

THE POLITICS OF LEGIBILITY: NARRATIVE DYNAMICS OF TRANSITIONAL  
JUSTICE IN RURAL COLOMBIA

by

Alison Castel  
A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
George Mason University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Committee:

_____	Chair of Committee
_____	
_____	
_____	Graduate Program Director
_____	Dean, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Date: _____	Summer Semester 2016 George Mason University Fairfax, VA

The Politics of Legibility: Narrative Dynamics of Transitional Justice in Rural Colombia

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Alison Castel  
Master of Science in Education  
University of Pennsylvania, 2005  
Bachelor of Arts  
University of Wisconsin- Madison, 1999

Chair: Dr. Sara Cobb, Professor  
Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Summer Semester 2016  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

Copyright 2016 Alison Castel  
All Rights Reserved

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the courageous people in Colombia working toward social change that shared their stories with me and trusted me to pass them on to you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earning this doctorate has been the most challenging accomplishment of my life and would not have been possible without the unwavering support and patience of family, friends, colleagues and mentors who often believed more in me than I did in myself.

Thank you to Leslie Dwyer for convincing me to “stop complaining and do something about it!” Without your encouragement I would never have embarked on this incredible intellectual and personal journey over the past five years.

Thank you to Sara Cobb-- words cannot express my gratitude. I am forever awed by your fortitude, generosity, wisdom, and passion. Thank you for rocking my world with narrative and helping me understand how I see the world.

Thank you to my mother for enduring the ups and downs and twists and turns at every corner and for feeling like this process was your own. I could not have done it without you in my corner every step of the way. Thank you to my sister for being my confidant and champion down to the wire, and to my father whose example and support have continually shined a light on my path.

Thank you to Sembrandopaz for entrusting me to be a steward of your work, to the communities Mampujan and Pichilin for inviting me into your homes, and to the victim’s and human rights advocates who shared your experiences with me, despite your fears.

Thank you to the faculty, staff and students at S-CAR who touched my life and provided a sense of community during what was at times an isolating process.

I could not have completed this research and writing without the funding I received through the Dean’s Fellowship, the Provost Dissertation Grant, and the Point Of View Fellowship.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: TRANSITIONS FROM VIOLENCE</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: TRACING THE BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: PATHWAY INTO THE NARRATIVES</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: MASTER NARRATIVES: SETTING THE TERMS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: EMBLEMATIC VICTIMS AND THE PRODUCTION OF VICTIMHOOD</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: PUBLIC SECRETS</b>	<b>306</b>
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR PRAXIS</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>364</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE POLITICS OF LEGIBILITY: NARRATIVE DYNAMICS OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN RURAL COLOMBIA**

Alison Castel, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2016

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Dr. Sara Cobb

Transitioning from violence to peace is highly politicized and often dangerous. Increasingly, transitional justice mechanisms provide a framework for considering such issues. However, the dominant narratives emerging from these frameworks often privilege macro-level political processes that fail to acknowledge the complexities of how nations rebuild and people live together post mass violence.

This research aims to understand the politics of the production of narratives of peacebuilding and justice by studying the discursive and meaning making practices around reparations processes in rural Colombia. The questions it asks include: What are the sites of intersection between the production of narratives at the community level and transnational discourses of transitional justice? What stories develop and how do those stories interact with, resist, and/or appropriate national and transnational discourses of

transitional justice? What are the relations of power that impact what stories can and cannot be told?

Drawing on qualitative methods such as participant observation, interviews, textual analysis, and narrative analysis, this project demonstrates that understanding the dynamics of legibility between communities and the state is central to reparations processes. These processes of legibility are often mediated by local organizations that help interpret and translate state processes in local communities. This analysis provides a framework for understanding the politics of legibility and concludes with future directions for narrative praxis.



## CHAPTER ONE: TRANSITIONS FROM VIOLENCE

In the summer of 2014 in the midst of my doctoral research in Montes de Maria, Colombia, I brought a newspaper clipping that I had come across while reading a reputable Colombian newspaper, *El Espectador*, to the community of Pichilin, where I often visited. The headline read: “A pedir perdon por massacre de Pilinchín.”<sup>1</sup> “To ask forgiveness for the massacre of Pichilin.” The article related that the Consejo de Estado, the Council of the State which consists of the Supreme Administrative Court and Supreme Advisory Body of Government, ordered the police and the army to hold a ceremony in Pichilin to apologize and ask forgiveness for their complicity in the massacres that took place in the community in 1996 and to install a plaque as part of the collective commemoration. According to the court, it was proven that two men in charge, the police captain, Jorge Javier Muños Suárez, and army major, Luis Guillermo Parra Niño knew about the paramilitary “cleansing” plan in advance and not only did they keep silent with regard to the violence, but they agreed with it. Even still, the article reads, the two men were never condemned for these acts (*El Espectador*, 2014).

When I shared the article while visiting Pichilin the following day, most were hearing the news for the first time. Community members exhibited a range of emotions upon reading it. Multiple people felt it was more of a joke than anything. “They will

---

<sup>1</sup> I am quoting the misspelling of the community’s name as it was printed.

probably send some new young guys to apologize, “ Felipe said throwing his arm into the air. He asked me how I would feel if Elena (one of the community members with whom I connected personally) did something harmful to me or my family and one day she sends over her sister to apologize for it on her behalf, would I feel satisfied with that? Don Ernesto spoke about how it was the first time they had ever seen actual names attached to accountability measures indicting state entities. Don Ernesto’s wife stared at the article, shaking her head while asking softly, “how could anyone do this to innocent people?”

This conversation aroused interesting debate over what each person thought and felt, and I was surprised that none of them had heard the news of the sentencing before I brought it to their attention. It became clearer through the course of the dialogue that this was something that they had not worked through as a community and there were varying reactions. Some seemed very clear that this was a move forward and that they should welcome the ritual, while others felt that it was empty symbolism that would only serve to absolve the state of their actions and would not have any real impact or benefit for them. I learned shortly after that visit that the community took the contentious decision in response to the sentencing that they would not allow any public apology or commemoration in their honor or on their soil until they received their monetary reparations.

The community of Pichilin after being invisible to the state for over twenty years, in this case, like many others, is being asked to consider their healing process, their transition from violence to peace through the normative transitional justice practices of apology and commemoration. However, this example demonstrates that addressing the

emotional fallout of decades of threats and violence is not a straightforward matter. The judicial sentencing, along with the community, acknowledges that there is a need greater than just material for communities to feel a restored a sense of wholeness and dignity. Money, some of them have said, will not bring back their loved ones or take away their pain.

Many rural communities in the Montes de Maria, Colombia are seeking to redress marginalization, restore their dignity, clear their names as guerrillas, and grieve; monetary reparations are not the highest on their list of priorities. It is not that the money would not assist in meeting some unmet basic needs, rather, many peasant farmers believe that they would be better supported by consistent agricultural production and stable networks for its distribution. Many communities can no longer meet their own dietary needs since the violence of decades of internal conflict reached their homes and families and they have since been forced to travel into town in order to supplement their diets. Many people in the communities are still suffering internally from the violence they experienced and the loss of their loved ones. While there have been some programs offered by the state to address these issues, they have been executed with varying degrees of consistency.

Pichilin's story is one example of how the realities of war and violence are no longer accurately captured by the widely accepted imagery of soldiers in combat on the battlefield. Characterized by mass killings, kidnappings, displacement, sexual assault, and torture, innocent people and civilians have been grossly impacted by war (Nordstrom, 1998) with vulnerable populations victim to the direst consequences

(Rothbart, 2013). This violence ruptures and destabilizes institutions, local and national, damaging relationships between communities and neighbors, creating loss, suffering, and a damaged sense of understanding. Communities are fractured, often displaced, trust is breached, and livelihoods are destroyed.

Once overt violence ends, considerations for how to transition from war to peace, to “repair” communities, and “rebuild” trust become the focus for entire communities, countries and regions. Recurrence of violent conflict has risen which indicates that agreements and settlements have been difficult to maintain or implement, leading to instability (Human Security Report, 2012) and signaling the need for closer attention to the post- conflict or post-violent environment. According to 2012 the Human Security Report between 1950 and 2004, twice as many peace agreements were followed by renewed violence within five years (p. 173).

Often, people find themselves in situations where they are recovering from violence in contexts where their governments failed to protect them and/or where violence still persists. Likewise, the violence that characterizes prolonged conflict is situated within relations of power that often existed prior to the conflict, and involve marginalized populations with limited access to formal justice (Hume, 2005). These conditions make transitioning from violence to peace highly politicized and often dangerous. How do people craft a new relationship with the state, develop a sense of agency and the capacity to generate safety in their communities?

Considerations such as these are often framed as “transitional justice” issues, but the associated processes, formal and informal, have varying degrees of success. Efforts

to redress violence may fail to support the emergence of peace on the ground, and peacebuilding is all too often treated only as relational rather than as institutional processes (Nadler et al, 2008). The transition from a culture of violence to one of peace requires not only the integration of peace and justice, as they are not dichotomous, but the integration of a violent history, into new state and local institutions, using this history to story new moral frameworks and to anchor the development of a peaceful future. Failure to attend to this narrative project leaves populations vulnerable to the recurrence of violence, maintains societal tensions and fractures, and, as we have seen in cases such as Bosnia, Syria, and Lebanon, the violence that reemerges has consequences beyond their own borders.

Just as the consequences of violence seep beyond national borders, attention for how to address the post-conflict context has become a domain for international consideration and intervention. Many transitional governments and societies rely on transitional justice mechanisms to provide infrastructure and parameters for how to legitimize the rule of law or balance peace and justice. However, there is debate as to how effective the theories and practices of transitional justice are. While the field provides a framework for considering the issues, it requires a closer look in order to understand the strengths and limitations that characterize the complex set of processes.

In the Montes de Maria, I encountered the perennial question of how communities recover their social worlds in the aftermath of violence –a question being asked all over the world today. Chapter one of this dissertation reviews the literature on research and practices of transitional justice. A predominant narrative of transitional justice is one

that has historically emphasized national level efforts and international legal frameworks that have been critiqued for failing to acknowledge the complexities of how nations rebuild and people live together post mass violence. However, scholarship and practice in transitional justice have shifted to emphasize the experiences of local communities and the ways that the associated processes impact them. This is where my project enters into the conversation. My dissertation research seeks to understand the politics of the production of narratives of repair by studying the discursive and meaning making practices around reparations processes in the community of Mampujan in the Montes de Maria region of Colombia in order to understand these dynamics as they pertain to the communities' so-called return from violence as they work within the system to define themselves in ways that are recognizable by the state.

The narrative process of making communities and the state recognizable to one another is highly politicized and in order to illuminate the dynamics of that process I draw on the case of Colombia.

### **The Case of Colombia**

Colombia provides a unique landscape for understanding post-conflict dynamics. To date, the conflict is one of the longest standing in existence. However, the government over time has taken strides to recover from the violence that has characterized Colombian society and has resulted in 1.8 million hectares of abandoned or seized land and a contested figure of seven million displaced people. In order to address the destruction of the social fabric especially between victims of the violent conflict and the breach of trust

between the communities and government, the state has turned to transitional justice laws that address demobilization of paramilitary actors and call for reparations to victims. As with any nation dealing with the complexities of repairing after, or in the midst of prolonged violence, the stakes in Colombia are extremely high. National-level peace negotiations remain fragile with the continued militarization of various groups, presenting risks to already vulnerable communities, potentially maintaining fractures or creating new ones.

The case of Colombia is one that illuminates many of tensions that arise through engagement with these processes as the people struggle to make sense of decades of violence and the associated forms of justice. It is through observing the process of reparations in Montes de Maria region, a region characterized by paramilitary violence, and specifically in the community of Mampujan that was the first to receive a judicial sentencing for reparations that my research explores these tensions.

### Research Design

In order to explore, describe, and analyze the dynamics of reparations processes between the state and the community of Mampujan my research was driven by three main questions: *1. What are the sites of intersection between the production of narratives at the community level and transnational discourses of transitional justice?* *2. What stories develop and how do those stories interact with, resist, and/or appropriate national and transnational discourses of justice?* In service to this second question, I further elaborated my inquiry to ask, how are communities mobilizing in order to engage in

these processes? What stories do communities have about themselves and their relation to the state and other communities? How/or do they see this as changing over time? 3.

*What are the relations of power that impact what stories can and cannot be told?*

## Methods

In order to develop an understanding of these questions and of the ways in which meaning is constructed around the reparations processes that the communities and state are engaged in, it was necessary to enter into the very spaces where people are not only describing their experiences but making sense of them. The best way to accomplish this is by using qualitative/interpretive methods. To this end, I traveled to Colombia on four research trips, the bulk of which transpired over a five-month period in the summer of 2014.

I engaged in ethnographic research approaches mostly concentrated on participant observation, where I became embedded in daily life and practices in the region, but maintained enough distance to remain an observer of them as well (Dewalt, 2010). This resulted in some formal interviews but mostly lengthy conversations with a variety of individuals, communities, organizations, and academics.

In order to contextualize these primary methods, I also engaged in textual analysis of secondary sources including, transcripts of the reparations hearings, newspaper articles, and YouTube videos of major events. In between research trips to Colombia, I also attended US events on Colombia sponsored by WOLA and USIP and monitored websites promoting human rights in Colombia.

My analysis draws on narrative theory and analytics for making sense of the



dynamics between the state and communities in the Monte de Maria. Narratives are a critical mechanism for creating architectures for meaning about the past, present, and future, and portray how “self” and “other” are constructed. The move to studying narratives is an effort to provide empirical data for the analysis of meaning systems and their dynamics in social processes. As an analytic frame, the politics of narrative remind us that some narratives are privileged over others and that there is a politics to who can speak and who cannot

Analyzing the stories that are told by people living in the aftermath of violent conflict provides an understanding for how people are making sense of their lives and their interactions with various processes. Positioning theory opens up narratives to the analysis of how people position themselves and others and how they define the rights, duties, responsibilities, moral obligations that people believe they and others have in a particular set of conditions. This becomes an important analytical frame when looking at the relationship between the state and communities as well as between communities in the rebuilding of their society.

As narratives evolve in interactional dynamics some narratives are privileged over others or become dominant, potentially crowding out possible alternatives or creating erasures. Alternatively there are some narratives that are artifacts in society that provide moral and ethical frameworks that are downloaded into our everyday narratives and anchor the meanings about what is ethical, appropriate, moral, evil, and that organize our descriptions and understandings of events and our subject positioning in the world. These master storylines or master narratives are critical for understanding how

individuals locate themselves within the conflict or post-conflict story. It is critical to understand the master narratives that circulate in a conflict in order to understand how communities understand themselves within them, to understand how they contribute to further violence and marginalization, as well as to re-imagine how those stories can change and evolve to end violence.

### **Critical Approach**

It is necessary to hear how individuals and groups position themselves within the narrative landscape in order to understand how they see themselves in relationship to others. Violence ruptures narratives creating a sense of instability and damaging individual's sense of self. Often times it is people from the most marginalized populations that experience the brunt of this narrative violence (Cobb, 2103) and, therefore, are voices that can give great insight into the dynamics on the ground and provide data for understanding what repairing in the aftermath might look like. As such, this research draws on feminist standpoint theory, which offers that people from marginalized communities are the most equipped to provide knowledge at the intersections of their own experiences and the broader social context within which they live. It is at this critical intersection that master narratives that dominate the landscape can be best understood as they live in people's daily lives.

This narrative domain provides an understanding about how marginalized communities are legitimized or delegitimized in the broader context, in this case, post-conflict context. Critical theory as a framework provides a critique of society and culture

and the ways in which hegemonic forces, structures, and process constrain local dynamics. In order to make sense of these complex dynamics this analysis draws heavily on the work of Judith Butler and the notion of “legibility.” Some communities are more visible, or legible to the state and are enlisted into reparations processes while others do not, raising critical questions about which narratives are legitimized and elaborated and which do not gain traction more widely. In order to illuminate these processes and interactional dynamics, this research takes a closer look at the community of Mampujan whose story has become emblematic of reparations processes.

Framing transitional justice as processes of legibility and their critique contributes to the conversation about how the process work or do not work to repair communities in the aftermath of violence. Describing legibility and transitional justice as narrative brings a unique lens to transitional justice processes with the potential to develop a deeper understanding of how stories are “working” to shift discourses about rebuilding social worlds after violence or to maintain them.

In the spirit of transparency, I tell the story of Colombia and the Montes de Maria, through the stories of the people that I met with. While I draw on academic literature and theory to interpret and make sense of the patterns that emerged, this project was just that, an emergent project. It was a process of discovery that has developed in conversation with the people in the organizations and communities where I lived and researched. This project, like any other, is partial. I mean that in two senses of the word—it is part of a story and it is from a particular standpoint.

My hope is that by using this standpoint, and drawing on the local dynamics, new

areas for praxis can emerge that draw on the insights and complexities that are so often watered down or overlooked by the “tool-kits” that characterize the technocratic mechanisms that often dictate transitional justice programs.

### Local Context

When I received an email from an old colleague and friend newly involved in peacebuilding work in Colombia, asking if I knew anyone interested in doing research to document peacebuilding processes, I planned a pilot trip within a month. I was blown away by the work being done in the communities accompanied by the small grassroots organization where she worked and with whom I would build a relationship with over next three years.

Chapter two describes the narratives of that organization, Sembrandopaz, which paved the path for my engagement with the narratives of many organizations, activist, advocates, communities, state functionaries, and victims. Led by Ricardo Esquívia, a prominent peace activist and Mennonite preacher of afro-Colombian and indigenous, they are a close-knit community organization that helps conflict-affected communities create spaces within the political structure for greater community participation. They privilege relationship building and trust-building as paramount to their work and creation of solidarity networks. It is because of these relationships of trust that I had access to the communities, people, and stories that I did.

They describe their work with communities as accompaniment, signaling that they do not represent the communities or speak on their behalf. The approach represents

an ethics for peacebuilding practice that positions the communities as agents, and Sembrandopaz as a supporter of their non-violent processes. Sembrandopaz mediates the relationship between the state and communities through accompaniment processes in order that communities receive the most benefit possible from the state.

Their work in four communities provides an entry point into the diversity among conflict-affected communities, not just demographic, but in their experience of violence and therefore, their needs in the aftermath. What these communities do share is that they were each victim to paramilitary violence that characterized the Montes de Maria region during the mid 90s and early 2000s resulting in occupation, sexual violence, displacement, and massacres. However, the government declared the region a zone of rehabilitation and consolidation in the mid 2000 through a law that demobilized an estimated 30,000 members.

### **Master Narratives of Peace and Transitional Justice Laws**

By way of this analysis of stories on the ground in communities, the master narratives that circulate become relevant and are a location for understanding how communities are embedded, constrained, ignored or even advanced by them. The state narrative that the Montes de Maria region is a zone of rehabilitation and consolidation operates to make certain actions and beliefs possible and invisible.

Chapter 3 discusses master narratives and this master narrative of peace in the region in conjunction with the presence of two major transitional justice laws that are implemented in communities in the region. 1. The *975 Justice and Peace Law of 2005*,

which offered reduced sentences of five-eight years to paramilitaries who contributed their stories and information in the judicial proceedings resulting in the demobilization and disarmament of approximately 30,000 paramilitary. The law is critiqued for excluding victim's voices and for the courts' inability to manage the process. To date, only 33 cases have been tried through this mechanism and it is commonly held that the demobilization was not successful, as the same paramilitary groups re-formed other different aliases. This critique emerges out of the lived experiences of communities, and eventually led to the development of the *1448 Victim and Land Restitution Law of 2011*. Often referred to as the Victim's Law, it is the most comprehensive transitional justice legislation for victims to be established in Colombia, and the first to foreground legal mechanisms for reparations, and most significantly land restitution. Despite the narrow definition of Victim according to the law the Victim's Law is like an outstretched hand from the government, potentially offering millions of affected citizens acknowledgment of their victimhood. However, the efficacy of the law is highly debated as few communities are actually engaged and, in some cases, the implementation of the law has generated violence against victims.

Through the work of Sembrandopaz these narratives become more evident and their work in communities provides a lens into how those narratives are engaged by them. This inquiry revealed that some communities are more legible to the government often leaving others to wonder if and how they would ever be selected or make themselves legible as victims raising the questions, what makes victims legible to the state? How do victims come into being?

## Challenges to the Success Story

Chapter four seeks to provide an understanding of these questions and the interactional dynamics at the intersections of the master narratives of peace and transitional justice law and the level of community narratives. The community of Mampujan, the first community to receive a judicial sentencing through the 975 Peace and Justice Law and later the first to receive land restitution through the 1448 Victims and Land Restitution Law is touted as a success story by the state. Describing and analyzing the narrative dynamics through which this success is constructed by the state, enables an understanding of how certain communities become legible over others.

What emerges from this analysis is a description of processes of legibility and a discussion of the interplay between victimhood and agency. These processes also illuminate how the narrative dynamics reverberate across the region more broadly, leading to a hierarchy of victimhood and narrative erasures that privilege particular stories over others. The relationships between Mampujan, the state, other communities in the region are understood and complicated through this analytical framework which provides a deeper understanding of the way master narratives work and how they are contested, resisted, or appropriated in the community and the region.

Of particular significance in this analysis are the erasures that become evident. Not only are the master narratives better understood, but also that which gets left out of national and international level discourses. It provides insight in the question of what are the stories that cannot be told lest they undermine peace processes, the efficacy of

transitional justice laws, or the state's projected image of security.

Chapter five delves deeper into the erasures that emerge out of the previous chapter, highlighting the continued presence of violence, largely attributed to paramilitary or ex-paramilitary that persists in the region despite the claims that it is a zone of consolidation and rehabilitation. The chapter refers to this violence as “public secrets” because it is known to exist because of the lived experiences of community members, but is forbidden to acknowledge publically. By way of discussing public secrets along with the erasures that are discussed in chapter four, the analysis provides a description of narrative dynamics whereby certain communities are differentially vulnerable to violence making narrative stability difficult to achieve. This narrative precarity is described in greater detail through the understanding of interactions between the dominant narratives of peace and transitional justice and local community narratives.

Chapter six provides a discussion of the implications of the analysis that emerges from the research and concludes with recommendations for narrative praxis and transitional justice. While it is not a “how-to” guide, it does offer frameworks for analyzing relational dynamics and for using narrative theory in the development of practical applications in order to address issues that arise through the interaction between international, national, and local level narratives of transitional justice.

As researchers and practitioners seek to address the way that communities and the state repair in the aftermath of violent conflict it is critical to consider the narrative dynamics that emerge through the associated processes. An inquiry into the narratives calls attention to the meanings that are being made by people on the ground about their



social worlds and the rebuilding process. This analysis contributes to field of transitional justice and peacebuilding by generating a description and a critique of the processes that operate within a neo-liberal framework that privileges macro-level institutions and institution building at the state level. These processes are not proven to be transformative but rather a reproduction of the status quo that operates as a temporary fix rather than to spurn long-term change.

### Limitations

As with any research, this project has particular limitations of which I will highlight three here. First, I admittedly may have been seduced by community's stories of innocence as I developed close relationships with many of my interlocutors. Second, my research does not take me to Bogota, the locus of politics and power in the country to speak with people about their perspectives on the region. Third, while this research provides a framework for narrative analysis of the community of Mampujan, it draws on retrospective narratives that could not capture the meanings that were emergent at the time of their interactions with the state. Additionally, many people in the community were not familiar with the language of transitional justice making much of my research focused on the meanings and reflections of the four main leaders.

Despite these limitations, what follows is a detailed analysis of ethnographic research on transitional justice processes using a narrative lens in order to illuminate the politics of legibility in the aftermath of violent conflict in Colombia. It draws directly on the experiences of individuals, communities, and organizations bringing to the reader

stories that often do not get told more broadly and in the international media. These stories and their analysis can provide additional ways of thinking about transitional justice, peacebuilding and their associated processes.

## **CHAPTER TWO: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: TRACING THE BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE**

According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, “transitional justice refers to the set of judicial and non-judicial measures that have been implemented by different countries in order to redress the legacies of massive human rights abuses. These measures include criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and various kinds of institutional reforms” (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2003). They are associated with “periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes” (Teitel, 2003, p.69). A predominant discourse of transitional justice is one that has historically emphasized national level efforts and international legal frameworks that are oriented towards human rights norms presumed to be universal (Teitel, 2003; Drumbl, 2007).

While this work has enabled a much needed focus on these transitional processes, leading to new international standards, both moral and legal, they have also been critiqued for overemphasizing democratization as expressed in legal and governmental reforms as well as for focusing attention on western, legal forms of perpetrator accountability (Minow, 1998; Roht-Arriaza, 2006, Dwyer, 2009; Hinton, 2009; Avruch, 2010; Theidon, 2010; Shaw, 2010). These frameworks also privilege macro-level political processes, often failing to acknowledge the complexities of how nations rebuild and people live together post mass violence (Finnstrom, 2008; Dwyer, 2009; Hinton,

2009; Shaw, 2010; Theidon, 2010). As violence manifests and affects communities and individuals in unique ways, universalist approaches are potentially dangerous and even alienating for people struggling to make sense of the past, and develop trust in new institutions, local, national, and international.

These complexities emerge as communities attempt to renegotiate their positioning vis-à-vis the state, as well as within and across their particular regions. As a result, research and methods of transitional justice have shifted in favor of an inquiry into how different meanings of the past are contested and negotiated, with the recognition that some accounts are privileged over others (Hinton, 2011). Attention to meaning making in transitional justice challenges the tendency of mechanisms to apply universalist approaches in the form of trials, tribunals, or truth commissions to particular contexts, thus, often overlooking the complexities that inherently emerge in specific localities.

As the field has developed over time, it has incorporated a variety of strategies to respond to the complexities and particularities of post-conflict contexts by creating restorative practices and drawing more attention to memory, storytelling, and meaning making processes. These approaches have enhanced the field raising and confronting important debates about the value of trials, the politics of truth commissions, the morality of impunity for war criminals, and critical questions about the benefits and limitations of working toward peace versus justice.

However, many of the practices of transitional justice remain grounded in formal legal processes and, while, the questions and critiques advance conversations about ethics and politics of the approaches, the roots in institution-building and top-down approaches

still predominate the field.

### Formal Legal Processes

According to Bass (2000) there is a long history of war crime tribunals dating back to the 1800s with Nuremberg as the most “successful example,” of post-war accountability, albeit, not unique (Bass, 2000, p. 5). While the overall success of the trials are contested (Biddiss, 2004), it is widely held that the contemporary moral-legal framework of transitional justice grew out of the groundbreaking trials of Nuremberg, where the international military tribunal prosecuted perpetrators of the European Holocaust as a measure of accountability for war crimes (Orentlicher, 1991; Teitel, 2003; Ahtisaari, 2004; Biddiss, 2004; Malcontent, 2004). The retributive formulation of the Nuremberg trials that have influenced contemporary transitional justice was premised by the assumption that criminal punishment and accountability was and is the most effective way, not only to deal with perpetrators of mass violence and heinous crimes, but also in preventing future violence (Orentlicher, 1991, Roht-Arriaza, 2006; Rubio-Marin, 2006; Drumbl, 2007). Court-mandated decisions from these trials provide legal precedents that inform transitional justice decisions and processes today. They sought legal responses to justice as opposed to power politics and military aggression (Minnow, 1998; Orentlicher, 1991).

Despite the eventual realization that the Nuremberg trials resulted in compromises to justice such as “victor’s spoils” and high ranking individuals taking responsibility for national-level crimes (Minnow, 1998), they universalized the terms of the rule of law,

thereafter framing transitional justice debates (Teitel, 2003) Accordingly, the trials have been credited for helping to launch the international movement for human rights with the introduction of “crimes against humanity” that could be attributed to individuals as well as states (Orentlicher, 1991) and for supporting legal institutions to implement those rights; most notably the Genocide Convention, the Convention Against Torture, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions which established a standard for how to handle humanitarian affairs in the aftermath of violent conflict (Minow, 1998, Biddiss, 2004; Wladimiroff, 2004). These principles eventually informed the statutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993, the International Criminal Court for Rwanda (ICTR) in 1994, and the Rome Statute in 1998, leading to the creation of International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002 (Wladimiroff, 2004).

The creation of these institutions positioned the state and international law as central in developing and implementing mechanisms for dealing with times of post-conflict transitions. Prevailing thought is that societies fraught by war and mass atrocity are lawless and chaotic and that the rebuilding the justice system and the rule of law is tantamount. The discourse of transitional justice from this perspective “assumes the relationship between the promotion of liberal values, the rule of law and democracy, and the achievement of peace and stability in post-conflict societies”(Kent, 2011, p. 3). The transition then is inherently one from illiberal to liberal and undemocratic to democratic with law as the stabilizing factor and punishment “advancing the society’s political identity in the transition as a democratic rule of law-abiding state.” (Teitel, 2003, p. 11)

As such, the field is dominated by legalism and the assumption that the normative framework of the legal system is the path to peace and reconciliation (Lincoln, 2010). Legalism, “an attitudinal belief that rule abidance is a moral mode of being in the world”(West, 2003, p. 122) is foundational to these top-down strategies that foreground the rule of law (Shklar, 1964; West, 2003; McEnvoy, 2007; Lincoln, 2010) and claim that the law can repair and protect societies from violence (Clarke, 2013). However, legalism is limiting and narrows the framework for working in transitional legal settings (Shklar, 1964; West, 2003; McEnvoy, 2007, Lincoln, 2010).

Legalism parameterizes the factors that contribute to the consideration of whether to have an international court or tribunal and often times that decision is driven by politics or funding, and trials still dominate the discourse on transitional justice. Many thought that the courts would contribute heavily to domestic legal reform but did not recognize the limitations of the courts. The courts aimed to prosecute the highest leaders of the atrocities sending a message across the world that masterminds of mass conflict would be held accountable putting a stop to impunity. However, this lead to overlooking the actors in lower-level positions, an outcome difficult for people who experienced violence, seeing the approach as partial justice (Bass, 2000; Lincoln, 2010). It raises the debated question as to whether the punishment of the few is sufficient justice to account for the many (Orentlicher, 1991; Osiel, 1997; Minnow, 1998; Teitel, 2003; Lincoln, 2010).

Despite this question, Osiel (1997) makes the case for trials and opens the conversation about the role of criminal trials in transitional contexts by turning attention

the kinds of public debates they engender claiming, “trials, when effective as a public spectacle, stimulate public discussions in ways that foster the liberal virtue of toleration, moderation and civil respect” (Osiel, p. 2, 1997). As it stands, he claims that liberal law is constraining and that litigators should be provided with more leeway to interrogate the moral and ethical implications of the past; a past that draws on cultural and legal myths (Cover, 1985; Osiel, 1997).

However, there is insufficient evidence that trials are public enough to generate Osiel’s (1997) debate. In the case of Sierra Leone, outreach efforts undertaken by the courts to publicize the trials proved largely ineffective, leaving many communities without access and without the inclusion of their conceptions of justice (Lincoln, 2010). Similarly, in the case of Colombia, while some local communities have benefited from their participation in trials, most communities have had limited to no involvement because their voices were not solicited in the trials (Arvelo, 2006).

Additionally, while trials and punishment have been deemed the most effective way to deter violence (Goldstone, 2004), there is no evidence behind the claim (Teitel, 2003). Since the shift in international law there have been countless wars and atrocities of mass violence for example in Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan, Syria, Colombia and the list goes on. It is often the case that threats of violence and actual violence persist as trials proceed, making it difficult or dangerous for communities to participate, signaling that trials do not equate an end to violence.

The narrow scope of legalism which focuses on criminal prosecutions leads to “thin” descriptions of the law, keeping it distanced from the realities of transitional



contexts, therefore, restricting the development of salient policies and practices of transitional justice (McEnvoy, 2007) and, I would argue, conflict analysis, prevention, and resolution. West (2003) posits that those limitations should be supplemented with a “pacific” legalism, utilized in the prevention of wars, rather than relegating the law to react to crimes committed after-the-fact (West, 2003, p. 155). Others consistently raise the critique that current legal approaches to transitional processes fail to, and should, address structural violence and the pre-existing conditions that lead to violent conflict (Ahitsaari, 2004; Flinterman, 2004; Goldstone, 2004; Malcontent, 2004; Mani, 2005; van der Mew, 2008; Clarke, 2013).

Additionally, there is no empirical evidence that trials lead to reconciliation (Stover, 2005). While court processes might elicit certain facts or evidences of violent behavior, it is not the facts themselves that are so important, rather how people are making meaning of the past and how they are interpreting what is shared (Stover, 2005). Criminal trials focusing on the accountability of high-level perpetrators or the “most guilty” leave communities living with former and sometimes current combatants, neglecting full accountability (Bass, 2000). Transitional justice, in this vain, does not extend beyond perpetrators and victims to address exploitative systems and political violence regarded as belonging to a broader agenda of reconciliation (Starr, 2007; van der Mew, 2008), and propelling accusations that the processes are superficial and undermine social injustices (van der Mew, 2008, p. 117). In fact, focusing on legalistic exercises might even exacerbate conflicts (Sarat, 1975; Meernik, 2005; Llewellyn, 1999) for example in the cases where trials take an inordinate amount of time, leaving victims and

perpetrators side-by-side awaiting justice (Bass, 2000, p. 299), or in the case of Colombia where instances of amnesty have led to vengeance killings.

### Restorative Justice: New Frames for Justice and Meaning

In response to many of these critiques, the field of transitional justice began to expand its approaches beyond the courtroom and legal processes to more restorative mechanisms. Crocker (2000) claims the term transitional justice may be misleading, even in the context of societies moving into more democratic processes because it risks overlooking other morally salient aims within the complexity of a justice framework. As has been demonstrated, this emerges in the form of privileging certain institutions, and/or overlooking conceptions of justice that might be located in communities as opposed to at the state level (Clarke, 2010). As a result, transitional justice approaches began to take social issues, victim's stories, and truth-telling processes more centrally into account, distinguishing practices from the previous focus on national and international spaces of relations (Teitel, 2003).

As the feasibility of dealing with mass atrocity with the rule of law came under consideration, other forms of justice began to emerge as well as attention to societal-level "healing" processes (Teitel, 2003). In the evolution from Nuremberg to alternate forms of justice and reconciliation, new forms of meaning-making have emerged as have different types of openings and constraints to rebuilding in the aftermath of violence. These processes have resulted in increased attention to restorative practices and alternative conceptions of justice.

This is a notable shift from mainstream criminological and legal approaches in the aftermath of violence that have focused on positivistic methodologies that privilege discovery, explanation, and prediction toward methods and practices which are concerned with further developing the concept of justices. This enables a new focus no longer anchored to processes that are offender-focused, that tend to disregard the political-social context (Waldorf, 2006, p. 435), and potentially elide the possible ways in which top-down formations of law may have contributed to conflicts (Sarat, 1975; Llewellyn, 1999; Meernik, 2005).

This shift emerged out of the particular contexts for example, in Argentina, where information about mass violence was characterized by secrecy, with information about torture and disappearances suppressed by the government. This tie to particular conditions led to a reliance on a more diverse understanding of the rule-of-law (Teitel, 2003). The discourse of transitional justice shifted away from solely addressing perpetrator accountability in order to incorporate different concepts and approaches to peace and reconciliation and nation building. This led to the emergence of truth and reconciliation commissions that attempt to reconstruct the past through less traditional processes drawing on restorative forms of justice toward building an understanding of the past. The question of amnesty became key in these forms of transitional processes whereby tradeoffs were considered in favor of giving perpetrators amnesty in exchange for their testimonies and accounts of the atrocities they committed.

