible for us to build another territory of identity, as a community, upon which to rebuild our present and future.

Does this make sense in other contexts and for other individuals, groups, professionals? What's next? How does this integrate with other realities? I think that you, the readers, are responsible for putting these ideas into practice, building generative and useful processes in your own communities of meaning. You are the ones who can give legitimacy to the aforementioned resources and restoration practices through discussion, criticism and deconstruction. You are the ones who must also be wary of what I've said here. I have presented my ideas to be used as a toolbox that proved useful for a particular purpose and within a particular context. In the end, I'd say I learned more than anyone from this relational process. My life more than any other was transformed, by recovering personal goals, forgotten social ideals, and neglected dreams. I am indebted to so many lives that made this possible.

Sincerely,

Manizales, April 2014

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Appendix

Workshops for the Green Zone

No.	DATE	TALLERIANDO	ACTIVITIES
1	December 9/2011	1. Statues	Introducing Statues
2	February 14	2. Printer or Tree.	Handling Video cameras Representing objects with the body Conversation about how is working in a team
3	February 28	3. My Relationships	Drawing a map of relationships Conversation about: ¿what does it mean to be youth? Photo exhibition
4	March 6	4. Portrait and daily life	¿How to do portraits? Dancing Bachata Improvisation about daily life Conversation about what does it mean to be part of a group
5	March 13	5. Neutral Masks	Elaborating mask of each youth
6	March 20	6. The Wolf Dancing Bachata	Dancing Bachata ¿How to do story boards? Playing "The hidden wolf" Recognizing the space out of the lab
7	March 27	7. Red riding hood video the vaccine	Collective storyboard Recording videos in the botanic garden
8	April 10	8. Eucharist, Images and Shots.	Finishing Video recording Representing images with the body Trustiness exercises Attending to an Eucharist
9	April 17	9. Mariana, the Fairy and the Future.	Mariana´s story Trustiness exercises Fictional conversation: ¿Who will be them in 10 years? Story of the fairy Godmother
10	April 24	10. Body Shadow performance I.	The team show a performance prepared for the workshop Videos of Body shadows Trustiness exercises Conversation about emotional control and conflict resolution
11	May 8	11. Body Shadow performance II.	Storyboard for the Chinese shadows performance Rehearsing the images Reading the fairy Godmother stories Conversation about social relations among them

No.	DATE	TALLERIANDO	ACTIVITIES
12	May 15	12. Disorderly Body Shadow Performance.	Rehearsing the performance
13	May 22	13. Silhouettes.	Drawing silhouettes ¿What does this project mean for you?
14	May 29	14. Clay Puppets	Concentration exercises Constructing the mask for the puppets
15	June 5	15. Body & Space	Concentration exercises
16	June 12	16. Puppets alive?	Handling Puppets
17	June 19	17. Camera, Breathing and Agreements.	Handling Camera Breathing exercises Conversation about agreements to behave during the workshops
18	June 26	18. Puppets and bodies	Collective handling puppets Handling masks
19	July 3	19: Lizard on Roller Coaster.	Small lizard and Roller coaster stop motion
20	July 10	20. Helping Hands, Frustration and Poem	Breathing, movement and concentration exercises Collective performance with puppets
21	July 17	21. Tree of Life.	Conversation about the trees they know The tree of life metaphor Drawing the tree of life Public presentation Conversation about the forest, the risks and the defense strategies
22	August 21	22. Adriana's Life	Conversation with Adriana
23	August 28	23. Trees and Names.	The tree of life Conversation about the forest, risks and strategies Certificates with the trees The name of the project
24	September 4	24. Adriana`s Flees	Adriana´s story Camera handling
25	September 11	25. Gender and makeup.	The Pandora's box Men and women sculptures Artistic makeup
26	September 18		Handling camera Movement exercises
27	September 25	26. Cartography, Animals and Acknowledgements.	Conversation about animals they know Mapping the Colombian land: mountains, rivers, animals, trees…. Certifícate of participation

No.	DATE	TALLERIANDO	ACTIVITIES
28	October 2	27. Animals, rubber & lighting	To become an animal with the mask
29	October 9	28. Masks, interrogatory or conversation?	Handling camera To become an animal with the mask
30	October 16	29. Body cartography	Drawing the body Speaking about scars
31	October 23	30. Make-Up, Jargon and Letters.	Color gradation Double-deutch Writing letters
32	October 30		Handling camera Lighting
33	November 6		Artistic make up
34	November 13		Sewing patchwork I
35	November 20		Sewing patchwork II
36	November 27		Handling camera Lighting Artistic make up: Kabuki & Sponge Bob
37	December 3		Handling camera Lighting Artistic make up: Animals (dogs).
38	December 4		Handling camera Lighting Artistic make up: hands and wounds
39	December 5		Handling camera Lighting Artistic make up: aging
40	December 20	31. Evaluation and Closure	