Tribunals and trials operating under the pretense of objectivity also limit the types of testimonies that can be told in the process, reducing space for subjectivity of

experience and multiplicity of truths thus constraining the learning that can be done to prevent future occurrences (Llewellyn, 1999, p. 363). “Restorative justice, on the other hand, does not force a situation to fit the theory. Rather, as a theory, it is open and flexible enough to apply at various levels and contextual imperatives” (Llewellyn, 1999, p. 373). Restorative justice approaches open up more space for meaning-making within their processes by being more victim-centered and premised by the notion that if you harm one person in the community you have harmed the entire community (Minow, 1998; Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2005; Avruch, 2010). Methodologically restorative justice focuses on a discussion of the consequences of injustices and acknowledges wrongdoing in order to begin the process of healing, with the goal of transforming the conditions that led to the injustice in the first place (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 564).

Within this process, the victims, offenders, community members and other stakeholders are invited to share their stories about the harm caused by a particular event. According to Zehr (2008), restorative justice is a form of conflict resolution that brings justice explicitly to the table, allowing for the space to include discourses about wrongdoing, harm, right versus wrong, is less polarizing than punishment and focus on interpersonal relationships, human need, and collaborative problem-solving (Zehr, 2008, p. 4). This type of exercise empowers those whose voices are often neglected through more formal judicial processes (Braithwaite, 2002; Sullivan, 2006; Pranis, 2007). The claim is that the very act of listening to people’s stories is a form of empowerment embedded in the process and emphasizes the “life-giving” potential of narratives about the past, present, and hope for the future (Zehr, 2005; Gaarder, 2006; Sullivan, 2006;

Pranis, 2007). Accordingly, this platform for “storying” is a way for victims, offenders and the broader community to work through and, ultimately resolve the shame associated with their experiences (Zehr, 2005).

However, the parties are seldom equal and that impacts speaking (Gaarder, 2006, p. 486). If indeed this is a serious critique, we must consider how, restorative practices should be organized in such a way as to minimize potential power imbalances including paying attention to the stories of victims, offenders and communities (Sullivan, 2006, p. 567). Part of the benefit of the empowerment process is to build the capacity for communities to resolve conflicts and also give them the opportunity to define which acts they want to pay attention to during the process (Sullivan, 2006, p. 3). It is under these circumstances that communities become more poised to affect change.

Sullivan (2006) claims that restorative practices are subversive and insurgent because they compete with the state for power, however, processes are often reduced to correctional alternatives that end up supporting retributive structures. In order for processes to be considered truly restorative, they cannot support or serve the power of the state or state-level institutions (Sullivan, 2006, p. 3).

Reconceptualizing justice to address power asymmetry operates with the aim of creating a more inclusive society where the needs of all are met and allows for the redefinition of individual or personal failures to be attributed to structural problems (Dyck, 2006; Gil, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). By focusing on the individual, retributive processes neglect the politics and structures of the problem (Sullivan, 2006, p. 13). In this way restorative justice purports to look at the structural issues that led to an act in the

first place, distinguishing it from transitional justice mechanisms and aligning it more theoretically with conflict resolution theorists, like Johan Galtung (1971).

Villa-Vicencio (2006) identifies the relationship of restorative justice and transitional justice in four ways: the condemnation of evil, restoration of victims, rehabilitation of perpetrators and the restoration of social order (Villa-Vicencio, 2006, p. 391). Truth commissions have often been established to bridge these processes on the ground between trials and social amnesia (Sullivan, 2006, p. 337; Avruch, 2010). The claim is that they achieve justice by “breaking the silence” and bringing more complexity to the perpetrators and victims and by giving the time and space to express their entirety of emotions. Silence, denial and suppressed anger, he claims, are the enemies of restoration (Villa-Vicencio, 2006), while acknowledgement of suffering is a hallmark. (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2006; Villa-Vicencio, 2006). Therefore, the debated theory that follows is that silence needs to be broken in order to know what happened in the past, to engage in shared mourning and memory preservation in personal healing (Minow, 1998; Villa-Vicencio, 2006; Sullivan, 2006; Avruch, 2010).

However, these claims as well as truth commissions on the whole, are controversial and their benefits need closer scrutiny and indeed, several critiques have emerged (Avruch, 2010). First, there are some who believe they are a necessary and integral part of post-conflict rebuilding providing the opportunity to learn the details of the past, provide the opportunity to share their stories of survival, suffering, coercion, and remorse, as well as critics who claim that truth commissions only exacerbate tensions by opening old wounds (Rotberg, 2000). As is the case of Yugoslavia, truth commissions

are often created on executive order in top-down processes that fail to include the input of civil society (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2006; Avruch, 2010). The impact of the national discourse then constrains the work that the truth commission can accomplish because the “safe” space the truth commissions and restorative justice processes overall purport to provide is compromised. In this context, stories of suffering are constructed in relation to power, impacting how one can create that story and what happens when it is heard—people lose the entitlement of their own story or the authority of their story once it is televised or taken up by the TRC (Shuman, 2010). As a result of such tensions, the field turned to local justice mechanisms assuming that it would alleviate such concerns. However, the case of Gacaca trials in Rwanda is an important caution of local politics as they exacerbated tensions in local communities in the aftermath of violent conflict (Burnet, 2008; Waldorf, 2010).

Second, as in case of the TRC in South Africa (Wilson, 2001) restorative practices often fail to seriously consider the structural problems and violence that actually precede violent conflict and often continue to impact those involved. Thus its restorative justice practices are critiqued for failing to be radical and challenge criminal justice frameworks (Cunneen, 2006, p. 356). “It is not considered restorative if we hold processes where people share their stories of violation in public hearing or discussion but then they return back to tense neighborhoods where stratification remains in tact, or if groups or nation-states are able to deny responsibility, or fail to give reparation in a way that would help restore the dignity and cultural autonomy of those harmed” (Rotberg, 2000, p. 6). For some trading truth for justice is morally suspect (Gutmann and

Thompson, 2000; Kiss, 2000) and it is morally objectionable to force people to agree on the past, or forgive one another (Crocker, 2000; Bargava, 2000), challenging many of the foundational premises of reconciliation.

Third, processes that force speaking risk re-traumatizing victims by forcing them to relive a violent past or exacerbate tensions (Buckley-Zistel, 2006; Dwyer, 2009; Hamber, 2010; Eastmond, 2012; Drexler, 2013; Lawther, 2013). It is not a given that through this process that one will arrive at a larger or collective truth. On the contrary, Michael Ignatieff (1996) claims that truth commissions can only “reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse” (Ignatieff, 1996, p. 113, cited in Avruch, 2010, p. 38).

Fourth, truth commission may conflate the individual with the collective (Avruch, 2010; Robben, 2010). There are claims that the emergence of social truth requires the convergence of individual memories into a collective memory, of singular accounts into a grand story (Avruch, 2010, p. 38), and some challenge the assumption that those convergences will lead to interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation (Avruch, 2010; Robbens, 2010).

Fifth, some challenge the need for a shared story claiming that rather than writing a joint consensual history, it is necessary for groups to admit each other’s truth in to their own (Kelman, 2004, p.123 cited in Avruch, 2010, p. 40). There are dangers in trying to encapsulate the multiplicity of accounts into one storyline because it reduces complexity and privileges some stories over others and risks domination (Maier, 2000). Rather stories should be “contrapuntal” and not “harmonic” allowing for “particular histories of



groups to be woven together, or linearly alongside each other so that the careful listener can follow them distinctly by simultaneously hearing the whole together with the parts” (Maier, 2000, p. 275). This counters the aim of national unity for which most truth commissions strive. However, despite this critique, it is maintained that restorative justice practices such as truth commissions still have the prospect of holding a deeper engagement with the issues that brought about the conflict in the first place in ways that are impossible through the courts (Dinnen, 2006; Ramsbotham, 2005).

Not only are truth commissions seen as contested sites for discovering the truth about a violent past, healing, reconciliation and other restorative processes, but they are also considered a site for memory construction (Hayner, 2010). However, they attempt to construct memory as something that is static and unchanging rather than as a political practice or a struggle for representation that will continue over time (Hamber, 2010). The attempts at the national level to create unified historical accounts from individual memories dilute or “sanitize” the diversity of experiences leaving voices left unrepresented. As such, this stunts the ability for meaning making. “One of the most powerful forms of social stability is the human propensity to share stories of human diversity and to make their interpretations congruent with the divergent moral commitments and institutional obligations that prevail in every society”(Bruner, 1990, p. 68).

Restorative justice practices begin to open the conversation of transitional justice to different mechanism for repairing relationships in the aftermath of conflict. By taking seriously the accounts of victims, the complexity and diversity of experiences of violence

and the aftermath begin to surface. Truth commissions and truth-telling circles took strides to create alternative justice mechanisms that privilege people's accounts of violence and invited a more holistic look at the ways in which perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. However, while these mechanisms offer new sites for the telling and listening to accounts of victims-- and sometimes perpetrators, often they fail to elicit and address the meanings that are derived from the accounts.

### Memory and Justice: Toward Meaning-Making and Narrative

One of the ways that the transitional justice literature begins to address this diversity of experiences is through the study of memory. Through the study memory, there is increasing attention to the stories that people tell and the meanings that are constructed through their telling. Colombia provides an interesting and complex example of this on the ground where the government mandated the creation of a historical memory project, Grupo de Memoria Histórica (GMH), which eventually became the government-instantiated, Center for Historical Memory, with monetary funding through USIP. In its inception and application as a memory process, it was disjoined from the official trials and prosecutions of former paramilitaries and, therefore, there was no explicit link between memory, truth and justice (Ansari, 2012). The stated objective of the project was to “design, develop and disseminate a narrative about the internal armed conflict to identify the reasons for the emergence and evolution of the illegal armed groups as well as the different truths and memories of violence, with a differentiated approach and a preferential option for the voices of victims that have been deleted or silenced” (Ansari,

2012).

In this pursuit, state-sponsored researchers entered into still unstable and sometimes violent contexts in order to collect stories from victims of paramilitary violence with varying degrees of access and success. The uncertain environments impacted what stories victims could tell and still feel safe. Many of the massacres that had occurred were carried out by paramilitary groups that were initially legally backed by the government's military funding in order to combat guerillas, however, their activities became illicit as a result of mafia takeover. Still this presented important ethical issues for government-funded researchers collecting stories and the impact that would have on vulnerable groups. Many human rights groups claim that these barriers were intentionally created by legal mechanisms in order to hamper the historical memory groups' investigation into truth and memory (Ansari, 2012). As a result of the limited resources the group had to accomplish their stated goals, they were confined to collect stories only from victims, who were restricted from talking about state-sponsored violence. During these processes victims became leery of sharing their experiences without safeguards from the state in order to protect them from potential backlash for sharing their stories of violence. Researchers who collected the stories compiled their recordings into long bounded texts resulting in issues of access to the materials that were eventually produced. Lack of Internet and limited print copies made acquiring the texts difficult, compounded by illiteracy among the informants who could not read their own stories. Additionally, individuals and communities that were not included in the process felt they were not adequately represented (Ansari, 2010).

This example demonstrates the complex terrain of collecting memories in a “fragile” context. Further, a national memory center and archive risks constructing memory as a unified collective object rather than an ongoing process of struggle, contestation, and meaning making of the past. Just as other aspects of transitional justice privilege national level, legal frameworks, this approach to memory might overshadow significant and profound processes that emerge in local communities independent of government-instantiated projects (Hinton, 2009; Shaw, 2010).

In local contexts, the social relations of violence create complex dynamics, which influence narration and remembering. “Given such a context, working through or speaking of memory is a highly complex cultural and political negotiation rather than a self-evident goal” (Dwyer, 2009, p. 242). Speaking of memory is not a linear process with clear outcomes associated to the meanings of the past. Often the attention to the veracity of an account occludes the meanings individuals attach to it, which is ultimately what creates reality. In instances where contexts are policed by authoritarian regimes or still plagued by armed actors, certain memories are silenced. Although linkages between memory and conflict are crucial to our understanding of violence, conflict resolution, and transitional justice practitioners continue to struggle to find ways to use these linkages to further the resolution of conflict rather than its perpetuation (Tint, 2010, p. 251-252).

It is crucial to attend to the meanings that are socially constructed in the aftermath of violent conflict. Experiences of violence disrupt daily life and ruptures narratives making it likely to destabilize memory organization (Bruner, 1990, p. 58). Transitional justice literature is opening the field to new processes through which an understanding of

this meaning can be examined and understood through research on memory construction. Such memory research investigates the processes that take place around monuments, memorials, and plaques, along with TRCs often with the aim of constructing a coherent narrative of remembrance of the past. More research has focused on monuments and memorials as sites for debate and or contestation (Jelin, 2007). The diversity of experiences and desires of victims complicates a society's desire to present certain symbolic representations of national unity through memorialization.

However, there is a great need for a diversity of local memory processes that in order to be inclusive beyond the national or hegemonic discourses that often privilege certain stories over others after conflict (Hamber, 2002). Embedded in these discussions is a deep questioning about the role of truth, memory, narrative, and the subjectivities of victims, memorialization projects, and national unity. These concepts exist in tension with questions of power, privilege, voice, and pathways to societal transition. Jelin (2007) notes,

*After periods of high political conflict and repression or state terrorism, there is an active political struggle around meaning; the meaning of what went on and the meaning of memory itself. In this arena, the struggle is not one of memory against oblivion or silence, but rather between opposing memories, each of them with its own silences and voids (Jelin, 2007, P.140).*

While meanings are socially constructed intersubjectively, symbolically and institutionally through cultural processes, they are influenced by the contexts in which they are constructed and based on a set of facts about the past (Jelin, 2007, p. 142). They are rooted not only in the personal experience but the institutions that support or constrain them (Bruner, 1990), and, in order to be rendered meaningful, need a narrative

framework (Hamber, 2002, p. 19). The meanings constructed through narratives are susceptible to powerful narratives of institutions that often dictate what kinds of meanings can emerge and what stories can be told. In the case of the historical memory project in Colombia, it is apparent that victims fear that certain transitional justice mechanisms could distract or detract from the struggle or pursuit of justice.

However, there is a distinction to be made between speaking and meaning making. Within the tribunals, courts and even truth commissions individuals are asked to tell the stories or accounts of their experiences but not to tell about the meanings they make of them. These are two different exercises that must be distinguished. While testimonies might construct a chronology of events or detail a sequence of actions taken, such accounts do not require individuals to reflect on their actions and make sense of them. Speaking without reflexive engagement, limits the production of meaning that would enable an understanding of the speaker's moral frameworks, which would give a deeper understanding of the events and their impact on both victims and perpetrators. It is at the level of meaning that narratives are more open to evolution or transformation.

Seeing truth commissions and other nationally constituted entities as the primary ways to remember and create meanings is problematic because of the constraint that those processes have on individuals. Likewise, there are many assumptions about speaking in the aftermath violence that need to be explored. Meaning making processes can highlight or surface ties to therapeutic practices and confessional discourses that anchor, restrict, and/or contain stories. Speaking can become so routine and rote that

stories become stripped of nuance or they can become so ritualized by the public demand for stories of suffering and trauma that they become commodified (Colvin, 2008).

These relationships are not universal in their construction and need to be examined more closely. While not discounting entirely the role that truth commissions have to play in the aftermath of violence, once again, it is critical to understand the various ways that people make meaning in their everyday lives outside of the purely political sphere that often assumes knowledge of the local or personal, and to see how relationships and communities are shaped by those processes which occur with more local ownership. Looking at meaning-making in relationship to memory opens up new possibilities for theorizing and understanding transitional justice in ways that recognize the practices and processes of people in their daily lives. As Das (2006) points out, the propensity is to look outside of the ordinary to find meaning, yet it is the everyday that is eventful and where memory unfolds in daily relationships, (Das, 2006, p. 8), through narratives (Kent, 2011; Brown, 2012) but also through routines, rituals and micropractices (Baines, 2007; Finnstrom, 2008; Dwyer, 2009; Shaw, 2010; Kent, 2011; Riano-Alcala, 2011; Brown, 2012) in a highly personalized pursuit of justice (Kent, 2011). Or, like the survivor who reveals that he does not need a mechanism to elicit his memories because he remembers everyday (Dwyer, 2009).

Riano-Alcala (2011) expands the notion that memories emerge only through narration orally and in textual documents and describes the physical embodiment of memory and bodies as living archives that carry memories everyday through their chronic pains and physical scars. Communities in her account of Colombia and Uganda create

safe social spaces to share and re-story past events of violence or resistance in what she calls “emplaced witnessing” which encompasses imaginative embodied strategies for sharing (Riano-Alcala, 2011, p. 413). Through theater performance, dance, and the sharing of imprinted bodily wounds, she examines the “archive in the witness” challenging the assumptions that memories are only legitimate with words and text by lifting the voice, agency, and dignity of the women to create and imagine new forms of documentation (Riano Alacala, 2011, p. 433). Speaking and meaning making at this personalized, local level are complex and multi-faceted processes that are highly politicized. Through the telling and the understanding of violence, power relationships emerge and stories reveal how individuals and communities are positioned discursively within the larger global context.

### Communities and Globalized Discourses

Communities and relationships are not monolithic, apolitical entities rather they exist within the complexity of globalized discourses of transitional justice that are engaged, contested, negotiated and alternatively constructed (Dwyer, 2009; Kent, 2011). Yet, while meanings of the past are reconstructed and new meanings are forged in unofficial and personalized ways, individuals and groups constitute themselves within the broader context whereby language and discourses of transitional justice are locally appropriated with the support of local NGOs in various ways reproducing, resisting, and transforming ‘official’ discourses (Kent, 2011, p. 436). Not only do the dominant discourses have hegemonic processes whereby they exhort participation, but they are also



translated and shifted at the community level where they become embedded. There are taken-for-granted assumptions about the “boundedness” of communities and the ways in which violence embeds into daily lives thus illuminating the complexity of memorialization projects predicated on shared experiences and orientations to the past (Dwyer, 2011, p. 231, 233). On the contrary, there are local power dynamics that are shifting and evolving in their own set of struggles (Dwyer, 2011; Kent, 2011).

In some cases it is the act of “forgetting” that is instrumental for communities struggling to make meaning of the past that create friction with universal norms of memory and transition (Shaw, 2010; Clark, 2013; Buckley-Zistel, 2006; Nee, 2010). Memory and forgetting can be seen as symbiotic processes and it is important look at what is being remembered and what is being forgotten, what is privileged and what is silenced and how forgetting might be a form of protection against the violent past (Clark, 2013; Nee, 2010). However, there are cases when the “chosen amnesia” of the past risks the recurrence of future violence (Buckley-Zistel, 2006) as well as instances in which people prefer not to speak at all about the past in order to move on (Nee, 2010; Drexler, 2011, 2013; Eastmond, 2012).

Whatever the process is of locating oneself within the past, it is artificial to say that it happens locally or internationally because it happens within a discursive context that is replete with stories by family members, neighbors, communities, governments and globalized discourses about transitional justice. Examining the discursive landscape and the intersections of narratives that through these processes opens the door to more creativity and imagination. Rather than the goal of harmony, disharmony and dissensus

can lead to more democratic responses to the way societies rebuild (Gutmann and Thomson, 2000, Rancière, 2010) that could be created in new public spaces where debate and discussion about the past could occur (Hamber, 2002).

Hannah Arendt (1958) argues that it is plurality in the public realm that constitutes democracy (Arendt, 1958, p. 220). Within the context of public discourse, the past is subject to infinite debate where memory is not a fixed object, but the social practice that constitutes narratives of the past. At a national level, this means recognizing publicly that the past is a site of struggle, not a fixed object to which all members of the nation must identify (Hamber, 2002).

People's understandings and stories of violence "are based upon a range of social, cultural and political discourses that affect how individuals interpret and give meaning to the world around them (Hume, 2005, p. 50)." In the movement from violence to peace, the stories of the past are called on to be told, and yet, in the telling, existing fractures in the community and the state apparatus must be addressed, redressed and transformed such that new stories, at the local level, can emerge. This cannot be done through legislation alone but is a dynamical process that can be constituted through the circulation of narratives and their intersections with powerful political discourses about justice and the recovery from violence (Scott, 1998). While attention to "the local" continues to gain more traction as researchers in the field of transitional justice use ethnographic approaches, there are still current examples as to how dominant discourses of transitional justice neglect local circumstances (Autessere, 2010).

While the literature begins to address the discursive processes involved in the transition from violence to peace, it does so with a colloquial understanding of storytelling as a cathartic process of sharing as in the case of truth commissions or a playing field that is evened by hearing all party stories in the case of restorative justice practices. Attention to the stories in these frames also relegates our understanding of the stories being told to the institutional contexts in which they are being told.

The study of memory begins to open the literature to the realm of the politics of meaning and how people make sense of their experiences of violence and how that can contribute to healing or rebuilding. This move to examine meaning making provides a theoretical opening for examining narratives as the site for understanding how people, locally, are engaging with transitional justice processes, and the narrative dynamics that constitute them. An inquiry of this kind requires a deeper understanding of the narrative approach and how it can lead to new insights about transitional justice.

The case of Colombia is one that illuminates many of tensions that arise through engagement with these processes as the people struggle to make sense of decades of violence and the associated forms of justice being articulated in relationship to the state. The reparations processes initiated by the Colombian state provide a space within which to examine narrative dynamics as it relates to “rebuilding” and redressing violence in ways that cannot otherwise be done solely through observing trials, or monitoring the process through the media.

Reparations processes are situated within the larger context of transitional justice and are often framed by state notions of repair and justice. Entering into the local context

in Colombia where the state and local communities engage in these processes is a way to illuminate how the transitional justice discourses are resisted, contested, and appropriated and to understand through the narratives of the people on the ground how that translates in their daily lives. A narrative approach to transitional justice and, reparations, more specifically, could bring a new lens to its associated processes with the potential to develop a deeper understanding of how stories are “working” to shift discourses about transitional justice and peacebuilding from within communities, in relation to the state.

### **Transitional Justice in Colombia: Tracing the Dynamics of Local and State Engagement**

The conflict in Colombia is one of the longest-standing conflicts in existence (Summers, 2012; Chernick, 2013). Currently, the country grapples to negotiate the complex terrains of transitional justice, disarmament, reparations and peacebuilding. Accompanying the direct impact of violence, there are 1.8 million hectares of abandoned or seized land and a contested figure of 7 million displaced--the second highest number of internally displaced communities in *any* conflict. As with any nation dealing with the complexities of repairing after, or in the midst of prolonged violence, the stakes in Colombia are extremely high. National-level peace negotiations remain fragile with the continued militarization of various groups, presenting risks to already vulnerable communities, potentially maintaining fractures or creating new ones.

The current peace negotiations are one of numerous attempts to bring an end to the long history of conflict in the country. Historically, negotiations have not only failed

but have led to increased violent outbreaks resulting in selective killings sometimes with death tolls in the thousands. Fear surrounds the current negotiations between the Colombian government under the leadership of President Manuel Santos and the largest operating guerrilla group, FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) because of the violent history and continued violence.

In the context of Colombia, transitional justice processes are being implemented in the face of ongoing violent conflict, pushing scholars and practitioners to think beyond the “false dichotomies” of conflict and post-conflict (Tabak, 2011). This move constructs a unique relationship between conflict and transitional justice, calling into question the timing of transitional justice interventions and bringing new dimensionality to the risks and challenges involved as fear and threat of violence persist. The continued persistence of violence and threats of violence in local communities, and the diversity of experiences of the population, challenges the assumption that a politically-negotiated termination to violent conflict will inevitably improve the lives of those most affected by it (Tabak, 2011, p. 115). The current efforts to build infrastructure to redress violence presents a paradox; there needs to be enough stability and reduction of violence in order to support the foundations for peace, however, as violence and threats of violence continue to persist, the context itself cannot support such an architecture.

Often, the marker for the ongoing violence in Colombia dates back to La Violencia (the Violence); a civil war fought from 1948-1958, mostly in the rural regions between the Liberal and Conservative parties joined by disenfranchised indigenous communities. During that time alone, the country experienced hundreds of thousands of

deaths and upwards of one million displaced people. It gave birth to auto-defense (paramilitary) groups as well as the longest-standing and influential guerilla groups, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). Thus began the guerrilla insurgency that characterized the country over the next five decades, heightening the insecurity in the rural areas that were instantiated by those initial years of civil war.

One such affected region, the Montes de Maria coastal region in Colombia, is one of the poorest in the country and accounts for the highest population of communities of Afro- and indigenous decent. These populations are the most impacted historically by violent massacres and presently by displacement and land loss, as a result of the civil war. Violence continues in many of their communities with peace organizations, private businesses and individuals receiving death threats in the name of local politics and conflict alliances. In the town of Sincelejo, a group funded by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), called the *Caribbean Commission for Reconciliation* meets every two to three months in order to share with each other the most prevalent issues in their communities and to imagine new approaches to the violence, silence, and marginalization experienced by the population. The group is depending on the success of national-level peace negotiations in order to cease the violence, recognizing, however, that negotiations do not bring peace--people and communities who live together in the aftermath of the violence need to work toward peace. They conceptualize a “positive peace,” in the words of Johan Galtung (1969) whereby there is not just an end to the violence, but a quality of life that is achieved based on equality.

However, there are mixed emotions about the prospects of a negotiated settlement on the national level based on the prior record of peace agreements in Colombia which in the past have failed to materialize, leaving the country mired in violence. In its current phase, the violence is less pervasive and has been pushed to the peripheral regions. At the same time, state-initiated efforts mostly driven by the creation of transitional justice laws have advanced at the state and local levels to begin the processes of restoring communities with mixed results.

One example of these initiatives emerged from legislation by the Colombian government. In 2005, the 975 Ley de Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace Law) was passed in order to address elements of truth, justice, and reparations by interrogating instances of violence committed by non-state, paramilitary actors who are allegedly responsible for more than eighty percent of political violence in Colombia, including massacres, selective killings, disappearances, forced displacements and torture (Diaz, 2009, p. 66). The law attended to past criticisms of the government for favoring impunity and amnesty by requiring former combatants to testify in judicial hearings, recounting the substance of the crimes they committed, sharing facts associated with their crimes, and revealing the location of disappeared individuals. Those who agreed to share did so in exchange for a reduced sentencing of five to eight years in prison.

However, the politics of the law and its implementation merit further inquiry as it has faced a great deal of criticism by victims and victim's advocates who claim that they have largely been excluded from the processes. Additionally, it is commonly held that demobilized paramilitary merely reformed into new forms of criminal bands. The

efficacy of the law is under scrutiny and because, there have been so few cases actually tried, there is little empirical evidence of how communities have been impacted. The criticisms eventually led to the creation of Law 1448 or 2011 Ley de Victimas y Restitución de Tierras (Victims and Land Restitution Law), which has been introducing pilot cases for reparations in the Montes de Maria region.

The complexities that arise in Colombia are rich and textured and provide a lens into the challenges of transitional justice mechanisms framed by trials and the rule of law--- processes that are informed by and emerge from practices that have predominated scholarship and practice in the field of transitional justice since the Nuremberg Trials after World War II.

However, despite these challenges that have emerged in the implementation of the peace and justice law, twelve years after paramilitary infiltration into their community, the displaced victims of the community of Mampujan became the first to be awarded monetary reparations as a result of their trials with the Justice and Peace Law and are one of the first communities to receive land reparations as part of the Victims Law. This historic decision positioned Mampujan as an exemplar of reparations processes in Colombia and has paved the way for some communities currently engaged in transitional justice processes while also marking increased disparities.

Exploring the reparations case of Mampujan provides a lens into the ways in which communities are working with the state to rebuild in the aftermath of violence. It is an opportunity to see how the laws are interpreted on the ground and how the community makes sense of itself and the engagement with the state. Engaging locally



with the narratives that emerge in the communities in interaction with the state through reparations processes expands on the transitional justice literature that calls for attention to meaning-making in post-conflict processes. Describing the narrative dynamics of the reparations process provides empirical data for understanding how state-initiated processes live in the daily lives of a local community and what happens when globalized discourses of transitional justice meet with local community narratives.

Such an examination raises a host of complex questions such as, *how do local conceptions of repair emerge in the aftermath of prolonged violence? What are the sites of intersection between the production of narratives at the community level and transnational discourses of transitional justice? What stories develop and how do those stories interact with, resist, and/or appropriate national and transnational discourses of transitional justice? How are communities mobilizing in order to engage in these processes? What stories do communities have about themselves and their relation to the state? What are the relations of power that impact what stories can and cannot be told?*

These issues resonate with the challenge that Richmond (2012) poses to peacebuilding more generally. Richmond (2012) refers to the intersection of the local and the international as a process of “hybridization” whereby local actors attempt to resist and reshape peace initiatives. However, he makes the clear assertion that these processes are not expressions of threat against policy-makers, rather it is a form of “authorship” employed by local actors to avoid some of the pitfalls that are endemic of peace treaties and the creation of new institutions and norms that often develop without the voices of those most impacted. These forms of hybridity open the potential for communities to

have more agency and peacebuilding capacity, which, in turn, creates the possibility for a richer more complex conceptualization of peace that is more sustainable.

Given the extraordinary circumstance of Colombia in the midst of unprecedented peace dialogues, it is more important than ever to understand the dynamics between the international, state and the local in order to bridge the gap that often leads to the failed peace agreements that emerge out of national-level negotiations. The case of reparations in Colombia has the potential to illuminate the tactics of local communities and how they might “work” in transitional contexts. Understanding the processes through the stories that have been told has the potential to emerge new methods of peacebuilding, contributing not only to theory but to policy and practices; revealing a nuance to the relationships and avoiding universalist approaches. It recasts peacebuilding so it is no longer relegated to state building.

Furthermore, Melucci (1989) argues that social movements and agency are the emergence of creativity in communities rather than expressly oppositional to state power. While institutions are influential, they are less deterministic and more so spaces to navigate and move around. Inquiring into these dynamics, which are in a "mutually constitutive" relationship recognizes that the state and the local can only be fully understood in terms of both (Acharya, 2004).

This dissertation research seeks to understand the production of meaning in the aftermath of violence by studying the discursive and meaning making practices around reparations processes in the Montes de Maria and specifically in the community of Mampujan in order to understand these dynamics as they pertain to the communities' so-

called return from violence as they work within the system to define themselves in ways that are recognizable by the state.

A narrative approach to the case of reparations in Mampujan provides a theoretical opening for a new look at reconciliatory theories and practices within transitional justice that highlight the meaning-making, and narrative work that is done. The narratives in Mampujan developed over time through the community's interaction with globalized discourses of transitional justice, trials at the national level, documentary films, local NGOs and their own processes of memorializing and ritual. The meanings that have been generated have been mobilized in relationship to the state and are an important domain for inquiry. Exploring these narrative dynamics then become important for understanding not only how the community sees itself, but also how it is viewed in the context of reparations process and by the state.

### **Research Method: Understanding Narrative Dynamics in Transitional Justice Processes**

In order to develop an understanding of the ways in which meaning is constructed around the reparations processes that the communities and state are engaged in, it is necessary to enter into the very spaces where people are making sense of their interactions and experiences. In meetings with organizations, communities, leaders, and state entities, the dynamics and politics of speaking, positioning, and meaning making emerge in the narratives that are produced. Narratives are a critical mechanism for creating architectures for meaning and portray how “self” and “other” are constructed.

As people's experiences and interactions create new understandings, narratives evolve in relational ways. Rather than focusing on a fixed moment, narratives provide insight into the social and political dynamics that continually shift and are anchored by the people themselves that are involved in complex political processes. Engaging directly with the narratives of historically marginalized communities also shifts the narrative authority of describing and constructing state processes, which often fail to incorporate the voices of affected communities.

Narratives are the way in which people create meanings in interaction about the past, present, and future; the move to studying narratives is an effort to provide empirical data for the analysis of meaning systems and their dynamics in social processes.

Narratives are composed of plots, characters and themes (Winslade, 2008; Cobb, 2013), and together these structures create "causality, implicativeness, or thematic coherence" in interaction. (Mishler, 1995, p. 91) Narrative is the discursive structure in which human action receives its form and through which it is meaningful (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 135). Through emplotment and evaluative moments or judgments, stories give meaning to events as well as constitute their importance as events (Labov, 1997; Somers, 1994).

From a narrative lens, conflict is a function of the stories that people/parties tell about Self and Other that constitute the relational fractures between groups, and, in the extreme, call for violence. Conflict narratives lack complexity in that they have thin storylines that externalize responsibility, delegitimize the Other, all on the basis of binary, rather than multifaceted moral systems (Hardy, 2008; Cobb, 2013). Conflict narratives cling to broad generalizations and binaries of "us" and "them" which overly

simplify the issues and, at the relational level, provide justification for the de-legitimization, marginalization and even the annihilation of the Other. Narratives are the domain for the struggle over meaning and as such, can be seen as a powerful tool with which disempowered parties can challenge dominant cultures or, they can be used strategically by dominant parties, to apply and reinforce beliefs and practices that privilege the dominant culture (Stewart and Maxwell, 2010, p. 35). Over time, in the context of violence, some stories are delegitimized and fragmented, silenced by the more powerful or more dominant culture. As a result people may become disoriented, lose their sense of identity, purpose, and history. This is often the case with displaced persons, as well as the victims of extreme violence.

Just as narratives are pathways into social worlds and provide a landscape of meaning related to particular events, stories according many narrativists are required to 1. to teach us our duties, 2. to guide morally good action, 3. to motivate morally good action, 4. to justify action on moral grounds, 5. to cultivate our moral sensibilities, 6. to enhance our moral perceptions, 7. to make actions or persons morally intelligible, and 8. to reinvent ourselves as better persons (Nelson, 2001, p. 36). This comprehensive set of criteria for narratives is not meant to claim that all narratives actually function in all of these ways at all times, but that these are attributes that they should have in order to carry heft.

It is not necessarily the truth of a narrative that makes it compelling but rather the “heft” of the narrative; whether it resonates the listeners. Resonance signals a relational understanding that goes beyond neural mirroring processes that trigger a sense of likeness

into the intersubjective realm of narrative where understanding is extended through language and body expression (Gallagher, 2012, p. 191). In a more interpretive sense a story resonates when it is harnessed to cultural or societal values that may be shared or contradictory but nonetheless, stimulates a connection with the interlocutor (De Bodard, 2010).

Privileging resonance of a narrative over the veracity of it rests on the claim that truth is not an artifact that is out in the world to be discovered; rather it is created through narrative dialectics in interaction. Just as narratives are a selection (Winslade, 2008), truth is selected and practiced (Jackson, 2002). It is not that there are multiple ways of looking at a singular event—reality itself is always multiple, meaning is always multiple—we diminish it by falling back on an image of thought and representation (Deleuze in Winslade, 2009, p. 335). “The truth or falsity of a story cannot be decided by measuring it against some outside reality, for what matters is how stories enable us to regain some purchase over the events that confound us, humble us, leave us helpless, salvaging a sense that we have some say in this way our lives unfold.” (Jackson, 2002, p.17).

Whether or not a story has the narrative heft that warrants discursive legitimacy, according to Nelson (2001), relies on how the narrative resonates with other aspects of the person’s identity and how it is intertwined with attributes of people’s lives that they or other people care about most. She ties this claim to the construction of identity-constituting narratives, which also need to have explanatory force and be tied to actions in order to be elaborated. This view of narrative is critical because it moves away from a

focus on broader, universalizing stories in favor of dealing in the particular. A view of the particular allows for engaging more deeply about how people feel about, live into, and imagine their worlds. It opens up a window into people's social, intellectual, and moral worlds providing greater texture and richness to their lived experiences.

Context impacts how stories are told, they are not told in a vacuum. Stories that emerge in particular social worlds are inflected by geography, history, and the socio-political landscape. Context can refer to the particular cultural environment, the nature of the space where a story is being told, as well as who is present for the conversation. Meanings are made in particular contexts as well, making "context" a critical element of understanding narratives, the meanings that are made, and the politics that influence their telling. The narratives themselves "can tell us something about how social actors, from a particular social position and cultural vantage point, make sense of their world (Eastmond, p. 250)."

Stories and their meanings are in constant production, that is, they are not static. The temporal dimension of stories suggests that meanings get ascribed differently over time, as the present and future shape stories of the past. They concretize through elaboration by self and others over time as they take hold and become routinized. Narrative coherence and fidelity legitimize stories as they are anchored over time in more complex meaning systems, increasing their stability. However, there is a risk in this stability or coherence when applied groups of people or when trying to build a shared narrative understanding of a group. In the case of narratives in the aftermath of violence, homogenizing individual narratives of victimization into one coherent story can be

violent to some; likewise, violence and pain can destroy narratives (Das, 2006; Eastmond, 2007).

Disruptions or ruptures in everyday life, such as violent episodes or conflict, especially call on the need to make meaning of the experiences, which we share in our stories daily. Narratives organize our lives in particular ways creating normative expectations about our worlds. Any breach to that calls our attention and requires us to explain or make sense of that difference. However, the “victim experience” is not universal. Some embody the victim story and embrace it because they are proud, there will be victims out of unity, victims out of recognition, victims who will never forget, victims who feel hopeless. Mayo (2012) cautions interlocutors to reflect on individuals not character types, however, the character types can be an indicator for how individuals position themselves within a story and provide important information. Narratives can reveal diversity away from the dominant stories or archetypes, however, the politics of narrative remind us that there some narratives that are privileged over others and a politics to who can speak and who can cannot (Cobb, 2013; Rancière, 2010).

### Data Collection

In order to investigate and apprehend an understanding of the landscapes of meanings in communities affected by violence in Colombia, I utilized ethnographic, methods such as participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews in order to look at stories in use, both in the local communities that are “in transition” as well as in the state apparatus that is authorizing and engaging it. For secondary resource information, I examined legislation, news articles, books created locally that document



community processes, documentary films and recorded footage of events given to me by community members and online.

My research in the Montes de Maria began with a preliminary week in March 2013, continued from April to August in 2014, a two-week follow-up visit in December 2014 and one month in June 2015. The research continued, ongoing between visits through on-line news, blogs, Facebook posts and instant chats, occasional Skype and phone calls, and email. Additionally, I attended numerous international meetings at the United States Institute of Peace and the Washington Office on Latin America, engaging with Colombia scholars on transitional justice, Colombian officials, and representatives of victim's movements.

In Sincelejo, Colombia, a small, community-based organization, Sembrandopaz, led by a prominent Mennonite peace activist, Ricardo Esquivía paved the path for my engagement with the narratives of many organizations, activist, advocates, communities, state functionaries, and victims in the Montes de Maria region, the location of this research. The government declared the region a zone of rehabilitation and consolidation during the Uribe presidency when the FARC guerrilla groups were militarily eliminated from the region. Effectually, the region is considered to be safe for international researchers and visitors.

Sembrandopaz served as my hub for information about the activity in the region-political, violent, and cultural in nature. Because of their close-knit relationships and far-reaching networks, the organization often understood the challenges of navigating the terrain, politically, socially, and geographically. In the region, Sembrandopaz has been

instrumental in translating transitional justice law and mobilizing community efforts for engagement at the state level. Their stature in the community of victims groups, advocacy organizations, religious leaders, regional state offices, continually opened doors to different events, interlocutors, perspectives, and meanings about transitional justice policies and practices.

My deepest engagement with the everyday lives of the communities<sup>2</sup> in the Montes de Maria occurred during my time from April – August in 2014. For the first month, I immersed myself into the culture of Sembrandopaz and their approach to political engagement with the communities where they work: Mampujan, Pichilin, Libertad, and the Alta Montaña<sup>3</sup>. I visited each of the four communities as a way of engaging with the broader context of the region and to explore the diversity that each community brings to my research question about the narratives that communities have about themselves in relationship to the state and the way their narratives intersect with narratives of transitional justice. During these visits I observed communities as they prepared for their meetings with state functionaries, participated in identity workshops, engaged with their ombudsman, organized events, and socialized. Usually, those in attendance at such meetings were considered to be community leaders, whether youth, elders, professionals, etc. This is the main population of representatives that I was

---

<sup>2</sup> The term “communities” is one that is used by Sembrandopaz exclusively to refer to the communities where they work. “The communities” means something to everyone there. They do not call the communities “victims,” which is the term that the state uses. I tend toward using the term communities, however, the language of “victim” becomes pertinent over the course of my research and this analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The Alta Montaña is actually a region with a social movement comprised of fifty communities that would convene in a house/office that Sembrandopaz recently opened in the central location of El Carmen in order to provide meeting space for the movement and lodging for people who traveled long hours from the mountain to attend.

exposed to in any given community meeting. Likewise, the long, sometimes arduous travel to the meetings was a critical time for me to understand the physicality of the work of Sembrandopaz and the communities as well as to speak with members of Sembrandopaz to learn how they frame the activities, the people, and themselves in the set of social relations.

During this period with Sembrandopaz, they allocated space for me in an office with three employees of the organization.<sup>4</sup> Spending my days in Sincelejo there meant being immersed in their daily conversations about transitional justice laws, court cases of peasants accused of being guerrilla, government plans for regional activities for peacebuilding, and political actions taken by communities. In this context I was able to learn how the organization made sense of the context they worked in and the specific events as they occurred. I was included in most aspects of the organizational culture and, before long, I benefited from many organizational privileges ranging from fresh mango juice in the morning to invitations to critical meetings. Eventually, when the office was overly encumbered, they began to send messages, money, and materials with me when I visited the communities.

I participated in every full staff meeting, which occurred every fifteen days.<sup>5</sup> On those days, all volunteers and employees came from near and far to update “the equipo” (the team) on the activities in the communities where they live and work. Updates included advances on projects, scheduling new meetings, material/financial requests from

---

<sup>4</sup> The term employee is fluid, at any given time there are people working in Sembrandopaz officially and unofficially, as volunteers, or passing through to share their passion for the accompaniment work of the organization.

<sup>5</sup> This is the Colombian way of saying “two weeks.”

communities, and reports of violence, which influenced, for example, which roads people would travel and at what hours. Volunteers called seeders, who lived in the communities provided a crucial touch point because they resided in the communities for two years and became an extension of the communities themselves. This time was also used to check in with people about their lives and for them to air any personal concerns, feelings, requests for support, etc. The performance was in service to the larger mission of the organization to treat people wholly and not fragment the person from the work.

More personal sharing transpired during the weekly Sunday night “prayer group” which was mainly attended by Sembrandopaz employees. The night began checking in with everyone about their personal lives followed by a biblical reading and discussion. This space was quite intimate and I found myself in tension-- wanting to keep some distance as a researcher, but also longing for connection during this period of research, which was quite arduous at times. Over time, I became more comfortable, but I mostly found the space enriching as a place to learn more about the people involved with my research and to observe the overlap between their personal and political lives which so intricately intertwined. One of the employees also brought her husband and toddler, making the evening even more familial and informal. It was as close to local, daily life in city of Sincelejo that I would access.

I lived in an apartment Sincelejo with an employee of Sembrandopaz who had lived in Montes de Maria for five years at the time of my research.<sup>6</sup> Our second

---

<sup>6</sup> She originally was a long-term volunteer who converted into a full-time employee, integral to the operation of the organization. It was known to everyone that it was Ricardo’s wish that she would take over the organization in the next five years as he approached eighty years old.

roommate was a young woman from a rural evangelical community in the region, who was studying for her degree in social work. In the same building, a long-term volunteer from Mexico occupied the apartment down the hall. This setting was influential for my research because volunteers and guests of Sembrandopaz stayed with us whenever they passed through town for meetings, events, or needed a shower and an Internet connection.

Mostly young people, they would sit around at night and talk about their experiences in the communities, making sense of their assumptions about social movements, the role of the United States in the Colombian conflict, how complicated life is for victims on the coast in Montes de Maria, their alliances and frictions with other organizations in the region, perspectives on the state processes in communities, and the challenges and ethics of being foreigners in very politically sensitive spaces in Colombia. These were some of the only moments I could speak about my own research in English with people who were intimately familiar with the context, albeit foreigners. They served as important interlocutors as I made sense of my research and experiences in the region. Here I could talk through challenges of navigating in communities where certain long-term volunteers hindered more than facilitated my research. They also made leather shoes and bags, celebrated birthdays and holidays, and indulged me in an afternoon of mango tasting.

Outside of the daily office operations, the impromptu intimate gatherings with Sembrandopaz, and attending community meetings, I also participated larger, regional events hosted by Sembrandopaz at their facility and attended meetings with the organization off-site. These included bi-weekly meetings with leaders from around the

region, which I attended sporadically, meetings with groups from abroad that came to learn about their work, and a very significant seminar that took place over the course of two months that was called Seminario: Los Procesos de Paz en Colombia: Experiencias y Respuestas Desde las Regiones (Seminar: Peace Processes in Colombia: Experiences and Responses from the Regions). This event was sponsored by FUCUDE- Fundación Cultural Democrática (Cultural Democratic Foundation), Sembrandopaz, USAID, Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (International Organization for Migration). The purpose of the seminar was to engage local communities, NGOs, and other regional partners in a process to make recommendations for regional peace to the national-level negotiation tables in Havana, Cuba.

These were the kinds of conversations that were continually happening in and around Sembrandopaz in Sincelejo and provided many of the insights for understanding the broader context and master narratives that operate in Colombian society. The regional organizations, advocates, and victim leaders who participated in meetings at Sembrandopaz consistently situated the experiences in their communities within state narratives and their frustrations were often framed by the inability of those narratives to include their voices on their terms.

Within the communities themselves, I attended meetings and workshops held by Sembrandopaz, those called by the state functionaries, as well as holiday celebrations, commemorations to violence, and religious campaigns. After the first month, in a typical week, I would spend about two-three days in Sincelejo, and four-five days in the communities. My time was generally split between the communities of Mampujan and

Pichilin because they each provided a different texture to life in the post-conflict context. Mampujan was the first community to be awarded reparations from the state and Pichilin had yet to begin a process with the state at the onset of my research. In each case, I spent days at a time, living with families, introducing myself to different community members, listening to their conversations, cooking with women, playing with their children, practicing English, learning their local dances, conversing about world politics, soliciting their in-depth perspectives on their interactions with the state and learning.

These multiple day visits were usually punctuated on either end by meetings or trainings with Sembrandopaz, preparing for visits from the representatives from the Victim's Unit (the government unit responsible for reparations process), and observing the actual visits. Twenty-five elected community leaders who represented the communities in the vast majority of meetings comprised most of the meetings. My research is largely anchored by the voices of those who are part of those twenty-five but is by no means limited to them.

In Mampujan, the community that anchors the majority of this analysis, became a centerpiece of my research. Through my interactions with the four main community leaders there, I gained access to more regional reparations processes and the meetings that convened victims from various communities. I spent time with other communities that knew Mampujan well, and forged relationships in the broader networks, which were anchored by my affiliation with Sembrandopaz. I also observed and participated in meetings as groups from abroad visited the community to learn about their peace processes. In each of these spaces I learned and observed how community members told

their story to the outside world.

As I attended more events held in different communities and those in more formal spaces, I was exposed to an extended view of the life of victims and how differentiated the attention by the state is in communities. I expanded the reach of my understanding of how different community's stories have different kinds of purchase with the state. Mampujan was the first community to be awarded reparations and their story has reverberations across the region and beyond. I followed the narratives within the community outward, to meetings with regional state functionaries in the Victim's Unit, the Ombudsman's Office, the regional military barracks, the regional police, to provide a deeper contextual understanding of the politics of victimhood in the region and to explore some of the questions raised about Mampujan's popularity with the state and international entities.

Throughout my time in the region I observed, participated in, and interviewed community members about their understanding of transitional justice in their communities, their views about the state, and how the state sees them. These conversations were in service to better understanding what stories are being told and what cannot be said. There are dominant narratives circulating in Colombia about rebuilding in the aftermath of violence that are framed by transitional justice laws. Organizations like Sembrandopaz are mediators in the process of translating those laws for communities and working with them to interact successfully with the state. Communities are then making sense of these processes over time and creating new meanings about themselves as communities, as victims, and as political actors.



My research in Mampujan lead me to wonder what it was about their story that made them so visible to the state, while other community narratives did not receive the same amount of attention. Because they had already navigated many state initiated transitional justice processes successfully, it was an ideal location to understand the ways in which a “successful” community resisted, appropriated, and integrated narratives of transitional justice into their own narratives about the recovery from violence. In order to illuminate these processes, I took rigorous field notes, recorded many of the meetings I attended, and, when, possible recorded individual interviews. In some instances the presence of my recorder shifted conversations so I opted not to utilize it outside of my conversations with the four main leaders who were most comfortable speaking about their personal experiences with the community and the state. In this way, I was responsive to the environment and I learned to adjust my questions with those less comfortable speaking in formal terms and to ask for reflections on particular events that were hallmarks of Mampujan’s reparations process. The varied responses attested to the diversity within the community and encouraged my research to account for complexity and learn how transitional justice discourses were negotiated, resisted, or absent.

Working in this way allowed me to investigate the official and personalized ways in which the community navigated the processes they were in, how they constructed meaning, the inter-community and intra-community politics surrounding their engagement with state processes. Because the community relied heavily on the council of Sembrandopaz, the organization’s presence influenced the way the community reproduced, resisted or transformed official discourses. Not only was the community

negotiating with the state, but, there were local power dynamics that had import for understanding how communities related internally, with surrounding communities and with the state.

Investigating these dynamics was an essential aspect to my research, which attends to multiple voices and perspectives from within the communities and around them. Recognizing that narratives are not static, my research provides a lens into how the narratives changed over time within Mampujan by asking questions that engaged people reflexively about how they have understood themselves in the past and inquired as to how, if at all, that has changed over time. One way of doing that was to explore critical moments in the processes that emerged as narrative markers in their processes with the state and learning about how they saw themselves within the set of relations as well as how they were seen by the state or other organizations in relationship to those critical moments. Because Mampujan has been engaged in their processes over such a long period of time, their narrative accounts for many changes that they have gone through as individual leaders and on a more community level. Likewise, stories from Sembrandopaz provided another lens into the changes in the community over time because of their intense involvement in their reparations processes.

My understanding of the narrative landscape was not relegated to Sembrandopaz and the associated communities. Narratives emerged on bus rides with passengers and, more often the drivers, in people's homes, waiting for transportation, on line at the bank, watching the news, at hotel front desks, and numerous other places almost always leading back to the conflict or reflections of life in the past. The woman who waxed my legs had

a brother and father with different views on the reparations process and the dentist down the road recalled the days when violence was so heightened that no one was permitted to leave the city; he is part of a conglomerate of landowners who pooled together lands to give to displaced farmers. The mere question about what brought me to Colombia opened the space for people to share their own personal experiences. The conflict is so deeply embedded in people's lives, their memories, and their stories, revealing the complexity that I can only hope to shed light on.

In addition to ethnographic approaches, this research attends to the politics of narrative by paying attention to the ways in which narratives are positioned as powerful, marginal or are elaborated or silence and in particular contexts, in meetings, in the communities, and in their interaction with the state and globalized discourses. In order to understand the narrative complexity in and about Mampujan in relationship to the state, I begin my analysis with a description of the way in which narratives are mediated. Just as I am mediating the way this story is being told, my pathway to the narratives in this analysis were paved by Sembrandopaz, their stories about Mampujan and their work with the community as well. In order to maintain the salience of my understanding of the narratives, this entire telling relies only on the stories that I heard from community members through my meetings and interactions with Sembrandopaz. While at times I use outside sources to make sense of what people have shared, the history of the conflict in the region, and the history of the conflict more broadly are reflections of the way that local individuals from the region tell the story. It is not to say that this is how every person from the region would tell the story, but it is pieced together through the

narratives learned in conversation with communities, leaders, and organizations affiliated to or supported by Sembrandopaz. This vantage point provides and lens into the way that people are making sense of the peacebuilding and transitional justice processes in their region and communities and gives voice to those stories that are often not told. In order to protect the confidentiality, I have changed the names of all of the individuals from the community I researched except for those who are significantly public figures or are not considered direct victims of the conflict.

### Narrative Analysis

The analysis of narratives in this project relies heavily on developing an understanding of the dynamics of dominant and counter narratives in order to materialize maps of meaning or narrative landscapes (Nelson, 2001; White, 2007; Bernardi, 2012). According to Dwyer's (2011) work with reconciliation processes in Indonesia, small gatherings of victims are crucial to providing a sense of identity and acknowledgment stripped by bureaucratic actions. Stories about the past are not a linear reconstruction of events; they "take place in engagement with one's everyday social world and those who inhabit it, but not always in linear, representational narrative" (Dwyer, 2011, p. 242). "Stories are designed to give the exceptional behavior meaning" (Bruner, 1990, p. 49). Narration is a way of translating knowing into telling and giving form and structures of meaning to experience (White, 1980). Recognizing and analyzing master/counter narrative dynamics and meaning-making and their centrality in promoting justice, peace, and reconciliation has important implications for the development of processes in post-

conflict or, in the case of Colombia “pre-post conflict” contexts. However, it is “not only about remembering and the agency to remember, but about the ways and which the legacies of the past promote or inhibit the meaning that can be made in relationship to the past” (Dwyer, 2011, p. 238).

There are histories of power, relationships and “lines of force” (Winslade, 2009) that influence the ways in which the state and the community are positioned and storied that impacts the conditions for peace and provides a lens for understanding possibilities and constraints of mechanisms through which justice and reconciliation processes are enacted. Institutionalized discourses and narratives can marginalize and silence communities and, therefore, support the development of the very tensions they are purporting to subvert. Definitions and practices of justice risk being subsumed by a political agenda operating counter-intuitively to the intended outcomes. In such cases alternative narratives and voices of those most marginalized are “compressed” by master narratives (Cobb, 2011). This compression of narratives, which are cultural, historical and fragmented, suggest that certain practices of transitional justice risk marginalizing important stories and histories, rendering them invisible within national master narratives. A narrative lens on transitional justice, conflict analysis resolution and reconciliation addresses this narrative violence (Cobb, 2013)

“The ability to frame individual narratives within powerful larger narratives imbues narrators with respective degrees of power within the local culture...” (Wibben, 2008, p. 34). Often times, political structures use a narrow narrative construction in order to consolidate their own power and to disempower those who might contradict their

own legitimacy. This has implications that go beyond the macro-political context according to Nelson (2001) who argues that individual identities are narratively constructed and that their moral agency is dependent on their stories having uptake and being legitimized by others. This type of oppression denies people opportunities and risks the development of what she calls an infiltrated consciousness; a damaged identity without self-respect (Nelson, 2001, p. 21). Individuals and groups whose narratives are not acknowledged by the dominant discourse may resort to extremes in order to have their voices heard. Likewise, individuals and groups are “interpellated” by the dominant discourse, or called into subjectivity and to respond accordingly.

This inquiry will not only illuminate the processes whereby one community has been “successful” in their interactions with state-level mechanism, but also will tell a story about what cannot be told or what stories do not get recognized. It is critical to understand these dynamics with an understanding of hegemonic processes and the ways in which powerful narratives support or constrain what stories can be told. Understanding these processes has the potential to enhance theoretical models and concrete practices of transitional justice on national and local levels.

Positioning theory is also used as an analytic tool that provides a way for examining story lines in relationship to how particular individuals, groups, or institutions are positioned within those stories. How do people story their rights, duties and responsibilities based on how they are positioned by the state, the community, or how they see themselves? How do these positions determine what people can say or do? (Harre and Slocum, 2003) Positioning analysis also be used to understand how post-

conflict identities are socially constructed and how they are materialized, anchored and/or mobilized by communities (Archakis, 2005, Nelson, 2011).

Narrative emplotment furthers this analysis and allows for an understanding of way people are constructing and reconstructing event history over time (White, 1980; Yamaguchi 1991; Elliott 2005) What are the episodes and event frames that are pertinent to how the community makes sense of the past, its relationship to the state and how the state sees the community? Such events might include trials, commemorations, or community meetings for example.

### My Positionality

As I describe the organization, the communities, and the processes that I observed and participated in over the course of this research, my lens is through the eyes of marginalized communities and organizations that work with communities forcefully displaced by paramilitary violence, as part of a “route of violence” which resulted in the deaths of thousands of peasant farmers. My own standpoint is not an objective one, and I acknowledge that I aim in this research to tell the stories that often do not reach the mainstream media. Telling the stories that are less told is deeply political. I was embedded in the work of Sembrandopaz and my understanding of the conflict and transitional justice is partial based on that institutional location.

However, as a researcher, being embedded in various institutional practices enriched my analysis and challenged me to interrogate my own political leanings and shift in ways that I could not have anticipated through Sembrandopaz’ interpretations, for

example, of the importance of hierarchical structures and government institutions. While Sembrandopaz paved the pathway into the narratives, the research, analysis, and interpretations are my own.

My research in the communities “fits” into the narrative that international exposure makes violence in their community less likely. That I am from the United States received mixed emotions. Some individuals valorized that status, while others equated the United States with Colombia’s increased militarization, bringing death in their communities creating skepticism about our presence in their country. This might very well have had an effect on the kinds of stories that people shared with me. On a more personal level, I continually reflected on how my positionality impacted my research and interpretations. My presence as a North American, of white European, Jewish, Hispanic, descent, and as an agnostic, single, “older” female, doctoral student researcher proved to be a complex negotiation depending on the meeting, the context, and the individuals with whom I interacted. Thus, there were moments when I was treated with deference, as a family member, as a youngster, as a teacher, as privileged, or as insignificant. However, it was my affiliation with Sembrandopaz that superseded these characterizations, as I entered into intimate community and professional spaces.

Because of my positionality, I do not purport to advance the telling of an objective reality; rather, I am transparently offering here the positioning of how I came to write this story. Just as truth is not out there waiting to be discovered as is implied by positivist methodologies, I operate under social constructionist views that “reality” is multiple and changing, is constituted in interaction and inflected by broader cultural



discourses. Feminist standpoint theory offers that people from marginalized communities can provide knowledge at the intersections of their own experiences and the broader social context within which they live, giving them, “double vision.”(Swigonski, 1994) This research does not enable a telling of the true story, but to tell a story that describes the dynamics on the ground as they were described to me or as I observed them as a “process of approximating the truth as part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differentially situated (Stoetzler, 2002).”

Understanding social relationships and how subjectivity is produced is a messy endeavor and, therefore, there are no universal answers or understandings that emerge out of the description of the dynamics. Rather, understanding that knowledge is situated and that it comes from a particular positionality or standpoint characterizes rigorous qualitative research providing validity to the empirical results. It is by way of making my positionality transparent, not the accuracy of the stories that increases validity (Hess-Biber, 2012). To this end, I rely on the narratives of the people who lived in the region and opened and shared their lives with me. This is not a story about the particularities of the violence in each community, but rather an attempt to share a slice of what communities experienced in their efforts to rebuild the fabrics of their communities, institutions, with the state and organizations operant in the region. We are all connected in one way or another through the work of Sembrandopaz who opened the door to the narrative pathways for this research. During the course of my research, I am not aware of being shut out of a space due to my affiliation with the organization. However, I recognize that same affiliation positioned me in particular ways in regards to which

people I spoke to, which communities I visited, how I fit into conversations and how people spoke to me.

### **CHAPTER THREE: PATHWAY INTO THE NARRATIVES**

Narratives emerge through relational engagement. A narrative approach to transitional justice dynamics between communities and the state requires access to the stories that are being told on the ground, in communities, in localized contexts. My path into post-conflict narrative dynamics in Montes de Maria was paved through my affiliation with Sembrandopaz through the set of connections and relations of people who shared their stories and experiences in meetings, events and daily activities which the organization supports. Their networks span the local, regional, national, and international realms where narratives emerge, intersect with, and constitute the complex environment of post-conflict Colombia in places where violence still persists and people and communities are making sense of the past and rebuilding for the future. Engaging the conflict through this organization revealed many of the challenges and complicated dynamics that are prevalent in such a context alongside the many advancements that fuel the hope and optimism that is needed to do the emotionally charged, demanding, political, and relational work that they do.

This organization is also a site for understanding how communities interact with the state and make sense of the laws and the associated processes in which they participate. The relationships they build are tantamount to their work, making the organization central to many regional and national meetings, creating close ties with

grassroots community building and advocacy efforts, while maintaining a deep sense of connection to the mission of the organization. While hundreds of people pass through their halls each year in their efforts to create networks of solidarity for peace and justice work, on the community level, they focus their time on four communities currently engaged in processes with the state. My exposure to each of the four communities where Sembrandopaz works has varied over the course of my research. Having spent most of my time in Mampujan and Pichilin, I can provide more in-depth descriptions of the processes they have been involved in. However, I participated in pivotal events and meetings in each of the communities and observed many of the dynamics between those who were affected most by the violence, Sembrandopaz, and various state entities.

### **Mediated Understanding**

The voices of those most affected by violence are critical to rebuilding in the aftermath. As the research and practice of peacebuilding and conflict resolution shift to include those historically marginalized, the people and entities working in particular violence-affected regions become the eyes and ears for the lived experiences of the most marginal voices. They are the doorway through which people from the outside gain access to those stories and experiences. Given the diversity of approaches and ideologies and the web of networks associated to organizations and people, it is crucial to critically examine how organizations are situated within a conflict region and more broadly. The positioning of an organization in a locality, region and national landscape is much more

than a vetting process, rather it is essential to understanding not only the way they are making sense of the political landscape, but also how they are positioned within it.

Many refer to the role of the peacebuilding organizations on the ground as “gatekeepers” that hold the key that unlocks passage into the territories to which they are committed. However, these organizations represent a complex set of relationships and practices - often as bridges to communities – but also providing a particular lens into the places and the people with whom they work. Questions of an organization’s legitimacy or illegitimacy and with whom, begin to expose a network of relationships that have deep political import, especially in “post” conflict contexts where those networks have been deeply severed along with trust between individuals, communities and the state.

These organizations are more than just gatekeepers who decide who can enter a space, a political act in and of itself, or intermediaries that speak on behalf of communities or play whisper down the lane between the state and communities. Likewise, research often locates the work of peacebuilding organizations within the formal practice of mediating conflicts or settlements between conflicting parties. However, beyond these descriptions, many peacebuilding organizations mediate dynamic, multidirectional flows of material and discursive resources circulating locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Understanding social and political contexts and, more specifically, conflicts and the complex terrains that are navigated in the aftermath of violence, could be described as mediated processes of understanding. The terminology of “lenses” is often used to characterize the filters through which we observe and make sense of the world around us.

But what is most important is how these lenses provide an understanding of the dynamics of how meaning is mediated in complex and, often, dangerous political environments.

Peacebuilding and transitional justice are processes and discourses that “interpellate,” or “hail” subjects into state processes that constitute victims, perpetrators, as well as civil society, NGOs, community based organizations, government administration, and politicians (Althusser, 2001). On the state level, in a case like Colombia, this might translate in to the creation of laws or participation in peace negotiations; processes that are unlikely to “trickle down” naturally to the most affected communities. Often peacebuilding, human rights, community based or non-governmental organizations emerge as translators or mediators between the state and local communities as they attempt to bridge an otherwise stark chasm that leaves processes impotent. These mediators then become integral to how laws and other transitional justice mechanism are framed and communicated to local communities.

Unfortunately, especially in rural communities, there is a lack of access to information about what their rights are and how they can engage in the processes that are being articulated by the state. In some cases peacebuilding or even state-based organizations initially serve as messengers, providing a panorama of what is possible to communities through which they can determine their courses of action. However, due to limited human capacity and material resources in the face of high demand, such interventions can be unsustainable or information is limited.

Not only are the spaces mediated by the individuals or organizations that are telling the story, but the frames that people use are also limited by norms and practices

that constitute how we see the world. It is critical to understanding the way that these spaces are mediated and the frames that are used to interpret meaning in order to understand the mechanisms of power (Butler, Frames, p. 2) operant in formulating categories, relationships, and dynamics. Organizations such as Sembrandopaz play an important part in these processes as they mediate particular narratives of transitional justice and peacebuilding and provide particular understandings about the roles of the church, state, community, and individual in peacebuilding. Learning about the organization, the people, mission, vision, and their orientation toward processes in the region provides a critical lens for understanding post-conflict dynamics in Montes de Maria, Colombia.

### **My story of Sembrandopaz**

Montes de Maria is home to historically marginalized populations, including indigenous and afro-descendent people, disproportionately impacted by the violence in the past more than sixty years of conflict. As a result, community voices in this region are often neglected by the state and excluded from peace processes. Sembrandopaz grows out of this reality with the intention of supporting more inclusive grassroots processes that build peace from the ground up.

Their mission statement reads, “We are a community that respects human dignity and engages in creative transformation to become a restorative community space. We engage communities through the values of participatory education, nonviolent coexistence, spirituality, solidarity, dialogue, democracy and respect for the environment.

We strive to generate ‘wealth’ in a broad sense, through holistic human development that allows individuals to contribute to a more just and harmonious society.” In their spoken mission, employees consistently reminded me that Montes de Maria is a relational space; relationships of trust are extremely important and, therefore, building and maintaining relationships is foundational to their mission.

The work that elaborates this mission was conceptualized by the founder and director, Ricardo Esquívia, and is inflected by his roots in the Mennonite Church. In order to fully understand the approaches and perspectives of the organization, it is critical speak to those foundational influences. After ten years working for and growing the Mennonite peacebuilding organization JUSTAPAZ in Bogota, Ricardo, the son of an afro-Colombian father, moved back to the Montes de Maria because of his calling to work directly with his own people whom had largely been neglected in the face of armed conflict. Ricardo brought his vision to the organization *Sembrando Semillas de Paz* (Sowing Seeds of Peace) shortened to *Sembrandopaz* in 2005, leaving behind the funders and institutional support of JUSTAPAZ in Bogota to embark on the creation of his vision of a community organization supporting local communities in their efforts toward peacebuilding. It is impossible to know *Sembrandopaz* without knowing Ricardo and vice versa.

Ricardo is a storyteller and a visionary who believes that we are only limited by our imaginations. I observed that when he inquires about people’s current pursuits, he envisions aloud where that will lead them in future years—to be a prominent lawyer, a heralded peace activist, a famous professor, or a titled landowner. For many community



members, leaders, and visitors his words are aspirational and inspirational. His leadership spans far beyond the reach of his organization as he is networked regionally, nationally, and internationally. Orphaned at a young age by a father who was extricated from his community because of leprosy, Ricardo was raised at a Mennonite school for children with similar backgrounds. This connection to the Mennonite Church served as a foundation for his life's work and provided him access to international networks that supported, not only his vision, but sheltered him when he was exiled because of the danger it put him in.

Ricardo's metaphors and stories while often inspiring should not be confused with sugarcoating and glossing over incredibly difficult and complex realities. Ricardo, like many involved with peacebuilding and human rights work in Colombia, has received repeated threats on his life and has a case against him under the accusation of being a guerrilla. The case against Ricardo spans almost forty years with over 400 pages of documentation. He refuses to accept the 24/7 protections of armored vehicles and armed bodyguards being offered by the state, repeatedly reiterating that he is a pacifist who practices non-violence and will not compromise those values in service to a dominant narrative about security he does not believe in. In his words "guns do not protect people."

While as an organization, Sembrandopaz does not officially claim affiliation with a church or doctrine, prayers are often central to their activities and events. Likewise, Ricardo's roots in the Mennonite Church are central to many of their operations. Ricardo has expressed the tensions that exist between his faith affiliation and political work,

sharing that people in the church community claim he is overly political and not religious enough while those involved in his political work claim he is overly religious and not political enough. Ricardo acknowledges that straddling these competing social and political locations presents its challenges. However, over time, I realized that broadened the scope of participation of people from various faith traditions and political affiliations in the work of Sembrandopaz could be attributed to his ability to navigate those very tensions.

In political terms, I observed as the organization supported the development and implementation of peaceful marches for communities to demand their rights from the government, provided legal advocacy for people they believe to be wrongfully imprisoned, assisted with written communications between communities and government officials, and translated new legal reforms so that communities could make decisions as to how they wanted to exercise their rights.

According to Ricardo, this work grows out of conceptions of justice that are rooted in the Mennonite tradition. Likewise their work is framed by the approach of accompaniment<sup>7</sup>, which, for them, grows out of the Anabaptist/Mennonite/Christian

---

<sup>7</sup> This term is used in more formal terms as the methodology used by organizations such as Peace Brigades International and Fellowship of Reconciliation. According to their theory of accompaniment, it entails international presence in local communities to protect citizens who might be under threat of violence because of their work as human rights defenders. It is intended to provide moral support for communities to continue their work, build advocacy networks for justice nationally and internationally, and to raise global awareness of human rights transgressions. <http://www.peacebrigades.org/about-pbi/what-we-do/protective-accompaniment/>

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel describes the theology of the methodology as a direct derivation from the bible that comes out of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus gives hope to two weary travelers who had given up on the possibility that Israel could be redeemed, “preaching a word of hope, sharing the basics of life and departing at the right moment to carry on the work elsewhere.” <https://www.eappi.org/en/our-model>

tradition. Accompaniment is not only an approach in technical terms but represents an ethos and ethics for peacebuilding practice that positions the communities they work with as agents, and Sembrandopaz as a supporter of those community's non-violent processes. Ricardo believes in the inevitability of the state but I witnessed how he and the staff at Sembrandopaz mediated the relationship between the state and communities through accompaniment processes in order that communities receive the most benefit possible from the state. The organization maintains a holistic view of what it means to recover in the aftermath of violence which moves away from binary thinking of peace or justice, local or state, and calls for attention to all of the moving parts, which entails, for example, engaging in reparations processes with the state, while attending to community-based projects and activities such as soccer tournaments or capacity building trainings, each of which is incomplete or partial but woven together begin to make a whole.

In addition to the core staff, which consists of nine employees, an integral part of their "equipo" or team also incorporates the participation of three long-term volunteers that are placed with Sembrandopaz for a two-year period as part of the Seed program of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). These volunteers, called "seeders," who come from around the world - Colombia, US, Canada, Zimbabwe etc. live in the forcefully displaced communities where Sembrandopaz focuses their work.

Like many long-term volunteers these individuals have a range of experiences coming into the work and contribute to the politics of the organization and its work as bridges and mediators of peace. The dynamics between "seeders," the communities, the

---

rest of the organization, outside researchers (such as myself), and the state, is complex as are their experiences living in the communities as representatives of Sembrandopaz. It is not uncommon for volunteers through the Seed program to continue working with Sembrandopaz after their two years of service have completed.<sup>8</sup>

The organization holds full team meetings every fifteen days. The caretakers of the Sembrandopaz farm join the meeting and the seeders travel from their remote locations by bus and/or motorcycle taxi the night before the meeting because of the length of their journeys. Also in attendance are the couple who maintain the Sembrandopaz house, any volunteers or researchers, the four full-time staff members, Ricardo's wife, Lillian, and a part-time administrative coordinator. These meetings are a chance for the team to keep abreast of the work of the organization, activities in the communities, report any security concerns, and plan for new events. The team meetings open with a prayer given by Ricardo, or a moment of silence, a method borrowed from the Quaker meeting tradition. Subsequently, individuals are asked to speak about their lives and well being as part of a community-building effort amongst the staff. In order to structure the meetings, a process they have been honing over the years, they divide themselves into six teams or working groups: Political, Productive, Farm, Chócoro, Administration/Finances, and International Relations.

The Political team mainly operates in the four forcefully displaced communities assisting with capacity building trainings, reconciliation efforts, and reparations processes

---

<sup>8</sup> Two former seeders have remained with Sembrandopaz for 3 and 4 years subsequent to their Seed experience, one as a full-time employee of the organization and one through funding from MCC. This year a third seeder will stay on with Sembrandopaz for her 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

with the state. The Productive team focuses on economic development in the communities implementing small loan programs to stimulate the local community economy. This happens, for example, by loaning money to women to buy chickens and having them pay back the cost as they profit from selling their eggs. The Sembrandopaz farm is a sustainable farm used as a model for education and to influence some of the destructive patterns that farmers and growers have been using in the past decades, for example, using pesticides, burning trees, or over grazing cattle. The Chócoro is an outdoor meeting space in the back of the Sembrandopaz office used for various events, political meetings, cultural gatherings, workshops, and films. The Financial/Administration team manages the accounting, and the International Relations team manages grant applications, applications for peacebuilding prizes that help fund the organization and organizes volunteers, academics, and international delegations.

For the comparatively minimal amount of funding that this small organization receives, they are extremely active and productive. The lines between work and personal life are blurred making it such that people are often working long hours. If at 5pm on a Friday, someone shows up to their office, they are attended to. Relationships come first, which is exemplified in their commitment to the communities where they work and the extended networks of people that they work with and support. The best way to learn about the work of Sembrandopaz is by understanding how it sees itself.

## **How I see Sembrandopaz seeing itself**

The organizational culture of Sembrandopaz is one that frames its employees and those related to the organization as “family.” In December 2014, there was a meeting in their outdoor space to plan for the re-election of the advisory board of the organization. As with all gatherings and meetings in Sembrandopaz, the initiation involved a prayer and, subsequently, each person in attendance introducing him/herself to all who were present. It was heartwarming to hear employees, spouses of employees, advisory board members, community members, and volunteers, claim their familial relationship to the organization. In almost every conversation with people tied to Sembrandopaz there is an acknowledgment that something special happens when people come together around their mission.

The converted two-story house that is home to Sembrandopaz also reflects their sense of community as an organization and their community-building more broadly. In addition to the three offices on the upper level, a married couple lives on the first floor of the premises full-time and maintains two spare rooms for those who need a place to spend a night in transit, for a weekend conference, or sometimes longer. Walking toward the back of the building, the often bustling kitchen leads to the outdoor space, the Chócoro, used for formal meetings, films, art workshops, cultural exchanges, informal gatherings, meals and selling locally produced soaps and crafts; living the local metaphor of the Chócoro as a pot for all who come to throw in their gifts and talents and enrich the stew with diversity. I, personally, interacted with hundreds of people from all over the world, the country and the region, through the events held in this intimate space.

Entering the Chócoro one cannot help but feel welcomed and enlivened by the aesthetics of the nurtured space whose thatched roof is adorned with hanging plants and periphery lined with vibrant, locally indigenous flowers. While participating in events, the hum of the treasured ceiling fans accompanies the music of birds and the intermittent pounding of mangoes falling from the hovering tree during mango season. On the sidewall, a portrait of Layla, the young granddaughter of the family that takes care of Sembrandopaz' farm, represents their hope for sustainable peace for future generations.

These details can be critical when sitting through hours of meetings in the sweltering heat, with mosquitos threatening, while discussing the upward hill yet to climb in a still politically tense and violent context. The long hours and constant flow of work and people to attend to can overwhelm the small office; and the philosophy that their organization is a community, not just a place of work, brings with it different sets of challenges in terms of work/life balance and relational boundaries. The employees at Sembrandopaz consider their work a vocation, not a job, which is reflected by the fact that they have some of the lowest salaries for employees in the region and still dedicate incredible amounts of time to their roles and responsibilities.

In a recent speech at the commemoration of Sembrandopaz' 10-year anniversary, Ricardo shared his own account of how he sees the organization which sets the course for most of the work they engage. As is customary for Ricardo, he opened his speech with a story.

*So, here we are, with our hand on the plow and looking forward. Under the tree which has not yet been born, but which has been planted. Permit me to illustrate these words with a small story.*

*Someone said that the shortest distance between a human being and the truth is through a story. And I believe that to be true.*

*It was once said that there was a man, rowing a boat on a river during the dark hours before dawn. And he saw that another boat was coming down the river in his direction in such a way that they would surely crash. And he started yelling, 'hey watch out you are going to hit me, be careful, we're going to crash.' But no one responded from the boat. And so this person got even angrier and used even meaner and harsher words. And when the boat got closer and ran gently into his, he saw that there was no driver and no one at the wheel. Upon seeing that, his spirit calmed and he could avoid having further confrontation. But upon getting closer, he saw that inside the boat there were some bloody, dead bodies. And that produced in him stupor and fear. But then he heard the cry of a small infant maybe just a few months old that was there lying among the dead bodies. And that gave him a sense of compassion and tenderness.*

This story reveals the emotionality that is engendered through working in a violent context over the course of a lifetime and the ten-year life of Sembrandopaz. That connection to emotion is palpable as employees, community members and victim's advocates share their struggles in the meetings and workshops hosted and facilitated by Sembrandopaz. In any given moment, there is laughter, tears, desperation, and hope, and Ricardo continues to say that "each person has his/her own story, their own way of burying their dead, of healing their wounds and consoling the wounded, rebuilding their territory, to recover their seeds, and to invent and reinvent themselves."

Following this belief, the work of Sembrandopaz caters to the particularities of the situations that individuals, organizations, and communities struggle to overcome. There is no universal strategy employed by the organization beyond that commitment. Ricardo continues, "Every community is like a seed that has within it secrets, its potential." While this presents challenges as it increases need for time and human capacity to pay attention to the details and remain responsive even when it might feel overwhelming, he shares that as an organization they often learn more than they achieve



and they continue to learn from the mistakes they have made, making them stronger.

Ricardo's vision is that as an organization they are the builders of bridges of peace, predicated on creating spaces of trust building that allow for constructive dialogue between different kinds of people. And while there is a strong commitment to the image of God, they left organizational religion in order to work with any population regardless of their political affiliation, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion. Such dialogues are critical on the ground as national peace efforts advance so that if/when the peace accords are signed they are prepared in the local communities to implement, what will prove to be complex provisions.

In this vein, Ricardo directed part of his speech toward a group of international donors from the Swiss Embassy who were considering funding Sembrandopaz' work.

*We are not an NGO, we are a family; a community that moves from precariousness to sustenance. We are also not a project, we are a process. And we join the processes of the communities with whom we interact in the region...*

*We have to change our mentality and stop thinking about time. In this kind of work you can't think about timelines for projects, you have to think about decades, generations. And that's why we invite the organizations that are here, present today, not to think about this as a project for one or two years. And that in one or two years we have this impact that we can document, because this, we are talking about generational work, work that involves education, there is a lot of process in that.*

This directness toward the donors was not uncommon for Ricardo who was often unrelenting in regards to making sure things were done in a way that aligned with his and the organization's outlook, which, as I said, is often conflated. He courted the donors and made it clear to them that the organization could benefit greatly from having a secure income stream to execute their activities in the communities and beyond, but that it could not be at the expense reporting outcomes and statistics in the conventional form required

by peacebuilding donors around the world.

An image and metaphor that Ricardo repeatedly calls on and continually develops to represent the work of Sembrandopaz is that of a tropical bird. Continuing from the words of his speech:

*...And we can see this as a very small and delicate and brightly colored tropical bird. A bird whose plumage is so bright and varied that contains within it all the different political visions that indicate the search that we're on. This bird, in order to fly, has two wings of equal size and they should work in harmony. These represent two realities that one must take into account and to nurture, the political on one hand, and the economic on the other. And this bird does not remain in the air. To rest from its flight, it needs its two feet. These two feet must be equally strong to support its weight and to move and to allow it to land. On one hand we see one of these feet as the ethical or the spiritual. We cannot forget that in this work. The ethics and spirituality are an important part of this work. And the other foot represents the aesthetics and the arts. To be poor does not mean that you have to be dirty. To be poor doesn't mean that you can't have beauty. As we've said, beauty is one of the things that can help save us from this situation.*

It was moving to hear Ricardo speak these words in the context of the commemoration of Sembrandopaz' ten years as an organization, as I, too, feel like part of the larger processes that the organization is engaged- in being builders of bridges of peace, trust-building, and accompanying political, social, and cultural processes in the aftermath of violence. This sentiment rang loudly for me as I engaged in humorous chatter following the speech with a couple of past seeders who were teasing that the tropical bird that Ricardo refers to should have an awkward third leg to represent some of the less-supported ideas that have emerged during their time working there. They reminisced with nostalgia and a hint of exasperation about a room full of cleaning supplies that they were somehow going to use to contribute to peacebuilding. However, behind the all-too-common frustration of working in a small organization, with few

resources, on extremely sensitive topics with victims of violence, with a complex visionary leader with whom the staff did not always agree, the vision resonates and carries the organization forward with a deep commitment to the work and more importantly the relationships they have fostered as a result.

While during his speech Ricardo hesitated to speak in terms of achievement, he and the members of the organization do recognize their accomplishment over the years of building trusting relationships in the region, in the affected communities, and in their broader networks. The organization's commitment to processes and not projects moves away from the often short-term scope and time frame of many NGOs and international organizations that relegate peacebuilding to projects requiring specific outcomes measured within short time frames. This focus on process, which is particularized, depending on a community's experience, is significant in demonstrating their commitment to individuals in their various contexts. Because of this foundation of trust, the work of Sembrandopaz provides a pathway into the landscape of violence in the Montes de Maria region that led to the victimization of thousands through forced displacement, occupation, and massacres as well as the efforts to repair in the aftermath.

They use the term accompaniment to describe their processes of engagement in the communities, which is critical to their view of themselves as builders of bridges for peace who do not replace, speak for, or guide the community processes. It is in the physical and ideological space of accompaniment that Sembrandopaz begins to take on an important role of facilitating conversations and actions between the communities they accompany and transitional justice and peacebuilding processes.

## Accompaniment in the communities

Sembrandopaz strategically elects to concentrate their focus on the accompaniment of four communities in the Montes de Maria because of their limited resources and the amount of diversity that exists among victims in the region. At times they feel that even four communities is too much to invest in because each one is so nuanced in their needs, desires, capacities, and experiences of violence, that supporting even just one could be their entire mission. In the province of Bolivar, they accompany the Alta Montaña (High Mountain) region and Mampujan, Maria la Baja and in the province of Sucre they accompany Pichilin, Morroa and Libertad, San Onofre. Learning the histories of violence in these communities through my association with Sembrandopaz highlighted the complexities of working in particular contexts to repair in its aftermath.

They accomplish most of their accompaniment through the presence of staff as well as the seeders. A less but growing aspect to their accompaniment processes involves continued presence of international organizations, researchers, volunteers and delegations that contribute to the scope of Sembrandopaz' work. The advantage of having international connections and participation, according to Ricardo is that it is a form of protection against violence. Sembrandopaz believes that the presence of international researchers can raise the profile of the communities they work in and see that their work can be used as a way to share knowledge about peace processes and to highlight the successes and challenges. The relationships are seen from a perspective of solidarity and

mutual support. “Doing community visits” as they say is an incredibly powerful experience for those who are new to the region or to rural life at all.<sup>9</sup>

Sembrandopaz dedicates their energy to ensuring that communities receive the attention that they need in order to participate effectively their political processes. There is an organic-ness to the emergent work that comes out of accompanying communities that blueprints or fixed models cannot predict or account for. Rather than carrying their prescriptions for working in the communities, they created structures and operated with frameworks that are responsive and flexible to the interests and experience of the community.

The staff at Sembrandopaz often takes turns participating in community activities and processes to ensure the people in the communities feel supported, but also because travel to the communities is often arduous. There is a great sense of responsibility to this end. Seeders played an important role in accompaniment processes because of their continued presence living in the communities over the course of two years. Through the coordinated efforts, the team has helped communities develop mechanisms for leadership and capacity building with an attention to gender equality, provided loans for productive projects, invited psychologists to work with victims, engaged in beautification efforts, spearheaded logistics for peaceful marches, and translated legal documents to list a few of their major contributions.

Often this work is done in coordination with elected community leaders. In

---

<sup>9</sup> Ironically, for Sembrandopaz, it introduces a new politics around which communities host visitors. There are certain communities that have “had the opportunity” to receive many delegations, while others have not had any opportunity because of their isolated geographic location with no paved roads.

keeping with the privileging of hierarchy in the country overall, Sembrandopaz encouraged the development of leadership structures in each of the communities, comprised of what might be called an “executive leadership,” bolstered by and included in a group of twenty five community-elected representatives, referred to as “los veinte cinco” or “the twenty five.” Part of their mission with the leadership is to do capacity building workshops once or twice a month, promoting self-care, team-building, and providing analytics for understanding conflict analysis, identity, and other peacebuilding theories and practices both broadly and specific to their own contexts. In the event that there are meetings with the state, in relationship to reparations, or otherwise, it is the executive leadership that is tasked with representing the community. They are additionally the main force behind animating the communities to participate, not only in official decision-making processes, but also in community activities and festivals.

The many processes that Sembrandopaz accompanies in the communities supported an understanding of how people spoke about and made meaning about the past violence and their recovery in the aftermath. Whether attending a workshop, washing giant banana leaves for making “pasteles” (a local tamale) for the upcoming holiday, or preparing talking points for a reparations meeting with the state, Sembrandopaz paved the pathway for my presence in these intimate spaces where narratives emerged; where people spoke of their fears, dreams, and ideas, how daily life was impacted by their displacement, or what life used to be like prior to the violence.

After my first few weeks of research, community members, particularly in Pichilin and Mampujan, invited me to sleep in their homes and participate in their daily

lives. I came to know them beyond the activities generated through their “work” with Sembrandopaz and the state, as mothers, fathers, teachers, activists, farmers, siblings, thinkers, and neighbors. While I did not have this level of contact in each of the four communities that Sembrandopaz accompanies, I participated in pivotal events and meetings in each of the communities and observed many of the dynamics between the communities, Sembrandopaz and various state entities. I witnessed as they told their histories to new groups of people and expressed their joys and frustrations. Each community has a unique history of violence and has received varied attention from the state, each of which merits an introduction that provides contextualization for the diversity of experiences of communities in the region and the complexities of attending to that uniqueness.

### Mampujan

When I first visited the community of Mampujan in March of 2013, I was explained to have the bus drop me off at “la curva,” the curve-- it would be obvious to me, right next to a gas station and a small bodega selling local treats and beverages. Luckily, my luggage was minimal because by the time I realized I had passed “la curva” the driver left me off the bus with little idea how to find the community. He pointed over his head, indicating that I had to go backward. In the beating hot sun, on the roadside with my small rolling suitcase, I wandered toward a group of women selling mangos and avocados out of baskets on their heads. Moments after greeting them and telling them my destination, they flagged down a young man on a motorbike and told me that he

would take me to Mampujan. I skeptically mounted the motorbike as he placed my luggage across his lap and the handlebars. Across the road from the community was an auto repair operation where large trucks idled. The small dip in the side of the road to enter the community was slippery from the rain and the young man easily traversed it. The seeder living in Mampujan was at the entrance to greet me, to my relief, and she escorted me on the muddy road as we circumnavigated mounds of dirt and construction debris that was characteristic in the community at that time. According to the seeder, they had just started to receive their reparations from the state and many were investing in building new homes.

That afternoon, the seeder shared the story of Mampujan with me, one that I would hear many times over the course of my research and will be elaborated at length later in chapter four. Mampujan is an afro-Colombian, peasant farmer community situated in the department of Bolivar in the municipality of Maria la Baja. The community, now referred to as New Mampujan, is located a stone's throw from the main road, approximately an hour and fifteen minutes from the major port city of Cartagena. This is where the community has resided since 2000 after being forcefully and violently displaced from their original lands by paramilitary forces on March 10<sup>th</sup> of that year. According to most in the community of Mampujan, this was their miracle "el milagro," that while they were forcefully displaced 6 kilometers away from their lush land that had been decimated, no one from their community was actually killed.

Mampujan has struggled over the past fifteen years to rebuild their community using a variety of strategies. The years following the initial displacement were marked



by incredible hardship and ingenuity on the part of the community. With approximately 1500 individuals in need of food and shelter, the town of Maria where they displaced to, received them with varying degrees of welcome. At the core of their process was the resolve to stick together as a community and not to flee to relatives in other parts of the country as much as possible. They believed it would be in their cohesion and solidarity as a community that they would be able to reassemble their lives. They eventually received a gift of land from an Italian priest, where they resettled and resided since 2002.

Sembrandopaz' initial work in the region started with the ASVIDAS (Asociaciones para la Vida Digna y Solidaria- Associations for Dignified Life in Solidarity with Others), in which community networks organized through the evangelical churches throughout the Montes de Maria before the paramilitary violence entered. They worked to build infrastructure and do empowerment work in the communities to help them generate community funds through creative projects that would serve to increase their collective financial capital in times of incredible financial need.

After Mampujan's displacement, Graciela, one of the leaders of Mampujan, attended a few of the meetings and eventually approached Ricardo about working with women in the community that felt left out of processes and were looking for ways to "heal" as a group. As a result of that conversation, Ricardo enlisted the help of a Mennonite psychologist who agreed to come and spend time with the women with the intention of having them do a yet-to-be-determined creative project that would encourage healing. This turned into the formation of the women's quilting circle, "Mujeres,

Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz” (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace), a group whose story would be recognized nationally.

As the community of Mampujan progressed in their process with the state and the 2005 peace and justice law, Sembrandopaz increasingly accompanied more of their processes. They advised the leadership and became instrumental in helping to facilitate processes that would be most inclusive and participatory along the way. When it came time to have the “audiencias” or tribunal hearings where the victims of displacement and massacres would be invited to give their testimony, Sembrandopaz was there to support the community and demand that all of the hearings be publically held in community spaces with technical capability to communicate between the communities and the courtroom in Bogota.

These hearings eventually led to historic sentencing in 2012 that heralded Mampujan as the first to receive a judgment in their favor under the 2005 Justice and Peace Law. They were awarded a comprehensive package that held the perpetrators accountable to pay monetary reparations and for the state to provide an accompanied and dignified return to their old lands. Around the time of the sentencing, the 2005 Peace and Justice Law was coming under greater scrutiny and the 2011 Victims law being developed by President Santos was becoming a new reality.

According to the community leaders, due to the passage of time with the state showing no action toward administering the awarded reparations and with the new law on the horizon, many in the community feared that all of the years of hard work they invested into their court process might get watered down by the new law, which promised

less in the way of monetary compensation for victims. Initially, they wanted to take to the streets in the normal violent ways, burning tires, roadblocks, in order to the attention of the government, however, in conversation with Ricardo, they brainstormed other, non-violent ways that they might get the attention of the government. They decided they would coordinate a non-violent march to Cartagena and make demands on government based on Law 23 in the constitution, which stipulates that the average citizen can ask for an explanation from the government about things that are happening and expect an answer within fifteen days.

This march and its success holds an incredible significance, as expressed by community leaders because, due to fear from decades of conflict and the consequences of speaking out in public, it was still uncommon for communities to peacefully march. The seeders from Sembrandopaz coordinated the majority of the logistics, freeing the leaders to rally support from their own and surrounding communities, to inform those communities along the way of their peaceful intentions and to enlist the support of local authorities that might otherwise misunderstand and thwart their efforts. The march resulted in the state sitting down with the leaders to organize a plan for reparations. The magistrate who was extremely supportive of the processes mandated follow-up meetings after one year that included follow-up with the perpetrators and their obligation to repair. These “seguimientos” were also held in Mampujan and supported by Sembrandopaz.

Throughout these processes, as Mampujan garnered more and more attention as a result of their successful sentencing, and as the community began receiving their reparations, the seeder living with them helped to organize community meetings, liaise

with bureaucratic requirements, plan commemorations, and support the completion of a book documenting Mampujan's processes. Throughout, Ricardo and Sembrandopaz continued to council the leaders on how to manage processes with the state and provided funds and logistical support for major events related to their processes within the community and with the state.

Sembrandopaz reiterates that trust is integral to the relationship between Sembrandopaz and Mampujan as they engage in these processes. While the community would like to call on Ricardo's direct assistance more often, the close-knit relationships with other staff members and seeders mediate between the two. Through these processes Mampujan has achieved a great deal of visibility with the state and other local, regional, state, and international entities. However, this has not been the case universally for the organizations that Sembrandopaz accompanies.

### Pichilin

About ninety minutes away from Mampujan is a community that is where Mampujan was in their reparations processes circa four years ago. Pichilin is a small, rural, peasant community situated between the municipalities of Colosó and Morroa. Their experience of the government has been one of total abandonment. They were the first community to experience massacres on the "Route of Death," as it was referred to in the region, on December 4, 1996, when 50 paramilitary in 6 jeeps entered the road leading to their village center. They rounded up the men and women and eventually executed twelve men and boys from the community, dragging them by their feet along

the main road, accused of being alleged guerrillas or guerrilla supporters. That night initiated their first displacement from their lands, people fleeing to the neighboring towns and into the hillside out of fear. Eventually, they returned “unaccompanied<sup>10</sup>” to their lands, but life did not return to normal.

I first visited Pichilin with Ricardo and his wife in March of 2013. Ricardo was initially interested in having me orient my research question around why the community of Mampujan was getting so much attention from the state while the community of Pichilin, whom was the first to experience a massacre in the region, was abandoned. He had let me know that it had been a while since he had actually been to Pichilin and that having me there was a good excuse to call a meeting with them. It was an incredibly complicated experience for me, unsure of what was going to transpire or what my role in the meeting would be.

As we entered the community, I was unsure if the baroness of the land was as a result of neglect or if the thatched-roofed houses separated by wide and long stretches of dirt were normal in the region. We pulled up to the thatched roofed hut shading two pool tables and crates of empty beer bottles from the beating hot sun. We situated ourselves in the three plastic chairs that were in the center of the dirt floor.<sup>11</sup> As members of the community entered, they fixed long pieces of plywood to balance on the crates at either end to sit on and greeted each of us with a handshake and a kiss. Ricardo opened up with

---

<sup>10</sup> An unaccompanied return indicates that the people moved back to their lands without any protections from the state. There are many communities that eventually returned unaccompanied which signifies that it was not a “dignified” return with safety protocols, basic infrastructure, acknowledgement of their victimization, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Plastic chairs were a tremendous commodity for communities. There was often a politics to acquiring chairs for meetings, and ensuring that they were returned to the right owners.

a friendly greeting to the group of roughly thirty community members that joined us that afternoon. He introduced me and informed them that I might be coming back down in a year to do research and that he hoped that they would be willing to invite me into their community and their homes, to learn about them and their processes. He invited comments from the group and asked them to tell me a little bit about themselves.

One woman began to speak, then an older man, and they seemed to be patching together a recounting of the history of violence in their community, explaining how the paramilitary entered and how they were accused of supporting guerrillas and what it was like for them to not be able to say “no” when the guerrillas came to take their beer. Then a woman in a bright yellow dress, clutching onto a young girl who was clearly her daughter, began to describe how the women were rounded up in the health clinic building and told to sit silently as the paramilitary abused and murdered their men. As she was describing this story, tears began to fall from her eyes, and in mid-sentence, Ricardo cut off the conversation. He stated that we were not there to dwell on the past but to focus on the future. He began to explain to them how Mampujan had been awarded reparations and asked them if that was something they were interested in. Were they interested in getting money from the government to help rebuild their community? He spoke continuously for about ten minutes about what it would take to engage in such processes, the commitment of time, energy, and will. He explained that Sembrandopaz could help them through the process but that the work would have to come from them, that they would have to be the leaders and Sembrandopaz would be at their side the whole way. It was then that he solicited their commitment to working toward reparations from the

government.

In the subsequent two years, there were significant developments within the community and with the state that had led to newfound energy among community members. Sembrandopaz placed a seeder in the community, a new experience for everyone involved. Around that time, the community was selected by the Victim's Unit<sup>12</sup> to be a pilot for the collective reparations program as outlined in the 2011 Victim's Law. The community had its executive leadership and "the twenty five" at the helm, with twenty-four hour support from Sembrandopaz' seeder. Over the course of my research, I observed and participated as Sembrandopaz helped the communities prepare for meetings with state entities, assisted them in understanding their rights within the framing of the Victim's law, and aided in holding the state accountable to their promises through letter-writing and through in-person advocacy at meetings in the principal city of Sincelejo.

Through the capacity-building workshops, community members established focus areas for more concerted attention and divided into teams to develop actionable proposals. They celebrated the Fiesta Patronal- the holiday for their patron saint- for the first time since their displacement eighteen years earlier, along with Mother's Day and Father's Day. The women in Pichilin were engaged in "productive" activities with Sembrandopaz' chicken loaning project. These activities invigorated community life that had been mostly stagnant according to descriptions by Sembrandopaz. Community leaders echoed that sentiment as they spoke in terms of firsts in relation to community activities since their displacement and "abandonment" by the state.

---

<sup>12</sup> This is the administrative arm of the government charged with executing the individual and collective reparations as outlined on the 2011 Victim's Law.

In December 2014, Pichilin coordinated a commemorative action for the victims who were killed during the massacre and their families, which began with a somber march from one end of the community to the other on the main road. As is historically the case in Colombia, the names of the deceased were echoed through a megaphone as those of us marching declared “presente, presente, siempre presente,” “here, here, always here,” to show that their loved ones are always with them. The procession led to a tented area where there was a day long program including speeches, symbolic commemorative acts and Sembrandopaz distributed an award for the best garden- a contest they had initiated six months before as a beautification effort in the mostly baron community.

These collaborations with Sembrandopaz are part of a larger effort to help the community create a new story about itself. Because Pichilin is close in proximity to the city of Sincelejo and is moderately accessible compared to the other communities, they receive a lot of international groups that pass through to learn about peace processes in the region. With each visit over this past two years, they have slowly moved into a space where they are able to articulate their history with more clarity and cohesion. As part of this effort, Sembrandopaz has also initiated and supported efforts to socially network the different communities where they work to support each other’s commemorations, festivals, and other activities as possible. This has brought a renewed sense of connectedness to the people in Pichilin.

The pathway to the narratives of this community paved by Sembrandopaz is critical because it provides insight into the narrative dynamics of a community that is



only now beginning to make sense of themselves in new ways in relationship to the state and surrounding communities. While Mampujan allows us to examine processes retrospectively, in Pichilin, they are newly engaging with the state and reparations processes. Because they have not received the same amount of attention, their experience of themselves is unique and relies more on the community itself to create new understandings of the past and look toward the future. This calls for a different approach to interventions and leads to different kinds of conversations in the community. Sembrandopaz sees its work in Pichilin as an opportunity to build on their successes and failures resulting from their work with other communities, especially Mampujan. Their work with Mampujan reverberates throughout the region and has translated into actions in other parts of the region, including a group of communities in the Alta Montaña or High Mountain region.

#### The High Mountain Region: Movement for Integral Reparations

It was March of 2013 that I drove to the Alta Montaña in the emblematic, beaten-up, blue Sembrandopaz mini van with Ricardo, Lillian, Kat, Rosi and Geronimo to the community of Macayepo. The leadership in the region heard of Mampujan's successful march and was requesting Sembrandopaz' council. Jorge Montes, a local farmer who was growing in his leadership capacity in the region at that time, greeted us. He led us to the back of the wooden hut structure to an open dirt area that had plastic chairs set up in a small cluster. Women were cooking over the wood-burning stove for the duration of the two hours that we milled around- until eventually, the other key individuals for the

meeting arrived.

I observed the meeting from close range, trying to make sense of the relationship between our presence and the community's desire to hold a march. They were negotiating time-lines and numbers, food, police presence, mostly logistics. Jorge had expressed that he wanted the march to take place in two months and Ricardo responded by asking him who in the community knew about their plan, how were they going to feed people during their days walking, had they spoken to the police in all of the different municipalities to inform them that they might be walking through with hundreds if not thousands of people? As the group reflected on these questions, Ricardo suggested that maybe they wanted to take more time to plan these details to ensure that the march would be carried out effectively, taking into consideration all of the necessary measures and precautions.

According to the history explained to me by Sembrandopaz and the community leaders in the blue van on the ride to Macayepo, in 2012 the avocado trees in the Alta Montaña became sick with a virus, adding an unanticipated element to their post-conflict lives. Communities suspected foul play by the state when they lost their most important cash crop, the lifeblood of their region, which, over time, magnified the impact that the violence had on their community. The Alta Montaña is a movement comprised of 50 small peasant communities who endured decades of violence at the hands of both legally and illegally armed actors, including forced displacement, massacres, destroyed infrastructure and fractured social fabric. The communities were characterized by their own internal politics of pointing fingers at who was affiliated with which violent groups.

This fomented an element of distrust between communities, a trust that was historically a hallmark of the region and its peasant communities. They eventually moved back into their lands, and in 2012 began their own processes of reconciliation. Emerging from this newfound solidarity, community leaders began to meet in order to respond to the avocado crisis the region was facing. Their complaints to the government fell on deaf ears for over a year before they decided to take action. They decided that they wanted to organize a peaceful march like they had heard Mampujan had done in order to call attention to the government's responsibility for their reparations.

More than a year passed before I would visit the Alta Montaña again, but in that time, Rosi, the young woman living in Sembrandopaz' office/house in El Carmen informed me that three critical events transpired. The march was successfully launched, and, in order to keep the communities from further spreading the message of their plight, state officials arrived on the second day of the march to hold extemporaneous meetings with community leaders. Sembrandopaz is a key supporter of the continued conversations that they have been having with the state in the past two years. Also in that year, Jorge Montes gained popularity in the region and took seriously his role as a community leader by running for city council. He won the election, but immediately following he was accused of being a guerrilla and was arrested by the authorities. They allowed him to attend his inauguration into his position but brought him there in handcuffs. He has been sitting in prison, far from his region, for almost two years without trial. A third critical evolution that happened that year is that Sembrandopaz secured a house in El Carmen de Bolivar, the entry point to the Alta Montaña in order to

serve as their satellite office in support of their peaceful movement.

Procuring this office signals Sembrandopaz' commitment to accompanying the communities in the Alta Montaña in their own peacebuilding processes and processes with the state. It increases the organization's visibility in relationship to the communities, generates broader visibility and recognition of the movement, and provides a centralized location for meetings and gatherings. Because it often takes community members a full day of arduous travel to arrive at meetings, there is also a place for people to sleep should they need. In meetings, community leaders work with Sembrandopaz, the regional Victim's Unit, the office of the Ombudsman, and many organizations that pass through and know about the work being done in the region.<sup>13</sup>

Through this increased engagement, Sembrandopaz also initiated a youth group, recognizing that youth were often left out of important conversations and lacked educational and economic opportunities. A young visiting researcher with Sembrandopaz learned through her interviews with youth that this was especially true for young women, catalyzing a concerted effort by the organization to create more spaces for their voices to be heard.

The work in the Alta Montaña is ongoing, dynamic, and has generated incredible momentum over the years, resulting in legitimate political gains. The movement garnered enough support during the 2015 election cycle to mount candidates for local offices under their own party affiliations. Strides such as these demonstrate the power of

---

<sup>13</sup> I attended a meeting when the leadership was preparing for roundtable conversations with the state regarding their reparations and two different organizational leaders who had heard the group was meeting came to speak with them about their work and the resources they could offer. The Sembrandopaz employee mentioned to me that often outside organization take advantage of Sembrandopaz' convening capacity to interlope on the spaces and put their own agendas across.

grassroots networking and peacebuilding from the base that can be fostered through long-term commitment and flexible approaches that address issues within and across communities and interactions with the state. While the Alta Montaña has gained a tremendous amount of momentum with the support of Sembrandopaz, other communities have not shared the same level of advancement.

### Libertad

Located in the department of Sucre and part of the municipality of San Onofre, Libertad is a community of approximately 6,000 inhabitants, 90% of whom are afro-descendant. June 2014 marked the ten-year anniversary of Libertad's resistance against paramilitary occupation in honor of which they held a commemorative march and ceremony that I attended with members of Sembrandopaz. Hundreds gathered under the scorching late morning sun as candles were passed around and cameramen worked their way to the front of the crowd to film the opening remarks. The speakers unveiled the plaque that stood at the entrance to the bridge as a signal of their ultimate path to resistance that would come after nine years of paramilitary occupation.

Community members shared that the sordid, violent history was difficult to summarize. Many of the stories they told reflecting on the violence centered on ways in which the paramilitary humiliated and sexually assaulted young women, publically shaming them and requiring the virgins to participate in pageants for the paramilitary leaders. Women were fined for arguing and taken to the paramilitary commander known as "El Oso" or "The Bear" to "wash his clothes." But everyone knew he was abusing

them.

As I sat in the house of the seeder living in the community, the leaders in Libertad recounted the fractures created by the paramilitary in their community through economic hardship, unlawful violence, and the creation of distrust that still haunts daily life today. Fear penetrated deeply and still permeates the community. The paramilitary recruited people from within the surrounding communities and declared themselves the law. They taxed the residents on their lands, stole their livestock, and told their children to report any suspicious activity by their parents. Resistance often met with death. During the time of the occupation, over 120 community members were killed and some forty more were “disappeared,” said to have fled to Venezuela or other regions never to return. After being occupied for almost ten years by armed paramilitary forces, who controlled and terrorized daily life, the community fought back.

By 2004, “El Oso” had been captured and many paramilitary had been removed from their posts as part of demobilization processes with the state, however, the occupation in Libertad continued under new leadership. At the time, community members had begun meeting secretly, working to create ways to stop the occupation. They described a skirmish between the new commander and a young boy as the final straw. The boy set himself free after being thrown from his horse, beaten, and tied up over night by the drunken paramilitary leader, who then came looking for him the next morning, rifle in hand. However, the boy’s family and neighbors stood up to the paramilitary leader causing him to flee on a stolen bicycle. The people, outraged, chased after him eventually catching up; they dragged him back, beating him along the way until

they reached the bridge where they threw him over and killed him. When the rest of the paramilitary returned looking for revenge, the community took a stand and confronted them. From then on, they started doing their own patrols at night until the threats eventually minimized.

Shortly after, the community wrote a letter to the chief military outpost in the region explaining the events and requesting assistance as they waited in fear night after night wondering if they would be retaliated against. But the Colombian military, under the leadership of Colonel Colón finally responded to the community's plea for protection and came to force the paramilitary out for good. The community heralds the military commander who led the "liberation" as a savior, without whom, they would not be free from occupation. However, as Ricardo and other members of Sembrandopaz have pointed out publically, the military ignored the community for almost ten years while they were unlawfully occupied and terrorized by the paramilitary group before they eventually intervened. Ricardo articulated this sentiment at a national conference where he was invited to speak about reconciliation in the region. He related to me that he openly contested remarks adulating the actions of Colonel Colón and the Colombian military that failed to protect its community.

For the past seven years, the community of Libertad has been engaged in reparations processes with the state. While some people have received funds sporadically in the form of humanitarian aid, the man considered to be the first victim of paramilitary violence due to the murder of his brother, explained to me that to date, he has not received one peso from the government. In his case, the process has actually cost him

money due to all of the paperwork and bureaucratic red tape involved in getting his official status as displaced, the first step in the process. While the community has a partially approved plan with commitment from the state for the dissemination of certain reparations, the promises have yet to be filled and the community fears that time will run out before they are recompensed. Most of the assistance that the community has received to date has come from donations by USAID and OIM (International Organization for Migration)

For most in the community according to the leaders I spoke with, security is the most critical need for Libertad. The level of distrust that still exists is exacerbated by the fear that paramilitary maintain connections and informants in the community. It was repeatedly stated that everyone knows that paramilitary did not completely demobilize. However, according to the community, the two-person police outpost is not enough to provide the security structures needed to rebuild the fractured trust. In the past two years, seven community members were assassinated without any known reason. For the community leaders, the only way to mitigate this violence is to provide thirty to forty trained police to monitor the community.

The seeder living in Libertad and Sembrandopaz staff work with the community leadership to build capacity and facilitate processes with the state. They have recently developed a theater group for youth in an attempt to use art as a creative mechanism for rebuilding and providing new interactive spaces. The context according to the seeder and staff can be challenging to work in and people feel the legacy of the occupation and the traumas that remain. A group of women from Libertad brought a legal case against “El



Oso” who originally received a reduced sentencing for revealing his part in the violence. He now is sentenced to more than forty years in prison, a ruling fraught with mixed emotions because the women fear retaliation by paramilitary who are still connected to El Oso.

### Reflection

Each community reveals a different set of circumstances in relationship to the violence of the paramilitary. The most significant thread is that they were all victims on the “route of death” by the paramilitary group, the “Heroes de los Montes de Maria.” As diverse as the violence that each community experienced, so too are the approaches needed to address the recovery from the violent past and even present. The intimate accompaniment work that Sembrandopaz carries out in each community is deeply personal and deeply political. Whether accompanying political processes, helping with bureaucratic reports, soliciting meetings with international organizations such as the UN, writing legal documents, providing incentives for beautification, they are committed to a holistic approach to working in the communities and attending to the elements of the metaphorical tropical bird representing the political, economic, ethical/spiritual, aesthetic of recovering from violent conflict.

The violence in these communities is shaped by the broader history of the Colombian conflict, an understanding of which is necessary to fully apprehend the context of their experiences. In order to frame this history, I continue to rely on the narrative pathways provided by Sembrandopaz and the people affiliated with the organization. By providing the history from the perspective of people from the region, I

aim to privilege the voices less heard more broadly and allow their version of history to be shared. The following historical account is told from the perspective of a peasant farmer elder that I interviewed who has been active in historical memory processes with the state to record the history of the conflict from the perspective of his people who are from the Montes de Maria region<sup>14</sup>

### **History of the Broader Conflict- A Regional Perspective**

It seemed fitting to be gathered under the thatched roof on the Sembrandopaz farm to listen to the history of the Colombian conflict from the perspective Chucho Perez, a small, peasant farmer in his 80s who has lived through war, social movements, displacement, and land politics. The family who lives on the Sembrandopaz farm sporadically joined the conversation; the two elementary school-aged children wandered in and out as did their grandfather who manages the farm who is peasant farmer around the same age as Chucho, that was displaced from his community a decade earlier after being shot in the face by paramilitary. It felt historical to witness the telling of the history of conflict amidst two elders who identified so differently with the conflict, one an uneducated peasant who identified as a victim alongside Chucho the self-educated activist who related his commitment to the peasant movement during which time and he watched many if not most of his peers suffer physically and emotionally, meeting their untimely deaths along the way.

---

<sup>14</sup> In places where historical events were mentioned in the interview with no explanation, I have added some description through my own research of the events.

With only a third grade education, Chucho is self-taught and has authored a number of books, one notably through the Centro de Memoria Histórica (the Center for Historical Memory), an entity charged by the state to collect stories from victims of the violence in order to capture the historical memories of the violent conflict. As we sat under the shade of the thatched roof on the Sembrandopaz farm, with animals roaming about and the sweet sounds of nature in the background, Chucho explored the historical terrain of the conflict of Colombia at first focused on the broader experience of the country but framed by the experiences of peasant farmers and the agrarian movements.

Understanding the political history in relationship to the peasant movements in Colombia helps to contextualize the violence experienced in the country since “la Violencia,” (the Violence)<sup>15</sup> and provides the historical backdrop for how peasants, especially in the rural regions faced discrimination and marginalization from political participation and land ownership. The discourses that circulated about peasant farmers as dissidents, communists, and threats to the state has historical roots that date well before the conflict as it is often characterized. As Chucho acknowledges, some of the fears that are felt today in the peace processes stem from occurrences of violence in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Colombia.

“Land is always at the center of the conflict”

The Colombian conflict is an historical conflict, he said, that heightened in 1928 as a result of “the banana massacre” carried out in the Santa Marta region of Colombia

---

<sup>15</sup> The Violencia in the 1950s is the era where most historical accounts of the Colombian conflict begin. However, this historical account situates the onset of conflict with the 1928 Banana Massacres.

against banana laborers striking against the United Fruit Company for better working conditions. Pressured by the United States State Department to protect U.S. interests, the Colombian military sent troops to the town of Cienega where they open-fired on the crowds, killing over a thousand workers in a show of force and exploitation, still characteristic of the region and multinational corporate presence, although to a lesser extent. The union strike had grown to unprecedented levels and was supported by left-wing parties.

The United States and its Colombian allies in the conservative government positioned the workers as communists needing to be clamped down on. In a climate already divided politically, the banana massacres further polarized society and is credited with providing the conditions for the emergence of greater government opposition. Struggles continued to proliferate throughout the country and especially closer to the capital in Tolima and Cundinamarca where coffee production in the region catapulted the market economy making large landowners extremely wealthy. However, this led to increasing disparity and peasants in the rural areas who worked the lands wanted to receive the financial benefits of their labor. In the early 1930s they created peasant leagues in order to demand their own plots of land for growing coffee. (Zamosc, 2006) According to Chucho's account, these peasant leagues were positioned as communist and shortly after their formation, all of their leaders were murdered.

During this time the conservative party had predominated politically for over 45 years. However, in the early 1930s, after the banana massacre Olaya Herrera took office representing the liberal party and created legislation that gave the unions legitimacy and

permitted them to organize. Also, the government attended to issues in the countryside by creating an agrarian institution, raising the flag of agrarian reform that would redistribute land to the peasants. Shortly following, Alfonso Lopez took office for the liberal party creating the famous “Ley de Tierras” or land law of 1936. Rather than providing a mechanism for the redistribution of lands, this law aimed to properly document land ownership, requiring large land owners, who had taken over the lands of small farmers, to produce legal titles and official documents. This was an attempt at organizing long-held land issues by giving these large landowners or “land occupiers” (Chucho’s words) a ten- year period within which to provide the appropriate documentation. Many landowners resisted and refused to participate and at the end of Lopez’ term, when another liberal party candidate, Eduardo Santos (grandfather to the current president), took office, the conservative party with the support of the Catholic Church campaigned against the peasant reform and, began to regard the peasants and the liberal party as “unruly atheists.”

This created deeper political schisms between the two parties and when Lopez was re-elected in 1942 he was arrested in the province of Pasto. His release was predicated on reaching a political agreement for reforming the land law, which they accomplished with the passing of Law 100. This political compromise fomented increased tensions within the liberal party and led to internal fractionalization, dividing the party into two factions- one under Gabriel Turbay on the more conservative end, and the other under Jorge Eliezer Gaitan, the populist leader who was known for his social democratic leanings. This bifurcation of the liberal party led to the election of the

conservative party in 1946 with Mariano Ospina Perez. However, Gaitan who was one of the only political leaders who confronted the oligarchy, representing the working poor and peasant populations, maintained clear popularity in the liberal party, with a overwhelming likelihood of winning the elections in 1950.

That future would be thwarted by Gaitan's murder on the afternoon April 9, 1948 in Bogota, apparently by an individually motivated assailant who was immediately beaten to death by bystander mobs. The devastating and violent murder catalyzed massive emotional outcry from Gaitan's supporters, most notably in Bogota, leading to a night of riots, looting, and burning buildings in what Chucho refers to as an act of "civil insubordination." As a result of the "Bogotazo" as it is commonly referred, the state shut down the parliament and declared a state of siege in the country and it was at this time when, according to Chucho, the paramilitarism that we hear about today was created and unleashed.<sup>16</sup>

The "Bogotazo" is credited with unleashing long-held and simmering tensions between the liberals and conservatives giving way to the massive wave of violence known as "La Violencia." For the next five years, beginning under Perez's presidency, violence swept the country, leading to the murder of 350,000 peasants, according to Chucho.<sup>17</sup> The massive murders and massacres of peasants were not carried out by the police or the army but by a political army, a civilian police force that was called the "popol."

---

<sup>16</sup> Some claim that the paramilitary actually formed initially during the time of the banana massacres.

<sup>17</sup> I have heard numbers quoted closer to 200,000-250,000 deaths.

Members of the unofficial socialist party that had been elected to office under the umbrella of the liberal party before “the Violence” were abandoned by their party with the claim that the radical liberals, communists and socialists were not representative of the liberal political current. So, when the massacres by these civilian police forces proliferated, many left-wing representatives from city councils, mayor offices, senate, and congress went into hiding, fearing their lives. Some from the liberal party at this time formed their own auto defense groups, which became an armed movement that created independent republics within Colombia where national and municipal government influence was extremely weak.

Chucho noted that the level of violence and chaos between the conservatives and liberals increased to such alarming levels that General Rojas executed a coup de tat overthrowing Perez from the presidency and taking it over himself. He started dialogues with the guerilla and succeeded in demobilizing them. Immediately following that demobilization, however, the former guerrillas were selectively assassinated by the thousands, leaving an indelible scar of distrust for peace negotiations moving forward, including those currently taking place in Havana, Cuba.

However, the elections for that time took place before the assassinations and the general was credited for the demobilization efforts and was elected into office, through what Chucho refers to as “questionable means.” This presented the traditional liberal party and conservative parties with a common enemy. Those moderate liberal party members who fled into exile out of fear during the time of the junta, began discussions

with the conservative parties to put forth a public referendum in 1957 to create what became known as the National Front.

In this power-sharing agreement each party would be guaranteed the presidency and cabinet offices alternating every four years regardless of the electoral process. According to Chucho, this is when corruption really began in Colombia because, “who is going to be a watchdog in a system like this?” This guarantee of a two party system of dominance ensured that those party members representing the radical, left wing remained shut out from political spaces and faced continued persecution. It was out of this political exclusion, subordination, and oppression that the largest Colombian guerrilla group FARC- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia formed.

Although “the Violencia” eventually came to an end, the reverberations were felt for years after. Agricultural and land issues continued to haunt the country even as profits from larger scale industrialization projects, mostly from coffee production, drew attention to the possible recovery from the violent period. However, there was conflicting opinion regarding the stability that this shift to larger-scale, mechanized agriculture brought to Colombia. For some, it was a signal to accelerate development projects while for others it was clear that peasant farmers were being left out of the equation, thus increasing social and political instability (Zamosc, 2006, p. 21).

Facing the fear of the threat of communism in the wake of the Cuban revolution, politically, the National Front began to institute reformist agrarian policies. Not only were they attempting to placate the peasants in the aftermath of the Violencia, but they also believed that a stronger peasantry would strengthen internal markets and curb rural



to urban migration that was overwhelming the cities. These policies also resulted from external pressure from the United States who collaborated in the formation of the Alliance for Progress that was pushing for agrarian reforms in all of Latin America (with the exclusion of Cuba) in order to consolidate the power of the dominant classes against communism and revolutionary ideals.

This pressure led to the drafting of the Social Law for Agrarian Reform, Law 135 in 1961 by then liberal President Alberto Lleras, which was pushed through congress by Senator Carlos Lleras Restrepo. However, the next conservative president, Valencia, did not implement this law when he subsequently took office. It was not until 1966 that Carlos Lleras Restrepo became president and felt that peasants had to be participants in the law and that it needed to go into effect. He bypassed parliament and created a commission to plan the distribution of land to the peasants, and by presidential decree created the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC- Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos). Through this legislation, they formed a group of promoters responsible for organizing the peasants. The promoters implemented capacity trainings with peasants in the smaller hamlets as well as at the departmental and provincial levels.

The organizational infrastructure for the organization formed from 1968-1970. However, because of the power-sharing agreement, which slated a conservative candidate forthcoming, all of the work to bring ANUC into being was suspended. Big landowners who were not in favor of agrarian reform supported the new president, Pastrana. As a result, the administration passed the Chicoral Accords that would concentrate on supporting and benefiting the traditional political parties, the government and large

landowners. According to Chucho, this exemplifies Colombia's penchant for party politics as opposed to state politics, maintaining instability and lacking continuity between presidents.

The peasants felt the negativity of this lack of continuity and because the president suspended the work of the ANUC and agrarian reform, they began to rise up and organize land takeovers. Chucho describes this:

*“The peasants were organizing and if we saw this farm for example that belonged to a wealthy person, we would organize the landless families around that farm, we would do these land takeovers and occupy the land and they would send in the police, the army, they would detain us, arrest us, beat us up, but we would continue to do it. And while we were detained in jail our women and children would come and occupy the farm. So we were in jail and the women and children would be at the farm. So that forced the government into an emergency plan and to negotiate. In the case of Sucre in particular, through these land takeovers and forced negotiations, they got 118,000 hectares for 14,000 landless families.*

*There were weeks in Sincelejo where there were 2-3,000 peasants detained and they had to put them into these big rodeo stadiums because the jails couldn't hold them. And as I said, as they would take us to be detained, our women and children would go to reoccupy the farms. Sometimes all of the women would organize and they would take over the governor's office and the land reform office. And so it was the women that pressured for our release and negotiated for the land negotiations. It's such a rich history.”*

Politically at this time, in 1974, the National Front agreement expired, calling for official national elections, bringing the liberal party's Alfonso Lopez Mikelson to office. However, the military pressured for a security statute prohibiting unions, trade organizations, and farmer's organizations. And when Cesar Turbay got elected, he unleashed a period of violence against all of these people as an effort to crush unions and farmers organizations. Around this time, the liberal party split again and the conservatives took power with Betisario Betancort who believed that not only could you

negotiate with peasants but that you could negotiate with FARC, the communist party, and others in hiding. Under Betancort, FARC demobilized and formed a political party known as the Patriotic Union (UP- Unión Patriótica) that immediately participated in electoral politics electing seventeen people to congress, twenty-seven mayors, and about 200 city council people. Chucho related, “That is one of the ghosts that is hovering around in the current agreements. All of the political leaders of the Patriotic Union were assassinated. And the only people who weren’t murdered were people who went into exile or who took up guns again and went back to the jungle. And that’s when things get worse again.” This is the second time in history that the guerrillas demobilize only to face selective assassinations. Chucho articulates how this fear carries over into the peace agreements today.

*And the fear of the government and the fear of parties is that the FARC will demobilize, create a political party, like the UP and again win seats in congress, win city councils, win mayoral elections and make the changes that people are really desperate for in terms of social change. And we’ve got proof of that now. And it’s already happening. The government and the guerrilla created a commission about land mines because there are so many land mines and they negotiated in Havana that there would be a joint commission where working together, the Colombian military and the FARC would pick out these territories they would then de-mine. Two of these ex-guerrillas that have come back to Colombia to collaborate on that have already been murdered— this week.*

It is at the time of the assassinations of the UP members that guerrilla groups form in the Montes de Maria region. These groups include members from PRT, Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores de Colombia (Workers Revolutionary Party of Colombia) ELP, ELN, Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Arme), CRS, Corriente Renovación Socialista (Socialist Renovation Current), M-19, many of whom demobilized and vacated

the area leaving space for FARC and other factions of ELN to occupy the area between 1986-1990. Paramilitary activity also increased at this time, bringing violence to rural communities and stigmatizing them based on the accusation that anyone who was a peasant was a FARC member. The paramilitaries directed violence against anyone who was affiliated with any peasant movements in the region, such as ANUC, destroying their infrastructure and networks, and worse, killing their members.

Because the violence was so intense, government intervention in the region heightened as well. With the assistance of international aid, mostly through Plan Colombia with the United States, they declared the Montes de Maria region as a zone of “rehabilitation.” The Colombian military confined the region, restricting the entrance of food and other resources essentially killing off those members of FARC who did not flee the region. This seriously affected area communities as well and created intense suffering for the people. The European Union brought social programs to the Montes de Maria region, treating it as a peace laboratory. But the programs focused on welfare approaches and did not organize the people nor seek to empower them.

However, Chucho continues, the Montes de Maria continued to be the fertile grounds for continued peasant organizing. Though the violence and politics succeeded in disrupting the organization of ANUC, they continued to operate well beyond the initial two-years allotted by the government. It gained so much power and momentum that even though the government sought to dismantle it, many committed peasant activists wanted ANUC to be independent and autonomous from the state. As a result the state divided it into two factions in order to sideline such hardliners. This meant that when there were

meetings subsequent to the organization's formation, the government restricted access, refusing to allow those who fought for more autonomy to participate in the meetings.

The meetings, called congresses, were held in the Montes de Maria region, specifically in the town of Sincelejo. Journalists who attended this congress named the Sincelejo faction the hardliners who fought for independence and brought fear to the landowners and the government. The other group, Armenia, named for the location of their congress was considered "pro-government, yes-men, softies, like a yellow union" states Chucho. Eventually, the hardliner faction in Sincelejo was dismantled, however, Farm Alemania still struggles today.

According to Chucho, fifty-three families were part of the Alemania farm collective that was negotiated during the prominence of ANUC. Unfortunately, when the violence took over the region, those families had to flee and only now are starting to return. While the land reform office called INCORA managed to get 118,000 hectares of land to distribute to farmers and the land reform office got another 20,000 hectares from large landowners that had refused to legalize their documents and have titles, the peasants farmers as this time were not given individual land titles. Rather they formed community enterprises and only one title was issued in the name of all of the families as a collective. Unfortunately, because of all the violence and persecution that destroyed the peasant movement and the community enterprises, the people who are there now do not have legal title. Now the current task of the government is to legalize these parcels of land that belongs to these people that they are occupying.

As we sat under the thatched roof eating fresh watermelon from the farm and

listened to Chucho's encyclopedic knowledge of Colombia's history of land conflict, party politics, and the peasant movements, it was difficult not to wonder what his personal experience was in all of it. He told us he received a piece of his own land through these processes where his family of twelve children and their children all live and work. He never gave up on the land rights process and he and his comrades created a new group called the "communal movement" for which he was the coordinator in the Montes de Maria.

*So, I was still in a lot of different processes and this gave me direct relationship to the authorities such as the government and military, so they would see me at these meetings and so they couldn't accuse me of being a guerrilla because they already knew me. Here in Montes de Maria, we've had people from the EU, UN, ambassadors, and I have talked with all of them and that helped us to be respected. **International presence and our relationship with international organizations has been a guarantee for our safety.***

Once again, the concept of international presence and visibility as a form of protection from violence appears. However, now that overt violence in the region has waned, and the government is engaged in peace processes, Chucho has been collaborating with the Center for Historical Memory to consolidate records of this violent history. Chucho reflects:

*Just imagine. As we've been trying to document and do this research, I've been trying to find all of the little pieces of paper. Because we were all being persecuted and all of these little pieces of paper could incriminate us, all of our plans, we put all of the papers together in plastic bags and hid them in the palms that were the roofs of our houses. And we buried ours and, others, unfortunately, out of fear of having the documents used against them, burned them. And that's why I've been given awards; because most people burned their things or have been killed, and I'm the one who has kept the documents, kept that historic memory of peasant struggle. And that's why the Centro de Memoria Histórica came to my house and we made an agreement and I handed over all of these precious documents. A lot of them were old dirty documents; they had to clean them. They did a technical treatment to conserve them and they systematized them and they scanned and digitalized it and gave me a disc of them. I have 3,000 pieces of paper—*

*now on my hard drive. And we continue to recover documents from those times. There was a tremendous history.*

Chucho continued to reflect that even though there were so many people who died and who were detained, it is exciting for him to participate in this historic memory process and remember all of the great achievements that emerged through their risk and determination. Out of that process of investigating and rescuing all of that information, he hopes that it can give life to a reorganization and a resurgence of the peasant movement. In order to rescue all of the information for the book with the Historical Memory Center, they facilitated seventeen workshops in the seven provinces on the Caribbean coast with up to forty different community land leaders and activist at each one. These are the people he hopes are going to continue to build the movement. And again, the women are playing a really protagonist roll in the movements. “It’s not just a problem in the Montes de Maria, it’s an historical problem.”

While Chucho’s historical knowledge runs deeper than the average peasant farmer in the region, his articulation of the history as a member of the region and an advocate for the communities provides important context to the legacy of how people in the region have been viewed over the course of the conflict. This version of the history begins to situate the current reparations processes as part of an historical landscape characterized by deep political divisions that had import for the communities affected by paramilitary violence. In his historical account, Chucho articulates how the peasants were positioned by such words as “unruly atheists,” “communists,” “guerrilla,” by the government and how that positioning has contributed to the violence in the region, to the ongoing complex land issues, and to the marginalization of voices from the political sphere that

still resonates today. The daily struggles that the communities and organizations in the region share are anchored by the historical struggles faced in the region. Connecting to this broader history anchors the communities' experiences of violence as part of something that goes beyond just an individual experience and situates it as part of a larger ecology or system of violence. What transpires in communities today is not disconnected from this history, and the relationships between the communities and the state, according to this account, relates back to almost a century of complex relational dynamics.

Chucho claims that because of this profound history of the Montes de Maria, current President Santos has looked to the region to research, assess, and analyze the affects of the violence and to use it as a pilot for reparations processes. Indeed, eyes have been on Montes de Maria because of the disbanding of FARC in the region and the demobilization of approximately 30,000 paramilitary fighters during the Uribe administration. However, regional diversity punctuates Colombia making an examination of the history of particular regions critical. The violence manifested and still appears in distinct ways depending on which region is under examination. Therefore, in order to understand the post-conflict context in which the communities in the Montes de Maria are situated as they engage with the state in reparations processes, the following section provides the narrative pathway developed through the stories of local activists, academics, victims, and advocates.

### **History of Conflict in the Region**

This history of the Montes de Maria coastal region in Colombia and the conflict



more broadly lives and breathes in the meetings and conversations with community members, activists, NGO representatives, clergy, professors, youth, all of whom gather to create networks of solidarity, engage in dialogue about the devastation of violence and the legacy of that violence, and to imagine the way forward. The following history about the region, emerges from formal and informal conversations about the context and especially emerges from the narratives of three peace activists from the region, a professor of Sociology, a transitional justice scholar and professor, and a victim's advocate.

Because the violence proliferated in the region, it touched the lives of all the inhabitants. One of the poorest regions in the country, Montes de Maria accounts for the highest population of communities of Afro and indigenous descent. These populations are the most impacted historically by the violent massacres and presently by displacement and land loss. As I demonstrated through the descriptions of the communities Sembrandopaz accompanies, violence still occurs in many of their communities. Additionally, there are continued incidences of peace organizations and activists, private businesses and individuals receiving death threats in the name of local politics and conflict alliances. While the presence of violence persists at lower intensity than it did during the height of the conflict in the region, there is an air of insecurity. Distinguishing between so-called ordinary crimes and those directly associated with the broader conflict is difficult. The intensity of the forced displacement that required people to move into new towns and cities where there was insufficient economic opportunity, and local leadership, constantly changed due to corruption charges, fueled the sense of uncertainty

and contributes to the ongoing insecurity born out of decades of violent conflict in the region.

Julio Alfonso Chapo is a professor in the Sociology department at a local university called CECAR where he teaches about the conflict in the region. He marks the history of heightened insecurity in the region with the arrival of two smaller, weaker, factions of the most powerful guerrilla group operating in the country the FARC- Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), units 35 and 37, along with the emergence of paramilitary groups, AUC- Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) who were charged with combating the guerrilla presence in the region. The relationship between these paramilitary groups, local politicians, and the eventual president of the country, Alvaro Uribe further complicated the landscape of violence in the region as communities found themselves in the middle of these illegally armed insurgent groups, on the receiving end of massacres, forced displacement, and intense fear, with no assistance from the national army.

The conflict in Montes de Maria intensified with the increasing presence of illegal auto defense groups. These paramilitary forces, comprised of local peasant farmers, banded in order to protect the interests of large landowners and politicians in the face of ongoing guerrilla activity in the region. As part of this security effort, paramilitary entered into communities where supposed FARC activity had been reported and conducted selective killings. The first of these massacres occurred on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1996 in the community of Pichilin. Seven carloads of illegal paramilitary actors entered

the hilly terrain in the hamlets of the municipality of Colosó and killed twelve community leaders in an act of horror that would repeat and reverberate throughout the Montes de Maria throughout the next decade.

For Chapo, the history of the region can be divided into three major time periods, pre- 1995, 1995-2002, and 2002-2005. Using these demarcations he provides a framework for understanding the history of the region, how that led to violence, and where the region is today. Chapo emphasizes the importance of the agricultural peasant land movements in the Montes de Maria that make the region particularly important and critical in context of the war, considering the historical role of land ownership and agricultural conflict in the conflict. Especially in the 1970s, peasant movements proliferated in the region framing the democratic struggle for farmers to gain legal entitlement to their lands leading to the development of the first agricultural union. In this this struggle, peasant farmers organized across communities in solidarity to engage in land takeovers in order to reclaim land that had been unlawfully extracted from them by larger landowners. The leaders of the movements during those years became mythic figures because of their insistence and political work for agricultural rights.

Guerrilla groups unsuccessfully attempted to gain strongholds in the region beginning in 1948 during “the Violence” when a major political leader in support of the land grabs was assassinated. Attempts in the 1980s by the PRT- Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Worker’s Party), CRS- Corriente Renovación Socialista (Socialist Renewal Current) also failed and were largely ineffective in the wider guerrilla movement, which resulted in their signing peace agreements with the

government in 1991 and 1993.

According to Chapo, the inability of these groups to win the hearts and minds of the peasants and farmers during this time provided the grounds for the peace treaties and would factor in to what unfolded later in the region. It was after these groups failed in the region that FARC first appeared, seeking to recruit and overtake the spaces freed by the exit of the other armed guerrilla groups. At the same time two guerrilla groups out of Bogota, ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Army) and ERP (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, People's Revolutionary Army) also attempted to occupy territory in the region. None of these groups had previous contact to the region nor sources of social capital from peasant farmers to support their presence. However, FARC entered the region militarily, expecting to force farmer support for their group,

Their thinking, in Chapo's view, was that they had to take the war to the entire country before they could be successful and they knew they could benefit from all of the networks and linkages that the local peasant movements had created in the region in the previous two decades. It is this period of FARC presence in the Montes de Maria that characterizes the period from 1995-2002 marking an ascent in the level of violence never before experienced in the region. By avoiding direct contact with Colombian military forces and with use of force, kidnappings, and road blocking tactics, the FARC managed to gain the attention of political elites in the region and to intimidate them. Contrary to their methods in the south where their operations moved from location to location, their presence in the Montes de Maria region was more stationary. Chapo considers one of the main purposes for their presence was a strategy to entice the Colombian army to

relocate some of their troops to the northern region in order to relieve pressure from FARC forces in the South.

The wave of FARC activity during that time imparted incredible economic strain on the region, especially in the farming and livestock-raising sectors. The financial drain resulted from FARC's tactics of burning houses, killing and stealing livestock, and kidnapping wealthy land and livestock owners for ransom. In the period of 1995-2002 increasing numbers of non-violent civil society movements also emerged in response to the violence, independent of the regional elite and those tied to traditional political power. They mobilized independent of guerrilla forces in the region, in attempts to affect politics with non-violent strategies and practices. They achieved this through local electoral politics, with peasant farmers earning mayoral positions in small towns of 5-50,000 inhabitants across the region.<sup>18</sup> The success of these mobilizations, which resulted in the ascension of peasant farmers into seats of power, combined with the FARC actions against wealthy land and livestock owners, worried the political elite.

This worry turned quickly into action that mirrored the experiences in the nearby regions of Cordoba and Uraba where local politicians banded with paramilitary to combat guerrilla activity. Chapo suggested that because the political elite of Sucre, had familial ties to Cordoba, they leveraged their networks to introduce paramilitary forces into the region. These efforts brought together political elite, state military forces, and wealthy landowners who joined together to support the formation of the paramilitary group known as the "Héroes de los Montes de Maria" (Heroes of the Montes de Maria).

---

<sup>18</sup> For example, in Las Palmitos, San Onofre, Chalan, and Ovejas, Corozal

Paramilitary groups such as these, while not officially tied to the state, were known to enjoy military and political backing from the state, especially in the form of turning a cheek to their execution of violence in the region. Other groups operating in the region did not impact in the region with the same magnitude, therefore, efforts were made to incorporate them all under the same umbrella of the Héroes of Montes de Maria in order to be more effective.

In March of 1996 the group made their first official public declaration, that in every sector where there was guerrilla presence, lawyers, teachers, human rights activists and civic leaders would be assassinated. The first of these massacres occurred on December 6, 1996 in the town of Pichilin where twelve peasant farmers were brutally murdered and more than forty families were forcefully displaced from their homes and village. Thus the period from 1995-2002 was marked by FARC presence, civil movements, but also by war between paramilitary and FARC, making the terrain of violence extremely complex, leading to the proliferation of human rights abuses in violation of international law.

It is commonly claimed in the region that the purpose behind the paramilitary activity in the region was to eliminate anyone who might have the capacity to enlist local community support of the guerrilla movement. Because civil society was the target, many in the region do not characterize the operations of the paramilitary as anti-insurgent.<sup>19</sup> During that time, seven directors of the national agricultural association (ANUC) were killed along with the majority of the peasants who had been elected as

---

<sup>19</sup> One statistic quoted that only 16% of the violence committed was at the interface of paramilitary and guerrilla fighters.

mayors and into other municipal positions in the years immediately prior to the eruption of violence. Paramilitary are said to have worked to destroy any form of civil society organization in the region because the rural location of more than half of the communities positioned them as having greater potential for supporting or sympathizing with the guerrilla forces and at the time the state was viewed as incapable of defeating the FARC.

Chapo submits, “we have to ask, in a region that is not particularly jungle and is not particularly mountainous, how was a guerrilla group able to mount such a challenge to the national military and government?” The thought was, if there were no jungles within which to hide, they (the guerrilla) must have been hiding among the civilians. Therefore, control needed to be exercised over the general population. As a result, paramilitary forces used fear and terror and 125 communities ranging in size were forcefully displaced and lands were abandoned, many of which remain so today, ten-twenty years later. The violence reached such high levels that in 2002, the municipality of Colosó (near Pichilin) had the highest homicide rate in the entire country. All told there were seventy-five massacres with approximately 435 victims in the Montes de Maria, not including the thousands that displaced. The region was laden with violence and fear and was marked by FARC and paramilitary strongholds that surrounded communities largely unaffiliated with either group.

One of the most complicating features of the armed paramilitary groups at this time is the knowledge that they were not only supported by but also controlled by the political elite in Sucre. The phenomenon of paramilitary and political collaboration became known in Colombia as “para-politics.” This para-political activity in the region

surged in the period from 2002-2005, although at the national level Colombia experienced a time of relative calm under president Andres Pastrana. His government entered into peace talks with FARC at the time in a process called Cawal and overtures were also made with another active guerrilla group known as the ELN. However, because of the continued increasing strength of paramilitarism around the country, the paramilitary groups also wanted political recognition by the government, which some attribute to the rise in violence during that time and the failure of the peace agreements.

In the Montes de Maria region at the time, the strength of guerrilla activity was on the decline which was furthered upon the election of the new president Alvaro Uribe who supported vigorous military force in the region with the intention of killing the insurgent guerrilla forces altogether. Chapo reflects that the collapse of the CAWAL and the rise Uribe's policies drastically shifted the climate in the country, thwarting the signs of peace.

Uribe furthered his security plan by declaring Montes de Maria a zone of consolidation and rehabilitation as part of Plan Colombia part two from 2002-2004. Plan Colombia was created to thwart narco-trafficking and people in the region could not understand how in a region like Montes de Maria where there are no poppies and coca is not produced, why there was so much focus on their region. The answer that usually follows, according to Chapo, is the presence of the columns 35 and 37 fronts of the FARC.

Victim's organizations consider what the state did in their counter-insurgency effort to be unconstitutional and a violation of rights. Preying on the poverty in the



region, they created a network of paid informants in the communities that were charged with identifying and turning in names of those they thought were guerrillas. People succumbed to the financial incentives, which were undergirded by the broader discourse of the Uribe leadership that anyone who acted differently or spoke out against his administration was a guerrilla. The Human Rights ombudsman halted the execution of the plan because of the spike in incidents of human rights infringements that resulted.

His attempts at eradicating guerrilla groups were not successful countrywide, however, in 2007, the FARC in Montes de Maria were considered defeated. Chapo makes the analogy, “if you want to kill a fish, you take away the water” to characterize the strategy of the paramilitary under Uribe. One night they captured 200 people, after which, they surrounded and confined the region so that food could not enter or leave; a strategy that seriously affected the general civilian population as well. The military posed limits on what people could consume in the rural areas and if community members were seen transporting more food than what one family could consume, they were accused of supporting the guerrillas. Curfews set in around 5pm, so you could not be in the streets or highways. Travel was forbidden, even for busses and the region was completely confined by the army. It was during this period that the paramilitary carried out seventy-five massacres in the region. The size of the massacres in the Montes de Maria region were often larger than what was happening in other regions and there was a viciousness to the violence which sometimes included clubbing people to death, and chopping bodies and heads off with machetes. They succeeded in either pushing out or killing the two columns of FARC in the region and killed a high-ranking commander,

Martin Caballero.

The success of this method meant that the paramilitary forces in Sucre were no longer needed in order to defend the interests of the political elite and it was at this time that conversations began around demobilization processes. However, the level of destruction that the paramilitary left in their wake crushed communities and civil society organizations. Likewise, paramilitary ties to the local regional political elite remained in tact, maintaining high levels of corruption and lack of trust in the general population. Some statistics, according to Chapo, say that twenty-two of twenty-four mayors at the time had direct links to paramilitary who lined their pockets with bribes and bought them political elections. Thus far three governors of Sucre have been indicted for their paramilitary ties. Many believe that the Supreme Court has fallen well short of indicting and prosecuting the financiers and intellectual authors of the paramilitary criminal effort in the region and the nation.

Although there have been formal legal processes for demobilizing paramilitary combatants, it is well known that they still operate today in grand, organized scales beyond the criminal bands (“bandas criminales” or BACRIM) that refer to the new iteration of demobilized paramilitary. As the country looks intently at the peace talks in Havana, there is great fear among many about the safety and security of those guerrillas who demobilize as a result of a signed agreement. There is a long history of failed peace initiatives in Colombia as well as those that have ultimately resulted in the massacre, if not “political genocide,” of thousands. In one extreme case, after the peace treaty with the guerrilla group Union Patriótica in 1985, 3000-6000 members of their political arm

were selectively murdered after winning political offices. Many of those assassinated joined the group after their transition from arms to politics and, therefore, were not part of the preceding violence.

One member of the political party who survived this period, Regina, is currently part of a civil society movement that grew out of the assassinations and calls for state accountability in the violence in the Montes de Maria region. Regina who is a representative of the international organization known as MOVICE- Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (National Movement of Victims of the State Crimes) reflects, “To be a survivor of a party like the UP is not an easy thing. And to be a survivor of the violence is not easy- and to be associated with any leftist party. In fact in 1993 my family had to leave the country because of direct threats against us. We’ve had to bury friends and coworkers from the movement and those of us who have survived have lived to tell the story.”

Regina recalls the history whereby on June 22, 2005 in reaction to the 2005 Justice and Peace Law that outlined the mechanism for demobilizing paramilitary forces, victims groups from around the region and the country organized to create the movement that became known as MOVICE. Victims groups criticized the law for failing to take into account, if not obscuring, the needs of victims, instead focusing resources and attention on the processes to demobilize and reinsert the perpetrators. To date there had never been any law to make the victims of violence visible to the state and forming victims groups, historically, was a dangerous endeavor.

On the day in 2005, the group of 120 victim’s organizations met in the capital city

of Bogota during which time the national government under President Uribe, sent in paramilitary who surrounded the building and graffitied the wall with accusations that the victims' groups inside were members of FARC. Regina recalls a speech given by then President Uribe sending a message to defenders of human rights abuses and victim's supporters that they were not appreciated and that they would not be protected by the state.

That linking of the victim's groups to FARC persisted with threats of prosecution under the accusation that the members were guerrilla fighters disguised as human rights defenders. Because of the strong anti-guerrilla stance in the country created by years of guerrilla warfare and violence, this made MOVICE's positioning tenuous and dangerous. Despite the fear that this message engendered, victims groups proceeded to organize in the first effort of its sort in Colombia to "visibilize" to the country the thousands upon thousands of victims of state crimes. Through the Inter American Court, victims brought cases forward in order to address the history of persecution of particular political parties resulting in sentences that affirmed that there were victims that had been largely ignored previously. Regina shares how difficult it still is to understand how a democratic government elected with only a seven million vote margin could be so repressive against human rights activist making it extremely difficult for any kind of human rights work to be done in Colombia. Maintaining that these organizations had ties to guerrilla groups kept them from being legitimized.

In order to resist such accusations and to embed within stronger networks for victim's rights, MOVICE continued to operate with what Regina characterizes as the

organization's mission for justice, truth, holistic reparations, and guarantee of non-repetition. They focus their work on impunity on the premise that the primary way that the state "invisibilizes" its crimes is by creating the conditions for impunity. Although the movement began in 2005 in reaction to the Justice and Peace Law, many members came from organizations that had been documenting human rights violations of the state years prior. The project that forms the basis of this movement is called the Colombian Project of Never Again, devoting its attention to monitoring, region by region, the crimes that were committed by official state actors- i.e. military, police, and politicians. One of the key discoveries they made during these inquiries was the secret links between paramilitary and the military.

The prevalence of such collaborations and violent acts are often attributed to Colombia's strength of government in the center of the country but its weakness on the periphery. For that reason, organizations such as Sembrandopaz host regional tables where those whom have been working for peace within this violent context convene to imagine constructing political power from the bottom up. According to the participants in these regional roundtables, the struggle for political power is longstanding and will continue well into the post conflict. In the Montes de Maria alone there are approximately 960 civic organizations in fifteen municipalities many of which were formed amidst the violence with aspirations to expand their efforts for peace. A few of the more active roundtables for peace that meet still today, often in the Chócoro at Sembrandopaz are the Mesa Sucreña para la Paz (Sucre Table for Peace), the Comisión Ciudadano para Reconciliación (the Citizen's Commission for Reconciliation), and a new

group formed by John Paul Lederach, el Grupo Paz Territorial de Montes de Maria (Montes de Maria's Peace from the Territories Group).

While these organizing mechanism are in place, they exist in a context of ongoing fear and uncertainty as group members continue to be assassinated. Chapo and Regina recall in 2005, once FARC receded from the region and the Peace and Justice law demobilized paramilitary, people began to feel like it was safe to return to their land. However, lands were often discovered to be occupied or newly owned often by investors. The influx of investors in the Montes de Maria region created incredible unrest as it sealed people's eviction from their lands, inducing new forced displacements.

Coming at a time in history when the government was implementing a program of mini agrarian reform, some communities who were linked to the peasant movements of the 1970s, had been relocated to this land and began to form social movements to resist the land takeovers by the big company investors who are said to be linked with economic power of the paramilitaries. MOVICE joined this counter-agrarian movement for reform by accompanying two different processes with communities that experienced forced displacements and evictions from their land. Regina describes one of the farms, Europa, that is located at the heart of Montes de Maria and was the birthplace of the ANUC agrarian peasant movement from 1970-1971. The community had been bombed under the democratic security program and had sixteen people assassinated and one person disappeared, and they were forced to displace.

When they returned to their lands, a famous Colombian arepa<sup>20</sup>company, "Arepas

---

<sup>20</sup> A traditional food in Colombia that is a round flat patty made of ground corn.

Don Juan,” from Antioquia occupied the land. The company claimed to have bought the land in 2008, despite that it was said to be under the protection of the World Bank.<sup>21</sup>

Violent actions have been attributed to Arepas Don Juan. Around the time the company showed interest in buying the land, a local leader, Alex Correa, who vocally opposed the sale of the land, which was his farm, was found brutally murdered with his throat cut and his head chopped off. Regina continued to draw connections between the violence, land investors, Arepas Don Juan, and President Uribe who all “conveniently” originated from the same region.

MOVICE has been involved with this land restitution project since before the passage of the 1448 Victims and Land Restitution Law in 2011 and has faced challenges trying to get the process officially registered. Regina points out that there are inconsistencies with what the law claims and how it is working in practice. For example, the process is supposed to be free and not necessitate a lawyer, however, in their experience, the funds necessary have been difficult to achieve and those communities without a lawyer have lost their land. There have been reports of houses being burned and threats against the peasant farmers who are trying to go up against the companies without assistance from the state. On June 12, 2014, one of the peasant leaders had five shots fired at him, and one of the managers is currently in jail and being tried for attempted murder.

These threats are attributed to paramilitary still active in the region. While the region boasts the demobilization of approximately 30.000 paramilitary under President

---

<sup>21</sup> The World Bank had been acting as a repository as lands transitioned during the land reform movement.

Uribe, they are said to have reformed themselves into criminal bands known as BACRIM that have proven to be a serious threat to peace and reconciliation. Their groups have reportedly assassinated leaders of victim's organizations, human rights defenders, and benefactors of the land restitution law without recourse. Some attribute this to the continued corruption of local politicians who are reported to receive kickbacks in exchange for their support. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the demobilization efforts and maintains a level of insecurity that precludes particular ways of speaking and organizing in the region.

For that reason, it is not always easy to access these kinds of stories about the history of the region so openly. Many commented to me over my time that were it not for my relationship to Sembrandopaz, I might not have had access to them either. As we sat in the Chócoro at Sembrandopaz one evening in May 2015, a woman who is a professor of transitional justice at a local university in Sincelejo asked me to turn off my recorder for the beginning of her talk during which she spoke about the sensitive work of her organization. Later as the conversation shifted, she allowed me to resume recording. However, a few minutes after starting to speak, she looked at me and asked, "Can I say what I really think?"

The legacy and continued presence of fear and violence in the Montes de Maria cannot be taken for granted looking toward the future for peace building in the region. Sembrandopaz is the pathway into these stories, which often fail to reach broader audiences and are delegitimized in the context of the Colombian conflict. Understanding that context from the perspective of historically marginalized voices and populations



demonstrates the ways that dominant narratives about groups operate in people's lived experiences. The organization's commitment to relationships and to grassroots accompaniment shapes the way that communities interact with the state in the post-conflict context. It highlights the diversity of the experience of violence in the region, calling attention to the need for flexible and adaptable approaches in its aftermath. It also reveals the ways in which the peasant communities reacted to their circumstances, whether by resisting, complying, or even joining in the violence.

The way that communities and peacebuilding organizations and advocates see themselves is anchored to the narratives about them and the way they are positioned by the state and armed groups in these historical narratives. These narratives not only reflect how the communities see themselves but how they see the state and illegal armed actors seeing them. Not only does the experience of violence damage people's sense of self, but the narratives that are told or silenced about the violence contributes to that damage. As communities work to rebuild in the aftermath of violence the meanings that are carried over and remain from the neglect are reflected in the way that they see themselves as victims, agents, legitimate, or marginal. The work of tending to these narratives that are anchored in the legacy of and continued violence is complex and evolves differently over time.

The narratives of Mampujan and the Alta Montaña are punctuated by active engagement with the state, which has led to certain forms of reconciliation and political opening, while the narratives of insecurity and abandonment in Pichilin and Libertad reveal the importance of rebuilding trust and making communities feel visible and

legitimized. It raises the importance of examining post-conflict processes and dynamics in order to see which processes gain traction with the state and what legitimizes them.

The legitimization rises and falls as the political climate in the country historically changed hands between the Liberals and the Conservatives, eventually leading to a silencing of the extreme left. This historical backdrop from that standpoint opens up space not for discovering a pre-existing truth but to describe the dynamics by which people's lived reality is constituted. The contours of the work of Sembrandopaz, and the telling of history through the lens of local peasant farmers, activists, and academics presents dynamics between the state and communities revealing what gets legitimized, de-legitimized, what stories are elaborated and which stories are shut down. These discursive conditions are foundational for understanding not only the characteristics of the conflict but provide a platform for exploring post-conflict possibilities.

One of the ways the Colombian government has attempted to address the legacies of violence articulated here is through the creation of laws. Colombia has a reputation for writing extremely powerful legislation met with mostly criticism in regards to its implementation. Current pathways to peace are paved through the construction of two main transitional justice laws, the, Ley 975 or 2005 Ley de Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace Law) and the Ley 1448 or 2011 Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras (Victim and Land Restitution Law). Describing these laws in greater detail is another way of understanding the way that the state positions communities within the narrative of the transition from violence to peace. The laws are narratives that shape the way that communities in the Montes de Maria work to make themselves visible so that they can

participate in the associated processes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: MASTER NARRATIVES: SETTING THE TERMS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE**

In the preceding chapters Sembrandopaz provided the pathway into narratives of history of the Colombian conflict more broadly and, specifically, in the Montes de Maria region. The stories introduce a rich context of narratives tied to individual and community experiences of violence, marginalization, organization, activism, fear, and hope. These accounts provide a landscape of meaning for how communities, human rights advocates, peasants, the state, military, and their associated actions during violent conflict are supported by or undermined by particular narratives that circulate. The narratives provide a lens into how many associated to the work of Sembrandopaz view themselves and the state, who is positioned as legitimate, and who is delegitimized within the context of the decades long conflict.

Many of the narratives reflect the damage that has been done to the relationship between communities and the state, making the rebuilding of that relationship critical to the peacebuilding project. It raises the question of how the state and the communities can recast themselves in order to be seen and heard in new ways by each other. The communities desire to be seen or made legible to a state that has continually marginalized and silenced them through their narrative constructions. Conversely, the state is attempting to make itself legible to communities as a trustworthy institution.

Embedded in the rebuilding of this relationship, certain characters are attributed greater legitimacy than others and therefore more legibility and power than others. For example, certain communities have been invited into processes with the state while others have not, and depending on who committed violence in a particular community, different state actors have more legitimacy than others. For many of the communities that Sembrandopaz accompanies, corruption shadows the municipal governments, maintaining high levels of distrust. However, in the same communities that are working with the state toward reparations, relations with regional state functionaries tied to peacebuilding are more complex.

Community members experience different levels of inclusion and participation in the processes in which they engage making narratives at times elaborated and at times illegible. In order to understand how narratives function to situate these relations of power, legitimacy, legibility, versus marginality, de-legitimacy, and illegibility, it is critical to examine, both theoretically and practically, the way that master narratives emerge and the master-counter narrative dynamics operant in their descriptions. Master narratives are complex, tricky, and not always visible to marginalized or other populations who might be “stuck” in them.

### **Master Narratives Explained**

Master or dominant narratives are those stories that are found in a culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings that exercise moral authority (Nelson, 2001, p.6). As such, the stories that are told on a more personal or community

level draw on or converse with these broader, overarching master narratives. It is through the stories told that meaning(s) about the world are generated, connections are drawn over time that give a sense of self in the world and to make sense of the world itself. Often times, without realizing it, stories draw on master narratives that consist of archetypal themes, stock plots, and easily recognizable characters (Nelson, 2001, p. 6) and narratives can be traced back to particular constructions that already exist. Some of the master narratives drawn on that construct categories of understanding are foundational myths, fairytales, the bible, classic movies, and landmark court cases, for example (Nelson, 2001). Narratives draw on pre-existing scripts and normativity is constructed through narrative. There are particular genres, storylines, and themes that provide the architecture for the stories that are told and that are drawn on to make sense of life events.

A story becomes most salient to tell when there is “news of difference” (Bateson, 1988) or there is a breach in what is considered the normative scripts that govern daily life (Amsterdam, Bruner, et al., 2009, p. 121). It is the difference brought on by new information or a breach that makes the story unique, interesting, and worthy of the audience. While there are seemingly infinite number of stories in the world, anchored by every individual’s experiences and articulations, and tied to meanings that are constructed through them that may be personal to the individual-- stories have patterns, take on particular forms, and are informed by the master or dominant narratives that are found in a particular culture or institution. These master narratives provide moral and ethical frameworks that are downloaded into our everyday narratives and anchor the meanings

that organize our descriptions and understandings of events and our subject positioning in the world.

Through the construction of narratives, Self and Other are positioned as “good,” “bad,” “victim,” “perpetrator,” “legitimate,” “damaged,” etc. In so doing, identities and identity categories are formed through narratives in interaction and are dependent on how one is constructed. Through narratives we come to understand how we see others and how others see us. So identity, through which one understands their roles, rights, responsibilities, for example, is not only contingent upon one’s articulation of themselves but others must confer that identity narratively as well. At times, master narratives impose certain roles, rights, and responsibilities, through social practices, that construct people in ways that they would not choose. They are not only the medium through which we make sense of the world, but they are powerful and colonize landscapes of meaning restricting the development of any counter to itself and providing justifications for action, including violence.

When individuals and groups cannot situate their own stories within the master narratives it is a form of narrative oppression or narrative violence (Cobb, 2013). “The ability to frame individual narratives within powerful larger narratives imbues narrators with respective degrees of power within the local culture (Wibben, 2008, p. 34).” Often times, political structures use a narrow narrative construction in order to consolidate their own power and to disempower those who might contradict their own legitimacy. This has implications that go beyond the macro-political context according to Nelson (2001) who argues that individual identities are narratively constructed and that their moral

agency is dependent on their stories having uptake and being legitimized by others. This type of oppression denies people opportunities and risks the development of what she calls an infiltrated consciousness; a damaged identity without self-respect (Nelson, 2001, p. 21). Individuals and groups whose narratives are not acknowledged by the dominant discourse may resort to extremes (ie. violence) in order to have their voices heard.

The master narratives that legitimize one group over another, reveal relations of power in society that are embedded in everyday institutional and social practices that transcend merely what people think and provide conditions for certain behaviors and actions. There are a number of ways that an oppressive master narrative operates in the world to construct and limit the moral agency and development of the marginalized or oppressed groups. The oppressive narratives are systemically damaging and “justify the oppression of a less powerful group and distorts and falsifies the group’s identity by depicting the group—and therefore its members—as morally subnormal” Nelson, 2001, p. 23). This positioning as subnormal is so powerful that it distorts and constrains the possibilities for people to construct themselves in more positive ways. For example, there are communities in Colombia that are positioned as guerrillas regardless of the veracity of the claim. It narrows the narrative resources that people can draw from to story themselves in more expansive moral positions, therefore, limiting their capacity for agency in their lives.

The de-legitimized positioning in narratives generates an identity dissonance for individuals but also operates to damage relationships between groups and within groups. As damaging stories become dominant and circulate widely, they diminish the kinds of



responses or narratives that groups can have about themselves. This phenomenon damages social relationships, for example, between groups from different socio-economic backgrounds. By perpetuating narratives that position poor people as lazy, unemployable, and helpless, it stigmatizes the group and makes only particular kinds of policies grounded on such negative attributes possible. The generation of policy based on negative attributes further establishes certain groups as better than others or having more moral authority over their lives. The Palenque people in Colombia exemplify this narrative dynamic as they fight for political and social legitimacy in their afro-Colombian community.

It is critical to understand the master narratives that circulate in a conflict in order to understand the kinds of stories that can be told and those that cannot and how that contributes to further violence, stigmatization, and marginalization, as well as to re-imagine how those stories can change and evolve to end violence. There are histories of power, relationships and “lines of force” (Winslade, 2009) that influence the ways in which the state and the community are positioned and storied and impacts the conditions for peace and provides a lens for understanding possibilities and constraints of mechanisms through which justice and reconciliation processes are enacted. Institutionalized discourses and narratives can marginalize and silence communities and, therefore, support the development of the very tensions they are purporting to subvert. As communities struggle to make themselves legible to the state, they must work within the confines of these lines of force that support and strengthen the master narratives

making it difficult, if not impossible, to be heard, posing potentially violent consequences.

In the Montes de Maria, narratives of peace and transitional justice circulate widely and provide frameworks within which communities operate, make themselves legible, or remain unheard. These dominant narratives interact with grassroots efforts generating a multiplicity of responses and narrative dynamics. At some junctures, where the dominant narrative meets with local peacebuilding efforts, the lines of force are more obvious than others. Master narratives that crowd out or limit the production of new meanings and new stories also foreclose possibilities for making multiple subjectivities visible or legible. It is critical to understand these dynamics from the perspective of how they perpetuate conflict as well as how they operate to support or limit the evolution of new meanings toward peacebuilding efforts as the state and community build trust and become legible to one another.

#### Master Narratives and Lines of Force: Justifications for Violence

Throughout the Colombian conflict, a number of master narratives provided or served to maintain conditions that perpetuated violence. In the Montes de Maria, I learned about the master narratives about the communities where I worked that justified their forced displacement and the mass murder of their community and family members. This narrative about guerrillas is anchored to the broader political moment at the time of the group's development at the end of the cold war when the fear of the spread of communism populated international security narratives. The threat of communism

became all that was necessary to unleash violence on people presumed to be affiliated to, associated with, or actually part of a communist group. Because the master narrative about communism as a threat—often spoken about using the metaphor of —“the spread of communism” likening it to a disease—was/is associated with a threat to democratic ideals, capitalism, and basic freedom, it was considered undemocratic, un-American, and presumed support of the communist ideology if you did not totally condemn it. The implications for this were treacherous, resulting in mass killings of supposed communists spanning the globe, in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia, for example.

Colombia, a country largely influenced by the hand of the U.S. government was not exempt. The master narrative about communism was over-laid onto any groups that fought against state domination and in the interest of peasant farmers, the landless, or the working poor. While historically, they were not yet attached to armed guerrilla movements, any kind of protest from these historically marginalized groups was considered to be a threat to the state and eventually, tied to the communist threat, which came with a license to unleash violence openly. The master narrative that defined any movement in favor of the historically marginalized or poor as communist, foreclosed the possibility for those groups or individuals in those groups to define themselves, or to be anything other than communist.

Eventually, as anti-state, armed guerrilla movements formed over time, this “threat” narrative carried over. Any groups who supported the historically marginalized, advocated on behalf of victims of violence, or were suspected of supporting guerrilla groups, made them “enemies of the state.” During the time of the most intense

coordination of paramilitary violence against communities who were accused of participating in guerrilla activity, then President Alvaro Uribe ascribed to a militarized view of security providing the justification for violent actions of paramilitary Auto Defense Forces that would be later institutionalized as part of the state. The communities in Montes de Maria fell victim to this master narrative as they lived in places where illegally armed actors fought one another.

From a master-counter narrative perspective, this makes the stories we have about Self and Other thin and underdeveloped. Any peasant farmer in the region could be positioned as guerrilla regardless of their affiliation leaving communities vulnerable to violent actions. Communities could be considered inherently “bad” because of this supposed affiliation. Thin stories maintain binary categories of what is “good” and what is “bad.” In this case, there is no way to support any element of the guerrilla project without being an enemy of the state, whether or not you support violence, or if your intention is to raise your community out of substandard living conditions. Likewise, there is no room for any fallibility of the master narrative, which creates the conditions for such foreclosures related to poverty or other inequities. This “subjugated knowledge about violence not only silences and normalises certain types of violence carried out by important groups; it refuses justice (Hume, 2009 p. 50).”

The event of the 1928 Banana Massacres, brought to light by Chucho Perez, situates this dynamic historically. As workers for the United Fruit Company began to strike for fair wages, a six-day workweek, and working contracts, the U.S. and the Colombian government collaborated to quell their voices by enlisting the Colombian

army. The workers were positioned as “communists” and “subversive” threats to the government and U.S. interests as evidenced by cables between the Colombian Embassy and U.S. State Department leading to the massacre of over 1,000 workers.<sup>22</sup> This kind of positioning continued during the time of the conflict as we know it today in various forms, justifying particular kinds of violence. Chucho and Regina both spoke about “false positives” whereby paramilitary and military carried out selective killings of mostly poor, young, male, peasant farmers and dressed them to pass a guerillas to boost their death count. Violence as such was possible because of the strength of the master narrative that required guerrillas to be eliminated and framed peasant farmers as guerillas without any evidence.

In the daily conversations with victims and their advocates during this research, the master narratives were not directly present. It was through people talking about how they navigated and worked within the constrained context that the power of the dominant narratives was present and it was through their actions and fears that elements of the master narratives could be understood. The case against Ricardo for being a guerrilla, Jorge Montes imprisoned with no charges except accusations of associating with guerillas, false positives, the daily fears that people articulate feeling in their communities, and advocates who fear being condemned by the state for working in affected communities, provides evidence as to the way that the communities see the state seeing them. The master narratives can be seen in and through daily practices and the meaning architecture of those practices.

---

<sup>22</sup> For a log of the cables:  
<http://web.archive.org/web/20120717004708/http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/santamarta.htm>

Master narratives are strong and learn and grow over time as they take on resources and characteristics of alternatives that are launched against it, incorporating them in ways that obscure its own hegemonic force and the violent conditions it creates. During the Uribe administration, the narrative about security that justified paramilitary activity in the Montes de Maria eventually led to the zone becoming “rehabilitated” and touted as a zone for peace. This narrative about peace makes it difficult if not impossible for the ongoing violence in the region to be acknowledged. This “assimilation” hides, distorts and silences coercive conditions (Nelson, 2001). Master narratives build on fear and strengthen the more that alternatives to it are silenced, distorted, discounted and dominates the resources that might be available for alternative stories about a group to emerge. They become so dominant, that they resist, and often have immunity from, evidence that counters or contradicts it.

Ricardo Esquívia’s case exemplifies the strength of the dominant narrative that refuses evidence as a counter to it. For forty years the regional attorney general has been building a case against him trying to prove his affiliation with armed guerrilla activity. In their over four hundred pages of documentation, they cannot find evidence to prove such allegations, yet, he is still not exonerated from those accusations and remains under scrutiny by the state. Through his work prior to and during the life of Sembrandopaz, Ricardo supports and accompanies communities in their peacebuilding efforts. This has resulted in a number of non-violent marches, organizing rural communities to protest the government, teaching communities about their rights as victims, doing capacity trainings for leaders. Ricardo is a convener for regional activities and works on reconciliation

issues with the state, former armed actors, and in the communities. The successful organizing and pro-activity emerging from the communities are actions that have been historically deemed as subversive and anti-state. People like Ricardo, Regina, or Chucho who are human rights and victims advocates are assumed to be guerrilla collaborators. This results in threats by the government, attempts at arrest, and violent attacks. While Ricardo does not accept any armed protection as many accused do, he has fled Colombia at times and attributes his safety to his broad international networks.

The fallout of this positioning as a leftist, guerrilla debilitates individuals working toward peace. In this sense, even working for peace, is anti-state, raising the question of how it could be possible to build peace from the base under such constraining and threatening circumstances. With the government in the midst of unprecedented peace negotiations, it raises issues and concerns about how that peace could or if it would provide an opening for different kinds of approaches to be legitimized.

#### National Peace Accords Meet Peacebuilding from the Base

Despite the long history of de-legitimization and marginalization in the Montes de Maria, there is a “narrative of peace” that is elaborated through a vibrant network of communities, activists, NGOs, civil society organizations, operant in the region over the decades. Peace and human rights advocates have been working together to struggle to make their voices heard and assert their positioning as people with rights and human dignity. According to the communities I worked with in the Montes de Maria, there was an overwhelming distrust of the national level peace negotiations taking place in Havana

between the Santos administration and the FARC. Edwin from the National Center for Historical Memory opened a regional-level meeting detailing the history of failed peace agreements over the course of four hours, detailing the politics, the dynamics, and the ultimate cost of each failure.

However, despite that long history there are people in communities and organizations committed to reshaping that history and staking their claims to peacebuilding regardless of what happens at the national level. Those working on grassroots efforts articulated that the national level peace accords were necessary but that the true building of peace emerged from the base. It is critical to situate their work within the historical narrative landscape of the violent conflict in order to understand the risk involved and the challenges they face.

At the time of this research, candidates Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and Óscar Iván Zuluaga Escobar were vying for the Colombian presidency. The campaigns situated Santos as the “peace candidate” and Zuluaga as the “war candidate.” These characterizations were anchored by Santos’ successful initiation of national-level peace talks with FARC and Zuluaga’s position as protégé to former President Uribe. Being in a region that was intensely affected by paramilitary violence during the Uribe administration, it was scary for most to imagine a Zuluaga presidency. When sharing political views, people navigated carefully to avoid being seen as “anti-peace.” The region heavily supported eventual winner, Santos, in the election, spurning consternation and astonishment about communities or areas where Zuluaga received votes. How could communities violently displaced and massacred by paramilitary vote for the protégé of



the president who supported the violence? The only explanations offered were that people in those communities were bribed, coerced, completely uneducated or paramilitary supporters.

At least with Santos, it was offered, current efforts toward peace would not be thwarted, despite the relative pessimism that surrounded the possibility of a successful agreement. Colombia's history of failed peace agreements casts a shadow in the wake of advances or setbacks in the current peace processes. People wanted to be hopeful, but precedent kept most optimism at bay or at least pragmatic. The widely held perspective was that the government has the ability to sign the agreement but that it would be left to the people in the territories to actually build peace.

Local and international peacebuilders such as Ricardo Esquívia and John Paul Lederach have been working with the government in anticipation of the peace accords to provide a view into the complex work that implementation of the accords will require, highlighting Colombia's regional diversity. In a meeting with Lederach he shared with me that, while there has been support for these sensitive approaches by the High Commissioner for Peacebuilding, broader support from within the administration has been difficult to apprehend. This they attribute to the idea that working within the territories and accounting for regional diversity means investing more time and money.

There are, however, many initiatives on the regional level to address the concept of building peace from the base. Initiatives such as these are key locations for understanding the intersection between transnational discourses of transitional justice and peacebuilding and local level processes. While often meetings are held in Bogota or

Cartagena, Sembrandopaz is also a hub for hosting regional meetings. I had the privilege of attending a number of such initiatives hosted by Sembrandopaz, one of which was a series of meetings over the course of two months called Seminar: Peace Processes in Colombia: Experiences and Responses from the Regions (Seminario: Los Procesos de Paz en Colombia: Experiencias y Respuestas Desde las Regiones). FUCUDE- Fundación Cultural Democrática (Cultural Democratic Foundation), Sembrandopaz, USAID, Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (International Organization for Migration) sponsored the event series. The purpose was to engage local communities, NGOs, and other regional partners in a process to make recommendations for regional peace to the national-level negotiation tables in Havana, Cuba.

These meetings brought together many different sectors of civil society including businesspeople, clergy, NGOs, community leaders, academics, former guerilla/supporters, professionals, and students. These and other regional meetings revealed a complex matrix of organizations and personal networks, each working on their corner of peace. The proliferation of this work is part of the grassroots peacebuilding efforts from the base. As Ricardo iterates consistently, and was confirmed by others in the meeting, “the government needs to do their part and sign the peace accords so that we can do our part, the work of peace, at the local and regional level.” One woman said, “...at least if the peace accords fail, we would still have this work.”

Her words convey the uncertainty that many, if not most, articulate in response to the current peace negotiation. However, there is critical acknowledgement in this narrative about peace that the process is much larger than just what is happening in the

laws or in the state-level institutions, but is something that needs to be cultivated by the people living in the affected regions and beyond. Colombia is a country with significant human, bio, and geographical diversity, cultivating regional allegiances that at times resulted in tensions. As representatives of the Citizen's Commission for Reconciliation at another regional meeting introduced themselves, some expressed their regional ties with conviction, eventually leading to comparisons and claims that generated conflicting responses. However, while some find the adherence to regional affiliation limits possibilities for coalition building across the territories, for most, it is taken seriously when considering measures for building peace from the base. Sembrandopaz and many of its allied organizations and communities believe that trust needs to be built within communities, across regions, as well as with the state, and that strength will come from unity at the grassroots level.

These organizations navigate an incredibly complex political and social landscape and local, regional, national, international, governmental, non-governmental, religious, and secular entities form a confusing web of peace-related programs and processes. The claim that I heard most was that the efforts suffer from lack of coordination. Each entity operates within its own smaller networks to the detriment of more constructive forms of solidarity. Sembrandopaz works to coordinate these efforts by convening and hosting regional meetings with attendees who work and live in different regions and operate in precarious contexts, often with little support. The work is harrowing and dangerous and people often put their lives on the line to work in vulnerable regions with ongoing

violence. The meetings are aimed at cultivating stronger networks of experience and knowledge about working in violence-affected regions.

At a meeting for the Citizen's Commission for Reconciliation, participants traveled from many different provinces to invest in the network created and cultivated through Sembrandopaz and funded largely by the United States Institute of Peace. This effort to mitigate the lack of coordination between organizations met with varying results. The hours that it took for each person to describe the nature of their work and the biggest challenges they face in their regions made it difficult to accomplish anything more in the first day. It was difficult to digest the magnitude of what they shared, with varying levels of emotion. For some, they were the only people or organizations in their region doing dangerous intervention work in their communities with high stakes- often life or death. Many of their lives existed in a continuous state of emergency (Taussig, 2003, Tate, 2007). To have the space and time to speak to their concerns, tragedies, and routinely violent work, was special. Because of the master narratives that circulate, positioning human rights and peaceworkers as anti-state, not only are some of these individuals subjected to overt violence in the region, but they traverse a restricted narrative environment that does not allow for them to speak about the problems in their region or enlist support.

Over time, I began to realize that regardless of the length of meetings or workshops at this level, significant portions of time were spent accounting for and recounting the problems that people faced in their localities with intense frustrations about the lack of support from the state. The narratives portrayed a simultaneous strength

that stemmed from commitment and resilience that was also marked by hopelessness that the situation was too complicated to ever change. It was at the organizational level—speaking with the employees and leadership of CBOs and NGOs, some of them lifelong activists others, less so, that narratives of frustration repeated, portraying a kind of paralysis that felt palpable to me. The totalizing language of being abandoned by the state, or spending decades attempting to change things, inhibited inroads for narrative evolution. It was in meetings with broader civil society that the stifled narratives hung in the air, repressing possible changes in meaning or new understandings of their situation. The same stories of violence and shackles of the state circulated more broadly in the communities as well, however, the communities found alternative ways for navigating through them.

In addition to paralysis at the regional level, I observed in the seminar for conceptualizing peace in the territories, that there was a gap between the recommendations that resulted from the seminar and strategies for their operationalization. While it was clear that participants engaged in complex conceptual exchanges, the abstractness of the recommendations obscured the possibility for deriving concrete steps. Notions such as “building peace,” “economic development,” and “increased participation” were consistently employed to describe the outcomes that community leaders and advocates desired, but without grounding in pedagogies for execution.

The paralysis from the violence and the lack of support from the state is not unbound, in my analysis, from this level of abstraction. Because it is often dangerous to

carry out concrete steps, or it requires the support and attention of local government, which is historically corrupt, the narratives ensure that the efforts are not concretized. Not only is the work tied to the master narratives of the state that accused and continue to accuse many NGOs and their employees of being guerrilla collaborators but the narratives restrict the possibility of the emergence of new kinds of stories and for new meanings to emerge. Instability at the governmental level also makes cohesion at the civil society level complicated.

In the seminar meetings, many of the recommendations rested on economic development as the antidote for many of these issues. Following neo-liberal models of peacebuilding, there was a common thread that if people were economically more stable, it would also transform other political motivations. For example, it was argued that peasants would resist selling their votes during election time if they were financially secure making politics less corrupt. In a similar vein, some articulated the need for open markets and fair prices for products as the root of constructing peace. However, these comments shared toward the end of the seminar served to distill the many complexities shared over the course of two months into one magical answer that could not be responsive to the broader and deeper issues related to political subjectivity, having their voices heard, and living without violence or fear.

Although many of the conversations at the regional level meetings stayed at the level of abstraction, my understanding from engaging in side conversations was that the work that the participants engage in on a daily basis is extremely concrete; from providing services to victims, mediating disputes in the communities, organizing

community meetings, to translating laws and processes. However, those actions were not elicited in the shared discursive space of the meeting. Not only do the master narratives in circulation impede the kinds of conversations taking place in the regional-level meetings, but the structure of the meetings themselves made it difficult to drill down into actual practices.

Questions such as, “what is peace to you?” did not encourage micro-level details even when strategies for approaching the definitions were elicited. This was especially true considering some people’s definition of peace was “living without fear.” As the leader from the community of Libertad shook his head and repeated, “how can we have peace when we live in fear,” I remembered a visit I had with his community and how they described themselves as broken. After ten years of paramilitary occupation that pitted some community members against each other, the fractured trust remains a legacy. Recommendations such as economic development, increasing participation, and creating social networks, might contribute to the many diverse issues facing the different communities. But for the leader whose definition of peace was “living without fear,” speaking on behalf of a community paralyzed by the legacy of violence, detailed actions are critical.

### Reflections

Not only did I learn the multiple ways that the legacy of violence reverberated in communities, but by observing the work of Sembrandopaz, I came to understand that there is a multiplicity of approaches taking place in the peacebuilding sphere. It is often peacebuilding organizations that hail communities to work under the parameters of the

state, promote productive projects for income generation, but they also provide spaces for new conversations and dialogues to emerge. Their work is not only relegated within the communities, but they are bridges to regional networks that work to shape peacebuilding initiatives should the national level peace accords be signed.

The focus that the state places on national level peace accords contributes to the discord and uncertainty experienced at the base in three major ways. First, as demonstrated in the descriptions that Edwin shared about the historic failures of peace accords, immediately following the signing of the accords, selective killings of members of guerrilla groups left thousands dead and instilled fear across the nation that reverberates heavily in the peasant communities today. Second, the legacy of fear also stems from the conflict narratives that justified the violence of the past that many in the region still experience. The networks affiliated to Sembrandopaz attribute the ongoing violence in the region to paramilitary activity that is considered by the government and more broadly to have subsided, if not ended. That the peace accords are between the government and FARC and do not consider paramilitary violence, leaves peace at that level partial, especially for these communities. Third, the affected communities feel that they have been largely excluded from the peace talks and that their voices have not been represented at the table.

Efforts to bring people together from different regions and communities in solidarity to examine and address these concerns provided venues for learning, reflections, and attempted to raise the voices of those who felt and feel left out. However, in the regional meetings I observed, it was difficult for people to get out from



under the weight of the statement of the problem in order to translate big concepts into plans of action at the regional level. Focus was placed on outcomes rather than guide maps for how to get there or how to generate new meanings and understandings about what is possible.

Ricardo once attributed this to people in the meetings being “apolitical” as they are not always tying their experiences to a broader political culture of activism. However, I observed that the meeting spaces were also colonized by master narratives that are driven by grand notions of peacebuilding that are often difficult to drill down especially when people are still living in fear. This kind of narrative colonization makes the ultimate aim of raising the voices of the marginalized extremely difficult, if not, impossible. It is highly problematic if people who speak out against the state are not legitimized and human rights activists are striving to get the voices of their people heard. Organizations such as Sembrandopaz mitigate these challenges on the community level, but have more difficulty at the regional level.

A closer look at some of the dynamics that contribute to the difficulty reveals a connection between the work of local and international organizations and the state. Corruption, lack of trust and uncertainty are perpetually raised as challenges to many peacebuilding efforts. Some attributed these challenges to the many shifts in the political landscape over the years resulting in different kinds of support being provided by peacebuilding organizations in violence-affected regions. Two employees I met at a forum for victims in Cartagena from a Spanish NGO described the evolution of their agency’s work over the years to me. They originally came to Colombia to do

humanitarian work until the political climate changed with the passing of the 2005 Peace and Justice law when they adapted their emphasis to focus on “rights” and judicial accompaniment. With the passing of the 2011 Victim’s Law, they once again adjusted their priorities away from justice and Supreme Court mandates in order to concentrate on “return” processes and reparations for victims. With the varied emphasis of legislation, so followed the discourses and practices of the NGOs and the work to support affected communities.

These modifications take enormous time and momentum as international donors and local organizations mobilize to respond, until finally meeting up with communities. Each change in the tide signifies another shift in roles, rights, and responsibilities of communities, organizations, and government agencies, which lends itself to fractures in implementation with communities staring in the face of continually unmet promises and new forms of paper to fill out. It also requires that communities learn new sets of terminology to fit the new legislation, human rights approaches, or peacebuilding activity in order to line up with the organizational offerings and make themselves legible to the state. The introduction of law often directed the work of organizations and the ways in which they interacted with communities.

Narratives in these arenas were so embedded with legal jargon that it was difficult to distinguish whether local narratives reflected narratives of national and international law or vice versa. According to Tate’s (2007) account, it was human rights activists who first employed human rights narratives and frameworks to the violence, before the state (Tate, p. 27). Her account of the evolution of the human rights narrative in Colombia

ends before the introduction of major transitional justice legislation, however, she raises the importance of international law for human rights activists and advocates who leaned on international law in the absence of state accountability. Now that the government is attempting to reconcile from the violence they too have turned to international law to shape legislation to repair trust between the state and violence-affected regions. In times of post-conflict transitions, governments often turn to the rule of law in order to instantiate processes of peace, justice and reconciliation. Law itself is considered to be a master narrative that organizes meanings around violence, breaches, and sets moral frameworks and judgments in response. In order to understand the role of law in ruling during transitions, it is first critical to understand how it operates as a master narrative.

#### Law as Master Narrative

Laws tell stories about themselves and formulate how we “should” or “could” behave. Laws are aspirational. They articulate a vision for what it would look like if people were good to each other. Law establishes a moral order through narratives that provide moral frameworks. They set the parameters for judgment based on the moral frameworks that are laid out in order that people do not merely learn about a breach of law and feel badly, but that we actually place judgment on that breach. There is a gap, however, between the aspiration of law and what actually is. When we investigate and listen to cases that describe and account for that gap, the case becomes the texture of the breach. Ideally, law at its best will proliferate stories that develop normative worlds –

texturing and detailing the narratives that help us understand the breaches and lead to normative judgments about those breaches (Amsterdam, Bruner, et al., 2007).

Laws have their own genealogies and develop over time in the particular contexts in which they are conceptualized. Robert Cover (1983) argues that even the “nomos of officialdom,” the normative world of official institutions is “particular” and “it, too, reaches out for validation and seeks to extend its legitimacy by gaining acceptance from the normative world that lies outside its core (Cover, p. 33). The laws created in the context of ongoing violence in Colombia directly emerge out of international laws that have created normative standards for how countries should address the post-conflict. As Colombia works within their own borders for transitional justice, leaning on international legal standards is a way of legitimizing itself in the global arena as well. However, Colombia has faced the perennial issue for many decades whereby according to people of multiple sectors of society, the state has crafted the most beautiful laws-- articulate, elaborate, and visionary—that never get implemented. In the people’s minds, the laws are merely showmanship, empty promises, and false hope.

The gap between the vision and lived reality highlights the need for greater government accountability. According to an afro-Colombian activist, Marino Cordoba, verbiage in the 1991 constitution guarantees a seat in the state legislature for an afro-Colombian and an indigenous representative, however, that seat remains vacant today. Many contend that the 1991 constitution is a worthy and progressive document that merits living and breathing rather than adorning the shelf (Edwin, Sembrandopaz). Laws provide a vision and when that vision fails to be enacted, its effects are deleterious, if not

violent. It delegitimizes and re-victimizes those who sit on the side of the law where hopes are dashed, already tenuous trust is breached, and “nothing” changes. These have been the reflections of many in historically marginalized communities in Colombia, most notably the afro and indigenous people and many poor peasant communities.

The decades of violent conflict that were sanctioned by state institutions and still exists today, fractured communities and created incredible distrust between the government and the people. As the government crafts new laws to address the conflict to facilitate “healing” and “reconciliation,” it does so within a context where people have heightened awareness of their continuous experiences of laws that “do nothing” or further create unmet realities for communities. Because of the corruption in the government-- collusion with paramilitaries, acceptance of bribes, in conjunction with empty promises through law, the government’s attempts at rebuilding through the law is a lofty endeavor that requires a level of trust that has not existed in the country’s current generation. Building the peace in this sense requires building trust.

Colombia being the relational place that it is, the terms of building peace are often characterized as trust-building and I came to understand them to be synonymous in Montes de Maria through the meetings and workshops and informal conversations I participated in at Sembrandopaz and throughout the region. However, the way that the 2005 law initially created by Uribe raised serious questions about its function as a peacebuilding mechanism or a trust-building mechanism. On the contrary, it was highly criticized, especially by victims and victim advocates. Because laws were part of the narrative that justified the violence, the law has a long way to go to shift its legitimacy.

The law explicitly articulated justifications for violence. When I spoke to Coronel Marcus who headed the Colombian infantry in Maria la Baja at the time of this research, he never spoke of paramilitary activity in the region. When I inquired about it in an interview, he explained to me that the military did not have the authority to act on the actions of the paramilitaries. He explained to me that paramilitary were community grown defense units that intended to combat guerrillas who were causing trouble in the communities. He further shared that the guerrillas, by law, were declared enemies of the state and it was part of their mandate to go after them. But that was not the case for paramilitaries. There was nothing they could do. In his words, “their hands were tied.”

Guerrillas, by law, were considered enemies of the state and therefore, regardless of who was being killed in the communities, the current regional commander framed the military as having its hands tied by the law. The law in this sense legitimized a certain kind of violence by certain people. So it was not that it was against the law to kill, but it was against the law for certain people to kill and be killed. As paramilitaries entered into communities in the name of anti-communist and anti-guerrilla politics, in order to protect the rights and property of the owning and ruling elite classes, they were doing so under the watchful eye of state institutions such as the military and the police.

The head of human rights in the region in 2014 explained to me that the paramilitary and military were so interlinked that they were almost the same. According to their master narrative, it was their imperative to protect the interests of the state and to follow the orders handed down to them by the rule of law. In this way, the law served as a handmaiden to the anti-guerrilla narrative- as shorthand that falls under the duties and

obligations of institutions to protect its citizens. But even this articulation of responsibility to protect is subject to multiple meanings. Protect whom? From what?

Following the law, paramilitary were permitted to enter into communities and without any evidence, accuse people of their affiliation with guerrillas, and torture, dismember, humiliate, kill innocent people and forcefully displace entire communities. Under President Pastrana and then Uribe, the United States through “Plan Colombia” pledged over nine billion dollars in support of anti-drug and anti-communist policies. National security narratives dominated the government’s approach to both “wars” in Colombia leading to more troops, more uniforms, more guns, and more deaths. Plan Colombia supported paramilitary offenses with money and arms, joining the anti-communist campaign. State security forces were created by Uribe, which later transitioned into a private security firm that would continue to operate in the country. State law and state policy narratives constituted the war, legitimizing violence, leading to extreme ferocity and corruption, much of which happened with the current president, Santos, as the Minister of Defense.

These master narratives worked together to create the conditions for the escalation of violence in many regions in the country and for further silencing already marginalized communities. Communities in the Montes de Maria region were (and some still are) too fearful to speak out against anyone-- the paramilitaries, the government, and guerillas alike. Even as the rules of the game have been shifting in the wake of the peace processes, there is still little mention of armed actors in relationship to violence of the past and certainly no one speaks about their affiliation to guerrillas except to deny any.

Those suspected of anti-state activity still face dire repercussions including imprisonment or worse, death. The fear and its legacy are so palpable that asking participants in a workshop to play the part of the guerrilla in a role-play met with serious resistance from community members who said they would not even do it as an act.

What people in some communities do actively speak about are the peasant farmer movements of the past and the organizational cohesion at the time of the ANUC when peasant farmers banded together and fight for their rights to land, participated in large takeovers, and won back hundreds of thousands of hectares for their families. Yet never did I hear people in the communities I visited link the agricultural and peasant movements to guerrilla activity or affiliation. However, it is not a question one would raise lightly in the still precarious social and political climate.

I raise this particular narrative about peasant farmer movements because it accounts for the times when I heard the communities story themselves as actively engaged agents, rare occurrences since experiencing massacres and forceful displacement, according to community members in Pichilin, regional victims tables, and Sembrandopaz staff. These organized actions were linked to the law and policy from the government during liberal party leadership that created ANUC in order to organize and resolve longstanding land issues. However, as told by Chucho Perez, in the political climate characterized by power sharing between the liberals and the conservatives, the active, government-sanctioned work of the organization was cut short and abandoned as a government program. The violence in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s insured that



communities remained fragmented and that they would not be able to organize themselves as readily as they had in decades prior.

Law was ever changing during the decades of power sharing between the Conservatives and the Liberals, betraying rural peasant communities in multiple ways each with a different face of violence. Glimmers of hope created by Liberal party laws and policies that advanced the rights and well-being of peasant farmers, raising their voices in the public sphere, were dashed when power shifted to the Conservative party who obliterated their visibility. Many communities felt invisible before the outbreak of mass violence and struggle still today to make themselves legible to the state in the face of government narratives that seek to shore themselves up by not recognizing any alternatives that threaten their power, refute justifications for land ownership, or accuse of human rights abuses.

The law protected people, but only certain people. Interpretation of the law legitimizes certain people over others and makes certain individuals more legible than others depending on who is doing the interpreting. With the master narratives of anti-communist/anti-guerrilla, national security, dominating law and policy, other interpretations of law or of those narratives were left unable to surface. It is widely accepted that the fight for fair wages, 6-day workweeks, and legitimate contracts characterized the peasant protests against the United Fruit Company in 1928 and that the United States with the Colombian government framed those protesters as a communist threat. The ideology of the guerrilla movement grew out of this kind of dismissal of the working poor and their desires for better lives.

However, according to historical accounts (Ramirez, 2011; Rodriguez, 2011), the guerrilla movement began as benevolent to the peasant workers, the marginalized, and the invisible. They provided accompaniment and support with legal documents and associated processes to help small farmers secure official papers proving their land ownership. Some regions experienced so much corruption and disorganization that the FARC provided the only form of governance, reliability, basic services, and infrastructure for the population (Rodriguez, 2011). Guerrilla groups did not always take up arms and some say it was the “Banana Massacre” of 1928 and the subsequent Conservative Party-initiated “Violencia” that backed the guerrilla into a corner where by taking up arms became the only way to get acknowledged by the state and to be heard. However, this shift was not sudden and many communities also felt uneasy about the call to violence, not wanting to participate in this new manifestation of the movement. In the Montes de Maria, communities also experienced violence at the hands of the guerrilla, speaking to me mostly of being forced give them food and shelter. It was the guerrilla presence, however, that made the communities targets of the paramilitary.

In the Montes de Maria, the story is widely shared that President Uribe implemented extreme tactics to starve out the guerrilla forces from the region. The zone was considered to be a zone of rehabilitation and received attention and aid from around the world including USAID from the United States. The state set up barricades prohibiting the entrance of food and water, implementing curfews for people coming and going from the region. Communities remembered with me this time period of inevitable

suffering at the hands of these policies as they faced the same forced restrictions. However, eventually, in 2003 the FARC in that region stood down.

### Reflection

Laws can be extremely powerful in articulating norms and values in relationship to how people treat one another. In the case of Colombia, they have historically worked to legitimize certain populations and marginalize others. By declaring the guerrilla enemies of the state, it legitimized particular kinds of violence against those who were deemed to support or affiliate with the group. Paramilitary forces that massacred and forcefully displaced communities in the Montes de Maria did so with the permission and often times assistance of the Colombian military. As the Colonel shared, it was the military mandate to protect citizens from the guerrilla, who were considered to be enemies of the state. However, it was not their purview, to intervene in paramilitary activity. Now with over seven million displaced and hundreds of thousands murdered, the country is attempting to reconcile with the guerrilla. Once again, the government has turned to the creation of laws in order to address the fall out from decades of violence. In this case, transitional justice laws served to articulate a process for demobilization of paramilitary and later to address victim's rights.

### **The Master Narrative of Law in Society**

Colombia, like many countries facing chaos in the midst and aftermath of violent conflict relies on international law to establish government and legal legitimacy both

internationally and domestically. Many of the laws coming from international human rights law that influenced new legislation in Colombia, placed the onus of rebuilding trust and peace in the regions on the shoulders of state. Likewise, the communities position the state as central to post-conflict processes. Often times when states are positioned so centrally, and structural issues come to bear in these dynamics, a presentation of the state as static, concrete, total, unchanging and monolithic emerges. Recognizing the cracks in the state between the central government and regional and municipal levels, challenges the positioning of the state as a monolith, especially when you have armed groups demonstrating the currency of their power that even gets the mayors in their pockets. This reveals a fissure in the state and impacts the kinds of projects that can emerge from the base, making state formation from the bottom up difficult. (Ramirez, p.12) These contingencies and inconsistencies make trust-building an elusive endeavor especially in communities that have been historically neglected and abandoned by the state. One way in which the state has pushed against this tide of distrust is to lean on international law in order to harness narratives that give it legitimacy and enlist international financial support and international partners in the peace processes in order to substantiate that legitimacy.

International law has not only been enlisted by the state for legitimacy and sometimes survival, however. Human rights activists and advocates who were imprisoned for their work, for example learned that the Colombian state and its institutions were so corrupt that international visibility was a critical part of survival. Winifred Tate (2007) documents this phenomenon earlier on in 1978 when human rights activist realized that people internal to Colombia were not going to listen to the plight of

the people//activists and so reliance on international law became tantamount (Tate, p. 83). Paradoxically, here, not only did the state download universalized discourses generated through international law, but victims themselves recognized that the political situation in their own country was so untenable that their only hope for fair treatment was to call on those same international discourses to protect them.

The state initially mitigated this lack of trust by populating the rural areas with more traditional modes of security by increasing the number of police walk-throughs in communities and expanding military presence. These measures taken in order to respond to international law's call for "guarantees of non-repetition" at first glance might appear to be common-sense strategies to counter the state's absence at the time of violence. However, the communities themselves have reacted in diverse ways to such approaches.

Notably, depending on who was responsible for the threats, massacres and other violence in a region, determined a community's response. For example, in the high mountain region, many deaths occurred at the hands of the military, and as a result, the community of Macayepo does not trust current military units. However, in Mampujan, where forced displacement is attributed to paramilitaries in the region, the community leaders maintain amenable relations with the military (Colonel Diaz, 2014; Jeannette, 2014; police, 2014; Ramirez, 2011). However, this securitization-only approach has given way to more material approaches in the form of reparations that, too, emerge out of dominant discourses of international law that have found their way into local communities struggling to rebuild after decades violent conflict.

In the past eleven years, the Colombian government has undertaken two major initiatives through the implementation of law to address the decades-long violent conflict. These laws, the 975 Justice and Peace Law of 2005 and the 1448 Victims and Land Restitution Law of 2011 have predominated the work between the state and communities in the Montes de Maria. In order to understand the dominant narratives that emerge, I provide background for the two laws that stems from my understanding through conversations with Moni, from the legal team at Sembrandopaz, the text of the laws themselves, published analyses assessing the laws, as well as community voices during my research.

**Law 975: Paramilitary Demobilization as Master Narrative of Peace.** Approximately two years after the guerrilla were forced out of the Montes de Maria Uribe's administration established the 2005 Ley de Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace Law), which called for the demobilization of paramilitary forces. The law was developed in order to bridge the gap between processes of disarmament and the rights of victims. The legislation pertained only to victims of violence committed by paramilitary forces, which for the purposes of this process were considered non-state actors (not an insignificant detail considering the involvement of the state and the local and regional government support of paramilitary activity in the region). The law purported to address elements of truth, justice, and reparations by interrogating instances of violence committed by non-state, paramilitary actors who are allegedly responsible for more than eighty percent of political violence in Colombia, including massacres, selective killings, disappearances, forced displacements and torture (Diaz, 2009, p. 66).

At the time of the law, President Uribe claimed that Colombia was no longer in a state of internal conflict and was, therefore, ready to integrate processes of disarmament with those of transitional justice. The law intended to move away from granting total impunity and amnesty, as the government had been accused of in past processes, by requiring former combatants to testify in judicial hearings as to the nature of the crimes they committed, share facts associated with the crimes, and to reveal the location of disappeared individuals. While former laws did not mandate accountability processes or criminal sentencing of demobilized individuals/groups, the justice and peace law offered reduced sentencing of five-eight years to paramilitaries who contributed their stories and information in the judicial proceedings. In order to ensure the attention to truth, justice and reparations, the government established the Comisión Nacional de Reparaciones y Reconciliación (CNRR) (National Reparations and Reconciliation Commission). According to the mandate, it was the purview of this entity to create an historical memory of the conflict and to establish the truth of the incidents recounted in judicial processes (The Center for Justice and Accountability).

It is important to note that this law emerged out of what have become normative approaches to transitional justice that focus their attention more on perpetrator accountability and on accommodating their reintegration than they attend to the victims of mass violence. Although the law contained a clause requiring an apparatus for paying attention to historical memory and the establishment of truth, upon further scrutiny people understood the state interpretation of the law excluded the voice of victims in the process. There were significant barriers, for victims to access benefits resulting from the

trials as well as fear of retaliation from paramilitaries,<sup>23</sup> severely limiting the number of beneficiaries over time (Summers, 2012). Victims were not invited to be part of the trials or have their own testimonies heard (Diaz, 2009). Likewise, there has been no formal accountability attributed to the state within this law's formation although, according to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Colombia's military and security forces have neglected to protect civilians and have facilitated crimes committed by paramilitaries by providing transportation, munitions and other resources (Diaz, 2009, p.67).

According to Arvelo (2005), international law does not seem to facilitate conflict resolution in Colombia. As a protracted conflict the aims of peacemaking can be at odds with those of achieving justice (Arvelo, 2005, p. 412). The Peace and Justice Law has been under attack by human rights groups, such as articulated by Regina, who argue that it guarantees impunity for some of the worst human rights offenders because testimonies are not sufficiently transparent to the public, too many criminals are offered amnesty, and because it undermines the victims' rights to truth, justice, and reparation (Tabak, 2011, p. 148). Of approximately 28,000 paramilitaries processed in the courts, 90% failed to provide significant information on crimes committed (Diaz, 2009, p. 73). To date, there have only been 33 judicial sentences against paramilitaries since the implementation of the law began (<http://www.fiscalia.gov.co/jyp/>). As of this year, paramilitary leaders who were convicted in initial court proceedings are now being released from prison after serving their reduced sentences.

---

<sup>23</sup> According to Diaz (2009), as of April 2008, fifteen registered victims had been killed in circumstances believed to be related to their claims, with 92 receiving death threats (Diaz, 2009, p. 95).



The Peace and Justice Law in Colombia introduces what is considered an aggressive approach to ensuring reparations (Lloyd, 2011) resulting from criminal prosecutions; however, these prosecutions have been less than successful, due to the complicated bureaucracy and limited accessibility and resources. Additionally, the ongoing conflict has weakened the criminal justice system, slowing processes and overburdening its fiscal and human capacity to operate, especially in the wake of the implementation of the Peace and Justice Law (Diaz, 2009).

In this case, it begs for a closer look at transitional justice mechanisms and their universal approaches to post-conflict contexts with an examination of the dominant paradigms they draw on. In this case, the legalistic, individual accountability pursuit neglects to address critical issues about the violence that occurred. Namely, the law operates to position paramilitary explicitly as “non-state” actors, de-coupling the state and international (ie. U.S.) support of paramilitary violence in the country. So certain aspects of the violence are silenced while other aspects are privileged, and in the process, victims remain invisible or illegible to the state, and the broader public. Despite these challenges, after four years in the court processes a magistrate issued the first judicial sentencing of paramilitary leaders for their role in the 2010 “Case of the Massacre of Mampujan” awarding communities monetary and material reparations.

The sentencing, however, was only the first step. The judicial arm required that the administrative arm of the government carry out the sentencing. It was not until the current Santos administration introduced new victim-oriented legislation grounded on reparations that the infrastructure to support that administration would be solidified. The

1448 Victim and Land Restitution Law of 2011 would serve that capacity.

**Victim Legibility and the Law.** As understood from victims advocates such as Regina from MOVICE, the 2005 Peace and Justice law received increasing vocal backlash from the human rights community, NGOs, and other civil society members demanding that victims voices be represented in post-conflict policies and practices. Their protest echoed the sentiments of people I spoke with from forcefully displaced communities such as Pichilin, Libertad, and the Alta Montaña whom maintained a narrative of abandonment about government, its lack of presence in their communities, and failure to attend to their issues. Because of the pervasive corruption at local and municipal government levels whereby paramilitaries were able to buy the support of local politicians, and because most of the affected communities are rural and difficult to access, efforts at the national level to address community concerns often failed, leading to further distrust. The inability of the state to coordinate between the central and local governments has been a perennial challenge expressed by community members, NGO workers, and civil society members in Colombia, with serious consequences at the regional and municipal levels.

In an effort to face these challenges, in June, 2011, the Santos administration presented the 1448 Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras (Victim's and Land Restitution Law or "Victim's Law") to the Colombian people. The Victim's Law is the most comprehensive law addressing transitional justice for victims ever to be established in Colombia, and the first to foreground legal mechanisms for accountability, truth, justice, reparations, and most significantly land restitution. While there are currently peace negotiations taking place in Havana between the government and members of

FARC, it is distinctive that this legislation is being implemented before the peace negotiations have concluded. According to Summers (2012), ostensibly no political or social change has yet to occur in Colombia, which positions it uniquely within transitional justice processes.

Unlike the previous regime, this new president declared that Colombia was indeed in a state internal conflict. This framing laid the groundwork for the introduction of a victim's law, a law that recognized the Colombian Army, guerillas, and paramilitaries as perpetrators of violence, but not the Colombian state. Likewise, this recognition did not include certain acts of violence that occurred after 2006. Santos claimed that after this date, demobilization efforts resulting from the 2005 Justice and Peace law marked an end to violent paramilitary activities and that subsequent violence was carried out by local bandits, thugs, or drug cartels; groups that are not included in the law because they are considered to be crimes outside of the parameters of the violent conflict. (Chernick, 2013; Correa, 2015). Many contest this controversial element of the law based on common, yet often unspoken, knowledge that networks of paramilitary still operate, committing and threatening violence in many rural communities (Reed-Hurtado, 2010; Correa, 2015).

Despite the continued violence, the Colombian government has been attempting to address the fallout from the 2005 Justice and Peace Law and the decades of violence, forced displacement, and distrust in the government through the comprehensive legislation that promises holistic reparations to "victims" of the conflict.

According to the stipulations of the legislation it is crucial to understand what a

victim is according to the law. The war created victims, a myriad of victims at the hands of various armed actors, and the victim's law intends to delineate what constitutes a victim and to what the associated compensation of victimization amounts. The law stipulates that victims are eligible for reparations in the three following ways: 1. Victims of forced displacement and other human rights abuses occurring before 1985 may only qualify for symbolic reparation, not land restitution or financial compensation. 2. Victims of human rights abuses committed between 1985 and 1991 will be eligible for financial compensation, but not land restitution. 3. Only victims whose lands were misappropriated or illegally occupied through human rights abuses after 1991 and before the end of the law's applicability (ten years) will be eligible for land restitution (Ley de Víctimas, 2011).

However, even this group faces a number of obstacles in obtaining reparation (Amnesty International, p. 6). This has implications for the state's ability to rebuild trust. As victims begin to define themselves vis-à-vis the law, they come to understand that some people and communities experienced more death, harm, destruction, and loss than others and the law does not distinguish between those who fell victim to guerrilla, paramilitary, or state violence.

There is also the issue of providing benefits pre-post conflict to those who were victims of the violent conflict when most of these communities were neglected by the state prior to the conflict and never had their basic needs met in the first place. So not only is there a distinction that is made between what the state is responsible for regardless of the conflict, and what can count as reparations, but those who do not fall under the

definition of “victim” for the purposes of reparations, and also never received proper infrastructure ie. Water, lands, schools, health clinic etc. are still not eligible for such attention from the state because they are not “victims.”

However, given that the Colombian government continually resorts to using laws to communicate with the Colombian people, the Victim’s Law is like an outstretched hand from the government, potentially offering millions of affected citizens an olive branch in the form of reparations for the abuses and violence they experienced. In order to receive this peace offering, affected communities must comply with the rules and regulations outlined in the law. Given the particularities for what constitutes a victim according to the law, it is incumbent upon those harmed in the violent conflict to demonstrate their viability to receive compensation.

To this end, the Victims law has been strategically implemented by an administrative arm of the government that was created before the Santos presidency, however, with the advent of the law, became known as the Unidad Para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas (Unit for the Attention and Holistic Reparations to Victims). People in the region colloquially referred to the entity either as Unidad de Víctimas (Victim’s Unit) or simply the Unidad (the Unit). The unit is housed under the broader umbrella of social services alongside other social welfare programs. Each social service unit operates under different mandates, some attendant to victims of the violent conflict while others to social issues more broadly. But it is the Unidad de Víctimas that is charged with working with communities to engage the reparations processes per the Victim’s Law. At the time of my research, only a few pilot programs were running in

various communities including each of the four communities working with Sembrandopaz who were at various stages each facing their own challenges. The community of Pichilin had only begun the process with the state.

Through my time with Sembrandopaz and attending victim-centered forums, it became clear that this pilot phase rendered certain communities more involved with, or visible, to the government and leaving others to wonder if and how they would ever be selected or make themselves legible as victims. As more communities leaders participating in reparations processes became visible at government events, panels and programs, the status of victim elevated and conversations often centered on how other communities could be seen and heard, raising important questions about how Colombia's Victim's Law constitutes victimhood and how individuals and communities come to access the espoused benefits.

Visibility is critical to this process whereby communities have to make themselves legible as victims to the state in order to be recognized and enroll in the reparations process. What makes victims legible to the state? How do victims come into being? In the next chapter, I will discuss the concept of legibility and the ways in which communities are interpellated or enlisted by the law to perform their victimhood in particular ways in order to be recognized. Mampujan began receiving monetary reparations from the state in 2013. While Mampujan's process began with the 2005 Peace and Justice Law, they worked with the same government entities under different names and eventually became seen as archetypal victims under the Victim's Law. I will use a narrative lens to make sense of these processes and how Mampujan gained, not just

recognition, but notoriety, with non-state and state entities, making their case emblematic.

## Reflection

The many efforts in Colombia to address the violent conflict comprise a complex web of negotiations as the state and local actors vie for legitimacy in the endeavors for peace. National level peace processes frame the landscape as a process between government entities and FARC guerrilla leadership. As the country attempts to transition away from violence, it is mired in distrust and uncertainty. Communities, victims, advocates, peasant farmers, who have been historically marginalized and most impacted by the violence, have been largely left out of the national-level negotiations.

The peace processes operate with the claim that a negotiated settlement at the national level between the state and FARC will generate peace. At the more local and regional level, however, the effort is met with great skepticism that stems from the long history of failed peace agreements in the country that have led to many deaths, but also from the fear and violence that still exists in many rural areas. The sentiment shared at meetings with Sembradopaz at the regional level is that the peace accords are necessary to settle the violence with the guerrillas but that the real work of peacebuilding will happen on the ground, from the base.

While there are an incredible number of organizations operating in the Montes de Maria, the work is very disaggregated and lacks coordination. Efforts to pull organizations together and create networks of solidarity have met with mixed results. For

many, it is critical to have the space to speak about their experiences in often violent contexts where their lives are threatened. However, the conversations often rest on a repetition of the problem or solutions that are overly abstract and lack the substance necessary for actual actions. The gap between conceptualization and operationalization emerges because the context does not support the formulation of actions plans that might uproot the master narrative of the state that keeps peacebuilding at the national level and maintains a story that avoids accountability.

Master narratives about who is “good” and who is “bad” have characterized the conflict landscape in Colombia, supported by laws that instantiated which lives were expendable and who could be killed. Anyone associated with guerrillas, which often meant peasant farmer communities, fall under the category of “bad.” Human rights advocates and peacebuilders have been associated as such as well, all of who have found themselves under the weight of this master narrative about them that they did not create and cannot get out of by themselves.

Just as the laws made guerrillas enemies of the state, justifying paramilitary violence in the Montes de Maria, it was the starving out of guerrilla from the region in 2003 and the introduction of the 2005 Justice and Peace Law that de-escalated violence and resulted in the supposed demobilization and disarmament of 30,000 paramilitary. This processes met with great criticism, especially from the victims of the conflict who felt their voices and concerns were not addressed through the process, which gave impunity to many violent actors. This criticism gave way to the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, which governs reparations activities in the region. These laws operate



as master narratives of justice and peacebuilding in the region and are touted as part of the overarching support of the government in peace processes on the ground. The laws in their implementation, however, have complex dynamics, once they reach the community level.

It is critical to understand the dynamics between the laws informed by international discourses of justice and peacebuilding and the narratives that people have on the ground. As transitional justice laws become utilized more and more, with mixed results, a lens into these dynamics will highlight the challenges and limitations of such laws. An in-depth look at the first community to receive a judicial sentencing and subsequently, reparations provides important information about how the community understands the processes they are in, how they make sense of themselves within that process, and how they are seen by others.

## CHAPTER FIVE: EMBLEMATIC VICTIMS AND THE PRODUCTION OF VICTIMHOOD

*“Narrating it is nothing like having lived it.”* (Daniel, Community Leader Mampujan, 5/2015)

With only thirty-three judicial sentences achieved as a result of the 2005 Peace and Justice Law and the backlash it received for failing to attend to victims, the Colombian government was under pressure to produce legislation that would raise the importance of victim’s voices. This follows the trend of the field of transitional justice that has argued for more inclusion of victims in rebuilding and developing reconciliation processes. At the national level, the negotiators at the table with FARC in Havana have welcomed three delegations of victims to offer their reflections to the process, widely considered unprecedented. That level of inclusion, alongside the 2011 Victim’s Law, has garnered Colombia increased international attention.

What is expected of these laws is that they recognize the harm done to victims, clear the community’s names as accused guerrillas, return lands to those who are displaced, accompany communities in a “dignified return” to those lands, provide reparations for the harm done in the conflict, address needs for basic infrastructure including roads, schools, electricity, running water, access to healthcare and more. It is often questioned, how the government could ever comply with all that is eligible under the law because of financial and human capacity constraints. Despite this, communities

and the state enter into reparations processes as prescribed by the laws, which begins with proving victimhood. The process by which communities prove their victimhood is laborious and bureaucratic, requiring that supposed victims of the violent conflict register with the state and produce documentation and records of their holdings and losses over time. In order to be recognized by state as “victims,” communities or individuals must do so in accordance with the definitions articulated by the law. This process of producing the self as and being defined as a “victim” is critical to being included in the reparations processes initiated by the state, and is the first step for many neglected communities in making themselves legible to the state.

### **Legibility**

The production of victimhood is a narrative process and is important for understanding how communities and the state make themselves legible in the aftermath of violent conflict. When powerful dominant narratives about how to rebuild trust in the aftermath of violence circulate into rural communities, it sets in motion a dynamic system of narrative interactions that is particular to each community with which it intersects. The law does not encounter an empty vessel when it meets the community and, therefore, cannot prescribe exactly how a community is going to produce itself in response. The dominant narratives and associated processes are absorbed into local discourse, resisted, contested, denied, and taken up by communities such that they intersect with and are re-configured by local discursive resources. Often times these processes are mediated by organizations such as Sembrandopaz.

In the instance of the community of Pichilin, once a group of approximately thirty community leaders from the community agreed to commit their time, energy, and resources to the reparations process in collaboration with Sembrandopaz in March of 2013, the legal arm of Sembrandopaz drafted correspondence to the Unidad de Victimias making the argument as to why Pichilin should be included in the pilot program. In their letter, they emphasized that Pichilin was the first community to experience violence in the Montes de Maria region and reiterated the government's neglect of the community for almost twenty years (Letter to Unidad). This justification, this claim to victimization about Pichilin was repeatedly cast by Sembrandopaz, the community themselves, and eventually the Unidad de Victimias. The claim emphasized the abandonment of the state over the number of murders or displacements in their community. The stories at the intersection of these discourses did not just produce victims based on the community's experience of violence but requires that the community produced a particular story of victimhood in order to be legible.

Transitional justice laws in Colombia, interpellate victims into being and doing victimhood, setting the parameters for the interaction created, initiated, and policed by the laws that are imposed by the state onto communities. The requirements are outlined such that the victims are required to have experienced violence in a particular time frame by particular actors. The definitions largely rely on the harm done. Besides having a compelling story of victimhood, in order to be chosen for the program, the Unidad de Victimias seeks to work with communities that have the capacity to engage with the state bureaucracy and to produce the required documents (Interview, Unidad de Victimias).

This translates into selecting communities with stronger organizational capacity and leadership structures. Communities that work with Sembrandopaz might be characterized as having a comparative edge on this front given that one of their primary investments in the communities they work with is leadership development and capacity building. When I asked the Unidad de Victimas if they are influenced to work with communities that have close relationships with organizations like Sembrandopaz, the response was, “we have found through experience that we have had the most success working with communities with leadership capacity.”(Unidad de Victimas). The law’s parameters and the interpretations by state functionaries has implications for how people are made intelligible or legible to the state and what the criteria are for doing so. Because these stories are not mere replications of the law, it is important to look at how the process works through lived experiences at the local level.

According to leaders in the communities accompanied by Sembrandopaz, the laws introduced discourses of victimhood into communities, first, cursorily, through the 2005 Peace and Justice Law and then more explicitly through the 2011 Victim’s Law. However, communities that experienced violence five-fifteen years prior to each of the laws already had stories circulating about themselves and their lives. Before the introduction of the laws into the community leaders say they mostly identified as “displaced” rather than as “victims.” Their narratives, as displaced people often centered on religion, farming, paramilitary activity, local corruption, fear, abandonment by the state, and their innocence of collaborating with any illegal armed groups. These narratives are the discursive resources communities had to draw from in order to make

themselves visible to the state, making the situation quite complex, because the narratives were often critical of or negative about the state.

The vignette about the community of Pichilin in the introduction of this dissertation, whereby the community learned that the Supreme Court mandated that the military provide a plaque and a public apology, demonstrates the complexity of the reactions to a formulaic mechanism for forgiveness that was assigned without the consultation of the community. That the community who still maintains a quieting narrative of abandonment took the initiative to decline the offer until they received reparations demonstrated that the community was not a passive recipient of the judgment and, in actuality, they contested it so that it was more in alignment with the desires of the community. The development of this confidence and agency over time was a transformation from the community that I had not encountered over a year earlier. The community had located a collective sense of itself, and experience told them that they were able to voice their reactions to decisions that directly affected them. As the state rolled out laws that addressed the rights of victims and communities became aware of the legislation they saw the law as an opportunity to counter their experience of abandonment. The way that this manifested was through processes of what many in the communities and peacebuilding sector called recognition.

### **The Politics of Recognition**

Often in the field of transitional justice and conflict resolution, the process of countering abandonment narratives where by communities are acknowledged by the state

are framed as “recognition.” Recognition has been accepted as an essential part of post-conflict processes for victims in Colombia who wish to have public acknowledgment of their innocence. However, recognition as a concept has been contemplated and understood in a variety of ways. Often recognition is articulated as a way of seeing sameness or likeness between oneself and another (Oliver, 2001). Charles Taylor’s conception of recognition refers to the acknowledgement that different cultural identities make up the uniqueness of individuals and groups. Within this conception, identities are understood to develop through interaction with other and are then contingent on being acknowledged by the other. In order for people to feel recognized, they need that acknowledgment conferred (Taylor, 1997). However, Taylor’s multicultural view of recognition as acknowledgment of difference does not necessarily account for power dynamics and occludes the politics of the act of recognizing which are always present. Recognition sets up power dynamics in which one cannot self-identify, but, rather is dependent on being recognized by terms they did not create themselves, therefore maintaining hierarchical and dependent relations (Butler, 2013; Oliver, 2001). Oliver challenges that recognition does not go far enough in these conceptualizations and that what is needed is to move from processes of recognition to witnessing that which is “beyond recognition,” making knowledge of and “response-ability” to difference possible. In so doing, socio-historical subjectivities must be taken into account (Oliver, 2001, p. 18).

When marginalized indigenous or other cultural groups struggle to maintain their own practices, laws, customs, norms, dominant cultural narratives, their legitimacy is

dependent on the dominant culture, the master narratives often of the state. This politics of recognition calls into question who sets the parameters for how a community becomes legitimate or legible to the state or others. How does that positioning relate to other communities or the state? As the law sets the parameters for how victims get recognized, it could be seen as a form of policing by the state (Rancière, 2001) and Butler and Anasthasiousiso (2013) offer that communities might consider the costs of becoming recognized. However, it follows that there could be a greater cost if there were not avenues for any kind of recognition at all, presenting a double-edged sword.

Communities in the Montes de Maria used the term to express their desire for explicit acknowledgement that they were not guerrilla collaborators and that they were innocent victims of illegal atrocities. However, this concept of recognition serves as shorthand for complex relational dynamics. Narratives of the Colombian state and local communities interact with each other and engage in particular kinds of discursive work in order to move toward recognition, and that work is situated within particular politics and power relationships. Drawing back on the conversations in response to the newspaper article conveying the mandate for apology, Pichilin was never consulted in order to set the terms of the actions. Before I arrived with the newspaper article, they had not heard of the judicial sentencing at all. As victims they were not given any authority over the process or given the opportunity to speak on their own behalf.

When the state interpellates communities through the law to act in particular ways, the process itself is complicated. These communities have been largely invisible for years and they can only emerge as subjects when there are frames that establish the



possibility for that emergence (Butler, 2009, p. 139). In this case, in order to be recognized, the frames of the Colombian laws call on subjects to emerge and construct themselves as victims. The state is setting the parameters for how the communities need to story themselves in order to be recognized as victims, by the state. In this case, they are required to make the identity-claim of victim, based on a particular experience of violence, as if it is a static attribute. The process does not build in the possibility for evolution or transformation of that identity, making it a status quo endeavor. The state is, ironically, positioned as the antidote to victimization, perpetuating the dependency that communities have on the state apparatus and maintaining their marginality in political processes. The irony rests in the history of state complicity in the violence for which they are now positioned as the antidote.

It is widely held in the communities that the state looked the other way at the violence in Montes de Maria and that the military was not mandated to protect them from paramilitary violence. With the advent of the laws, the state raised its efforts to build trusting relationships with communities and the reparations package that is articulated by the law is comprehensive. Through the presence of the victim's law, and the way that operations are defined, the state has positioned itself, with concurrence from communities, as the antidote to violence. The establishment, especially, of a "rights" framework, compels previously abandoned to communities to see the law as an opening for the state repair the harm done to them. The history of the state's complicity in the violence in rural communities dates back to before the onset of the violent conflict as we know it and the laws and the communities position the state as the entity that can repair

the damage. One way the state mitigates this is through the diagnostic of the harm done in the community, followed by an action plan. The action plan attempts to allocate responsibility beyond just the state to other entities, however, the state is positioned as the administrator and, therefore, responsible.

Beyond the problematic of positioning and the status quo endeavor of recognition in this case, the law also requires communities to be defined and define themselves by their state of injury or the harm done to them in order to be recognized and assisted by the state through reparations processes. Focusing the victim identity on injury caused by the particular event of violence masks the possibility that there has been ongoing oppression and marginalization prior to or subsequent to the particular moment. The conditions that led to the massacres and displacements positioned the communities as viable locations for violence. Such conditions were created over the course of the decades of power-sharing on the political level making support for poor, peasant farmers unstable, exposing a long history of marginalization and oppression dating long before the actual acts of paramilitary violence in the mid 1990s and early 2000s.

Regardless of the limitations of this call, communities are compelled to comply with their positioning as victims as described in the master narratives of the law, even though their subjectivity is created to fit into the established norms and they do not get to debate the terms of recognition or participation (Butler, 2009, p. 140). After what for some communities has been decades of abandonment, this recognition from the state in the form of the law, is unprecedented and, while it may not liberate subjects to be able to frame themselves or tell stories about themselves in the ways that they might choose,

they see this recognition is a way of making themselves visible to the state and of being cleansed of their accused identities as guerrillas or guerrilla supporters. In the case of Mampujan, a statement was made in the regional newspaper stating the community did not support guerrillas.

These accusations that persist in the aftermath of violence and are anchored by master narratives about the conflict, perpetuate fractures in and between communities and in individual identities and daily practices and cultural norms are often suspended because of fear, displacement, or force. Reclaiming spaces for cultural practices becomes important to the recovery of community and family identity. However, often, violence leaves communities feeling abandoned, despondent, and fearful, mounting struggles to re-engage in ritual activities, and deepening their marginalization and exclusion from political participation. The Colombian state currently engages communities in reparations processes in order to re-build trust in institutions and repair fractured relationships. However, not every community gets recognized as victims or is chosen to work with the state on collective reparations. Questions have been raised as to who gets chosen and why? These questions are particularly important not only in terms of creating fairness, but also in terms of the possible downfall that differential treatment or acknowledgment risks fomenting new kinds of antagonisms between communities.

There are further politics to the process of communities producing themselves as victims vis-à-vis the law. Within the dynamics between the communities and the state, how does the state become legible to the communities? There is currency or even privilege to having access to the information that makes it possible for communities to

understand what the necessary steps are for interpreting the interpellation or the call to action and to definition as victims. That access at times transcends merely textual interpretation of the law and extends to physical access to government entities and to discursive understandings of how to perform, speak, or act appropriately. Navigating this complexity heightens the value of mediating organizations such as Sembrandopaz that understand complex political landscapes, and have access to such resources.

However, access to these resources once again is not inherently transformative. The government, intermediary organizations, and even community leaders refer to many of the meetings that take place between their entities and the communities as “socialization”<sup>24</sup> processes. The very concept of socialization by simple definition means “to teach (someone) to behave in a way that is acceptable in society (Merriam-Webster).” From a sociological perspective it can also be defined as “a continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position (Dictionary.com).”

Positioning through socialization, as such, maintains unequal distributions of power by requiring that victims fit into the social position prescribed by the state. This subjectivity and community identity crucially depends on dialogic relations with others, and interactions with the master narratives in circulation. In this case, the state is positioned and positions itself as having the power to confer this new victim identity, one that supplants a community’s previously imposed identity as guerrilla collaborators, through the implementation of the law. Communities participating in these processes are

---

<sup>24</sup> There is a vast literature on socialization, however, here I am using the word that they use in Colombia and attempt to use it as they do as opposed to situating it within that literature.

required to speak and behave in particular ways that only highlight certain aspects of their identities-- those aspects that correspond to their identities as victims. Understanding the dynamics of this recognition reveals the politics and currents of power of the process as communities make themselves legible to the state within master narratives that constrain the production of self.

The law introduced the language of victimhood, prior to which communities identified as “displaced.” As communities learned what it meant to be considered a “victim” vis-à-vis the law, it became a sought-after title with status. In Colombia, being a victim carries gravitas for communities who were forcefully displaced or experienced violence in the past. With the eventual passing of 2011 Victim’s Laws, those who are able to prove their victimhood are eligible for benefits from the state, mostly in the form of reparations. With the development of the victim’s law, the situation emerged whereby, in order for communities to be acknowledged, or recognized by the state, they are required adopt the victim identity as it is outlined in the laws, lest they be left unseen, unrecognized, illegible. As communities develop their victim identity, so too do they develop personhood. Especially with the advent of the Victim’s Law, which provides resources and certain rights for victims, at times the label of victim is prideful. Because their rights are only conferred through their identity as victims, communities are constituted by a victim narrative as they develop new meanings about themselves.

This personhood, as defined by interactions with the state, requires that communities define themselves through their injuries enacted by illegal armed groups. This definition of personhood constructed through the identification to injuries incurred

during violence is one-dimensional. It fails to account for the holistic account that people would make about themselves, therefore, limiting their articulation as multi-dimensional beings with rich lived experiences that encompass more than just their experiences of violence and their identification with the harm done. Likewise, it limits the potential for communities to construct themselves as agents and fully articulated social and political subjects.

In an ironic twist, within this complex dynamic with the state in which they become victims, the communities also begin to organize and actually fight for what they believe is rightfully theirs- the reparations. This sense of agency can be seen in meetings, especially those where Sembrandopaz was present and encouraged community members to dream big or supported them to take authority in their decision-making. During one preparatory meeting in anticipation of negotiations with the Unidad de Víctimas, women in Pichilin were moved to their feet as they spoke passionately about what they were rightfully owed as a dignified community. I also observed it in conversations over coffee when community members reflected on the ways they were dissatisfied, catalyzing particular events such as marches, soccer tournaments, and non-violent actions in order to make claims to rights as well as to create meaning in new ways as a community. This web of victimhood, agency, and state control can be seen by examining the processes that the communities engage in with state entities and challenges dominant discourses about victims as feeble, lazy, and without capacity. While there are times when communities express helplessness in their quest for actual social transformation in the midst of their engagement with the state, especially after disappointing meetings with the Unidad de

Victimas or when the summer draught left their crops destroyed, ultimately, they also show signs of hope. In this back and forth between hope and hopelessness, communities perform their victimhood for the state, in order to receive their reparations. “Es complicado.” “It’s complicated.” A phrase uttered before and after almost every story or explanation about the violence and the current dynamics between communities and the state.

Mampujan was the first community to receive a judicial sentencing against paramilitary leaders and subsequently, the first community to receive reparations and land restitution. Their process with the state began in 2008 and, at the time of my arrival, many in the community had already received their reparations and had begun investing the money to transform their homes into what they refer to as their “mansions.”

While most of the community has received monetary compensation at this point, they are still navigating the complexities of working with the state to iron out inconsistencies and to negotiate their land restitution and “right to return.” Their case has become emblematic, however, and provides a critical lens for understanding how a community made themselves so legible over time that they actually became “famous.” What follows is a closer look at the processes through which Mampujan became emblematic victims. The process is not a mere replication of the law, rather, this examination provides a glimpse into how dominant discourses and practices live and interact with local communities as they produce themselves as victims.

As communities in Colombia strive to make sense of the breaches that have taken place in their social worlds, history, and context, experiences of violence and the politics

of speaking influence the kinds of narratives that emerge within and about them. A narrative lens, which allows for an inquiry into the particular, is critical, then, to understanding how people might recover in the aftermath of violent conflict. In the particular context of the Montes de Maria, communities are not just making sense of the past and ongoing violence amongst themselves. As the state engages communities in process of transitional justice and peacebuilding those dominant narratives inflect processes of meaning making which then influences the way that communities see themselves and view their recovery in the aftermath. Analyzing from a narrative lens what happens when these dominant narratives intersect with community narratives and their associated meanings as communities struggle to make themselves legible to the state has import for understanding transitional justice and peacebuilding practices. These processes are mediated by the narratives of intermediary organizations such as Sembrandopaz who accompany communities in their communications and actions related to reparations.

Sembrandopaz is the pathway into this story that follows about Mampujan, who became the first community to receive a judicial sentencing and consequently the first to receive reparations and land restitution. Theirs is what is touted as a “success” story because they represent an example of the state “succeeding” in rebuilding trust and standing by their promises with this first exemplary case. However, being the exemplar sets Mampujan apart from the experience of the vast majority of other communities of victims who have not received any kind of recognition from the state. Part of what sets them apart is that they do not maintain the prominent narrative of abandonment that is



prevalent in the rest of the region, they do not anchor their history on the peasant movements of ANUC, and their community was spared any kind of massacre. This is critical however, then as a case, to understand what the state does tout as a success story and what the politics are of elevating and elaborating that story on the national and international stage, revealing the politics of these reparations processes and how certain stories that gain traction do so at the cost of others.

### The “Success” Story of Mampujan

Mampujan is heralded by the Colombian state as a success story. In just a paragraph, the Unidad de Víctimas makes that claim demonstrating what it means to them for a community to be a “success.” Here it reads:

"Report on Successful Cases of Territorial Accounts"

#### BOLIVAR

*Activities of the entity highlight, the recovery of trust and the process of social and community reconciliation of victims of the village of San Cayetano (municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno) and **Mampuján** (municipality of María la Baja).*

*This work of implementation, coordination and permanent support of the Unidad (de Víctimas), coupled with the leading competence of its leaders, has **enabled this community to become true political and social subjects**, who, today, are **examples of overcoming the pain and hatred sown by violence, of the reconstruction of the social fabric and of leadership in the region.***

*The Restitution Unit, DPS, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, the government and municipalities, among others, have joined the common cause in the work of rebuilding communities. Roads, bridges, schools, kiosks, monuments, housing, storage centers, trucks, commemorations, marches, psychosocial workshops, reconciliation processes, have been deployed over the three years of the Victims Law and execution of the sentence.*

*The strength and maturity shown have triggered a new future and a new dawn for future generations. The slightly hostile attitude towards the institutional entities and the community divisions present at the onset of the judicial process, have been transformed*

*into an attitude of union, respect and trust between one another.*  
(<http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/?q=node/259>)

The statement offers a range of signposts that signify the success of Mampujan as a community-- one that has recovered trust, achieved social and community reconciliation, become “true political and social subjects,” and overcome the pain and hatred the grew out of the violence. Materially, the Victim’s Unit touts success as the execution of a variety of rituals, workshops and infrastructure projects that were collectively achieved within the parameters of Victim’s law, which mandates a three-year time-frame for the entities to fulfill commitments to the communities once they are approved by the state to enter the reparations process. The report claims that now that the three years have concluded, these communities have “become true political and social subjects,” insinuating that they previously were not true political subjects and that it is through their process of becoming victims and having that victimhood conferred and addressed through reparations that they then have overcome the pain of the past and transformed into political and social actors. The arrival or destination that the state ascribes to the reparations process is material, quantifiable, and, in this case, does not reflect the subjective, lived reality of the community.

This is the narrative that the state has about Mampujan. What is the story that Mampujan produced in processes with the state that warrants this narrative about them? Does the community of Mampujan tell this same story about itself? Mampujan’s story is one that has garnered a tremendous amount of attention by local, national, and international organizations. It has propelled them to the national stage as the first community to receive a judicial sentencing in their favor against two paramilitary leaders,

the first to receive reparations from the state, and most recently as recipients of the Colombian National Peace Prize.

What is their story and why is it so powerful? What work has it done to avail them of the recognition they have received from the state?

### Emblematic Victims

This is an emblematic victim story- not because it actually represents other forcefully displaced or terrorized communities in the region or because it is a case that is replicable. It does not represent the most common victims; rather it is exemplary of an ideal. Victims are an abstraction in the same way as a “villain” or a “hero” (Christie, 1986, p. 18). Christie (1986) offers a set of characteristics that comprise the archetypal victim that is given legitimate status as victims: 1. Weak, sick, old, young, 2. carrying out respectable project 3. could not possibly be blamed 4. the offender was big and bad 5. the offender was unknown and of no personal relation (Christie, p. 18).

While all of the victims of Mampujan might not fully embody each of these characteristics, as their story is revealed, the resonance becomes quite evident as their role as victim is engendered over time. As their victimhood is produced in interaction with the state processes and their own narratives, their story becomes one that the state can tell and even showcase. They become the victims who are legible not only to the state but respond to the call for neoliberal strategies. As the ideal victim according to Christie (1986), they should be strong enough to speak, but weak enough not to threaten other important interests, in this case, interests of the state (Christie, p. 21).

Mampujan never threatens the state's interests and, while they assert themselves, they never pose a threat to the system. There is a distance that gets created between Mampujan and other communities as the state takes up and elaborates their narrative over time. So the archetype is less about what is real and lived in the experience of victim's lives and is more about the abstraction and how it fits within the recognizable storyline of the good/ideal victim according to the parameters outlined by the state. As Mampujan develops its victim narrative, the narrative draws on archetypal storylines that increase their legibility to the state, academics, filmmakers, etc. such that their story gets elaborated to the point that it is no longer "theirs." It becomes appropriated by the state as a success story, as we see in the blurb by the Unidad de Víctimas above.

That their story, which follows, is emblematic and draws heavily on archetypes does not diminish the community's pain and suffering of the violence they experienced but rather serves as a way to examine legibility to the state. What was the story that this community told about their victimhood that made it so compelling that they became exemplars for reparations processes in Colombia? Their path to this narrative is a complicated one that is far from linear. However, understanding and examining the major storylines collectively told as a result of their experiences of violence and their processes with the state retrospectively and their characterization of the major event history that has led to their "success" with the state, we can see how this archetypal narrative interacts with the dominant narratives of transitional justice that were being downloaded and acted upon during their process. How was Mampujan so legible to the

state? What was it about their story that received so much traction? How did they become the archetypal “good victims?”

### Forced Displacement: The Prophecy, The Angel, and The Miracle as Narrative Tropes

I remember the morning I first learned of their prophecy; a prophecy they see themselves living out and affirming daily. It was my second day in the community of Mampujan, Colombia at the very start of my research and I was spending time with two community leaders, Celino and Graciela and their two daughters, accompanied by Kat, our mutual dear friend and colleague at the grassroots organization, Sembrandopaz. It was through my connection with Kat and Sembrandopaz that I had been introduced to the community of Mampujan and, more specifically, Celino, Graciela and their children. That morning we traveled by motorbike from their house in New Mampujan to what they referred to as a “represa,” the meaning of which I would not come to fully understand until we arrived at the reservoir. The rural, dirt road and the lush greenery surrounding it guided our leisurely ride to the represa and eventually lead us to the large water source, which provided a panoramic, open space surrounded by a thinning but picturesque forest. As we approached the path leading to where we could enter the water to swim, we strategically placed the motorbikes in eyeshot, and I took note of the level of concern expressed for our safety.

As Graciela came to join us in the sun-drenched water, she immediately and anxiously approached me, equipped with a healthy supply of questions that I had not anticipated. (I later learned that the night before when we attended an evangelical

Christian revival in the community, she had learned from our mutual friend that I am Jewish.) One question barely finished rolling off her tongue before the next two were fighting to get breath. The questions ranged from my belief in Jesus Christ to the horrors of the Holocaust as she rattled off names of movies that I deciphered with great effort- Schindler's List, The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler. She demonstrated her knowledge of the Jewish experience of violence through these exposures and expressed her concern and outrage. After the barrage of questions and answers calmed, we responded to their daughters' anxious request to leave the reservoir- preferring to swim in the river framed by concrete banks.

As we were relocating, I mounted Celino' motorbike, their younger daughter seated in between us, and he proceeded to tell me that a few years prior to Mampujan's displacement in 2000, it was revealed to the community in a sermon, that one day, people from around the world would come to hear their story. What they were not aware of was that story would be predicated on and, come at the extreme cost of fear, violence, displacement, and victimhood. Never, he told me, had he imagined that a Jew would be part of this. God sending a Jewish person to hear his community's story was transcendental and integral to fulfilling their prophecy.

This prophecy anchored the community's narrative about their violence and was and remains critical to how they narrate their story. Mampujan is an afro-Colombian, predominantly evangelical Christian, peasant farmer community situated on the Caribbean Coast in the department of Bolivar in the municipality of Maria la Baja. The community, often referred to as Mampujan Nuevo, New Mampujan, is located a stone's

throw from the main road, approximately an hour and fifteen minutes from the major port city of Cartagena. This is where the community has resided since 2000 after being forcefully displaced seven kilometers from their original lands by right-wing paramilitary forces on March 10<sup>th</sup> of that year.

It was on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000 that the paramilitary militia known as the “Bloque Héroes de Montes de Maria” (Block Heroes of Montes de Maria) arrived in carloads to the original lands of Mampujan Viejo, Old Mampujan, nestled in the hills of the Montes de Maria. The illegally armed militia arrived at 5pm in the evening during the routines of daily life, children playing soccer in the main square, women preparing dinner, doing the washing. At first no one took special note of their arrival, assuming the men were from the national security forces. However, at 6pm, the illegally armed militia cleared out all of the homes and forced community members into a mass roundup in the main square using the butts of their guns, physical violence, and death threats, accusing them of being and/or supporting anti-state guerillas groups.

According to the community’s description, the paramilitary unit, wearing masks, sharpened their swords while they read a list of who in the community was “bad” and who was “good.” This attack came twenty days subsequent to a famous massacre in El Salado where sixty peasant farmers were brutally murdered. The paramilitary informed the people of Mampujan that they could expect the same. As the community sensed the time approaching when the swords would be used against them, the women and men were forced into separate lines while the men in masks explicated the gore of their imminent slaughter, that their heads would be used as soccer balls by the end of the night

and not even the dogs would survive.

In this moment, the people of Mampujan began to pray and pray loudly, asking for mercy from God, when on the horizon an angel arose from over the hills and an outstretched hand emerged from the light of the moon. In this moment they knew that God was with them and that they would be safe. And amidst the chaos, the head in charge of the operation received a call on his radio phone, after which he announced that he had been informed of the community's innocence; that they were not guerrilla fighters or supporters and that they would not be killed.

The paramilitary then grabbed seven men from Mampujan as guides and informed the community that they would be moving onward to the next village of Las Brisas. Anyone who was left on the land upon their return would be executed. They were given until the next morning to grab what they could and vacate their homes. Most of the community thought they were leaving for a few days at most and had no idea that their houses would be pillaged and burned to the ground, with their community remaining displaced after more than fifteen years. However, according to the story that circulates in and about Mampujan, this was their miracle "el milagro," that while they were forcefully displaced seven kilometers away from their lush land by the flowing river that had been decimated, no one from their community was actually killed. Their double miracle was that the seven men who had been abducted as guides for the paramilitary returned alive as well.

More than fifteen years later, this narrative is foundational to the way that Mampujan understands itself in the context of rebuilding their community in the



aftermath of violent conflict. The narratives of the prophecy, the angel appearing and “el milagro” are threads that support the master narrative of the evangelical community that makes up the majority of Mampujan and anchors their belief that everything that happens is God’s will and that Jesus’ teachings have primacy. When visitors come to the community, they are showered with these stories that are often told in relationship to the fact that Mampujan was the first community to receive a judicial sentencing in their favor as part of the 2005 Peace and Justice Law which guaranteed them monetary and other material reparations, including police security, roads, a health center, and much more.

This sentencing earned them great notoriety that was at first overwhelming and often times off-putting. However, understanding themselves within the context of the prophecy challenged them to be open to the attention they were receiving from NGOs, the government, researchers, filmmakers and the like, from all around the world. Daniel, an evangelical leader in Mampujan reflects on the rage that he once carried at the arrival of researchers from the United States who came with questions about the community’s experience of violence. This hypocrisy, as he called it, was difficult to reconcile as he, along with many other Colombians on the coast, believe that funds from the United States government helped to intensify and prolong the violence. However, the prophecy according to Daniel made it clear that the community was not just a spectacle or an experiment to be judged but an exemplar for Colombia and the world to learn from in their efforts to advance. And it was their story of the miracle and the prophecy that they would emphasize.

As Daniel briefly shared the history of Mampujan with a Canadian group from the

University of Winnipeg visiting to learn the story of Mampujan for their course on Human Rights and Conflict, he began with the historical details and finished by situating those details within the context of the community's prophecy.

*Mampujan was established in 1882 and dedicated to agriculture like most of the Montes de Maria. As you can see the environment here is great for agriculture. We were part of the 1000-day war and in different periods of history we have been affected by war and displacement. This community was the center of things for other communities and the municipality. There were sports exchanges and ceremonies for when someone dies, and other types as well. In the 90s there was an emergence of paramilitary violence in the region. **There was intensified confrontation with the guerrilla and the army, but this community kept its neutral position, we didn't participate in the guerrilla, the army or the police.***

*On March 10th, we experienced what we can call a catastrophe that we were displaced. Before that date, maybe fifteen to twenty years before, this is a community that prays, and someone said that this would be a well-known community around the world; that many people from around the world would come to hear their story, how they did it, how they made it. So when we face the displacement we believe that this is the fulfillment of the prediction. **The fact that nothing happened to us is news on the world scale and we believed that this ratified that word of God.** And now that there are so many people coming from all over and that we are welcoming you, we believe that prediction is being fulfilled now. Mampujan is the first community that due to the law of 2005 was subject to the first judicial decision for reparations. It was also the first community that received the first land restitution as a result of the 1448 law. **Over time, all of this is happening because God has this in his plans and that is how we understand it. It hasn't been easy- the reconstruction of our community. It now has two parts, one part is in the plan to return and others of us are being relocated, and we believe it is God that is guiding this...***

***And, what I feel is that, I feel like a tool that God uses to tell you what happened. And it's also important to tell you the story so that it doesn't occur again. At first it was really painful, but now, even though it causes pain, one understands that it's important that the others know the experiences of the communities in Colombia. (5/28/14)***

In this speech that Daniel draws on the stories of the prophecy and the "milagro," to make sense of the violence the community experienced at the hands of the paramilitaries. He makes sure to proclaim Mampujan's neutrality in the violence so as to ensure they are

not mistaken as violent and to maintain their status as innocent victims. These characterizations align with those of Christie's notion of the ideal victim as Daniel draws on their noble activities before the violence, proclaims their undoubted innocence, and demonstrates the strength of the community without challenging the state. The way that prophecy and God are invoked in their story about themselves draws attention away from the culpability of the state and justifies the violence as God's work to make the community great in the face of adversity.

This story is a rehearsed story. I, personally, heard it told mostly when new people would arrive to learn about the community for the first time. But it is a story that serves a purpose for the community in the larger world as well as for themselves with varying consequences. This narrative places emphasis on the role of God in the events that transpired pre-violence, during the violence, and now after the violence. This is no small detail considering Colombia is a predominantly Catholic country with estimates of anywhere from five to fifteen percent of the population identifying as evangelical. The church itself has been extremely influential in the conflict with varying degrees of support from the population as a result of historical alignment with the conservative party. However, it is undeniable that the Colombian people value the word of God, making it a story with currency in the country and viable and valuable as a victim story. The community's narratives are anchored to religious master narratives making them legible more widely.

## Damaged Identities

The presence of God and the prophecy in their story gives the community a sense of coherence in the aftermath of violence when communities and stories are fractured and identities are damaged. In the case of paramilitary violence in the Montes de Maria, communities were massacred and displaced because they were accused of being guerrilla supporters. In the particular case of Mampujan, the municipality of Maria la Baja where the community fled, while initially sympathetic, eventually treated their presence as displaced people with disdain. Community members recall the verbal abuse of their community and attacks on their personhood.

These kinds of abuses and attacks over time may result in further damaging people's identities over time leading to what Hilde Nelson (2001) refers to as "infiltrated consciousness," whereby individuals or groups of individuals begin to internalize the accusations leaving stains on their sense of selves. When identities are damaged, people/communities sometimes experience what Nelson refers to as "deprivation of opportunity" that occurs when powerful persons or individuals seeing people as sub- or abnormal, unjustly prevent them from occupying roles or entering into relationships that are identity constituting (Nelson, 2001, p. 21).

At the time of the violence experienced in Mampujan, the community was displaced and faced prevailing master narratives that positioned guerrillas as the enemy and, therefore, anyone associated to them, as expendable. Before the introduction of the Victim's Law and still today in some regions, it is difficult and dangerous to speak out directly against that narrative- the consequence for which was historically death and

remains imprisonment, if not death. While Mampujan did not face harassment immediately after being displaced and people in Maria la Baja were initially sympathetic to their experience, a master narrative will do everything in its power to keep its legitimacy, making any counter to them extremely difficult to mount, though not impossible. It is through the construction of narratives that counter or fall outside of the master that identities may be reconstituted.

These so-called counternarratives work to dislodge particular aspects of the master narrative or to uproot it all together. In the process, counterstories work to re-constitute identities that may have been damaged. Nelson (2001) proposes a typology of three possible ways that counternarratives operate in relationship to a master narrative: 1. Refuse- deny it applies to self, 2. Repudiate-limit the damage (re-identify self) 3. Contest- challenge publically and systematically (Nelson, p. 169). However, not all counterstories accomplish their task of challenging the dominant narrative and, often, they can end up reinforcing it. Master narratives learn and grow and often appropriate elements of a counternarrative into its own architecture giving an appearance of friendliness but actually co-opting it. This process serves to maintain the marginality or de-legitimization that the master narrative reinforces.

Narratives about Mampujan as alleged guerrilla were nearly impossible to refuse, repudiate, or contest because they ricocheted right off the master narrative. However, the narratives of the “milagro” and the “prophesy,” are narratives anchored by the mystical, and run orthogonal to the dominant narrative without directly opposing it. That Mampujan did not experience a massacre is a breach in the norm of violence in the

region, which most often resulted in massacres and abandonment by the state. The story of Mampujan represents a break in these more common storylines, which do not focus attention on the blame of the state or wallow in their story of victimization, therefore not operating in the same way as a counternarrative.

The power of the story of Mampujan is overwhelming in this context because of the way that their archetypal narratives move beyond any countering. They do not directly go up against or challenge the state or the perpetrators, rather their story is about their community and how special, unique, and blessed they are and how they are living out God's prophesy. One reason this has uptake by the state because there is no accusation there. Once again, this follow suit with Christie's ideal victims who are strong enough to be heard but do not to threaten the state.

From another perspective, in their narratives "God" does the countering for them and provides the recognition that most communities only seek from the state. It is their prayers that God responds to and the presence of God that is credited with the acknowledgment of their innocence in that moment when they are exempted from brutal murder. This framing of God's attention to their community positions them as special, unique, and a miracle to behold. This is a compelling narrative that anchors itself on motifs from the bible that are ubiquitous and alluring and in and of themselves are master narratives.

God, religion, and myths as master narratives can serve as a guide for meaning making. Eastmond (2007) found this to be true in the way refugees made sense of their experiences of uncertainty and liminality. "Such narratives may enlist ideological,

religious or mythical idioms to provide explanation, legitimation and hope (Eastmond, p. 256). Situating Mampujan's violent displacement within the context of myth, religious mysticism, or magic realism, placed the community and "their suffering and chaos in a vast setting of cosmological order and continuity in which they and their very existence were made deeply significant (Eastmond, 2007, p. 256)."

These master narratives are also very difficult to upend. Because they are tied to a belief system, one cannot merely refute miracle stories with logic or realism. In addition, their miracle story is tied to the genre of magic realism, which incorporates fantasy or mythic elements to otherwise ordinary situations, furthering the difficulty in refuting their existence. Cobb (2013) characterizes magic realism as an artifact lending an analytic frame that the use of God in conjunction with magic realism allows the community to be both "in" and "out" of the narrative (Cobb, p. 223). This being both or neither inside or outside of a particular storyline means that the community has more space to move around in their own self-narration than they would were they limited by the master-counter binary that would entail a direct refutation of their guilt in the face of the state's dominant narrative.

From the perspective of narrative heft, the magic realism serves to glorify the community as extraordinary. Because magic realism is a familiar genre in Colombia it has narrative currency to be elaborated. Magic realism is no stranger to the people on the Caribbean coast given the relationship to the famous literary fiction writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who based some of his stories on his home village in the Caribbean

region of Colombia. The connection to magic realism and the relevance of his writings are celebrated around the Colombia

The “milagro” and the prophecy provide discursive resources for the community to make sense of their experience of violence and subsequent years of displacement. When violence creates an unexpected turning point or a breach, communities need to make sense of it in order to become coherent as a community and understandable to the outside world. Constructing such narrative coherence involves finding a frame or “frames that connect experiences and events in one’s life to form a meaningful whole (Eastmond, p. 583).” The narrative of Mampujan is a coherent one. The prophesy, the “milagro,” and God’s hand are foundational to their narratives as victims and to how they make sense of their victimhood. Cobb (2013) describes two dimensions of narrative coherence: 1. The main plot line and 2. Contextualizing accounts, frames, or subplots (Cobb, 2013, p. 68).

A narrative maintains its coherence and is further legitimized as the contextualizing accounts provide deeper and richer elaboration of the main plot line without altering its meaning. As Mampujan’s community narrative develops over time in interaction with the state and the many entities that converge onto the community in the next decade, they continue to build on these main plotlines as they attribute their continued success in the struggle for reparations to God’s blessings upon them including “el milagro,” and anchoring their popularity and success to their prophecy. Linking the past to the present with grounding for action in the future, as such, is a way of forming and solidifying a coherent narrative. Stories are selections and they are a way of making



sense of potentially disparate events or disjointed experiences. Framing their experience of violence using archetypal patterns tied to God, miracles, and mystical experiences gives particular meaning and understanding within about the community of Mampujan.

Eastmond (2007) in her analysis of narratives of refugees demonstrates their use of mythical patterns to create meaning. In the process of narrative meaning making she offers that the story that is told is more important than the facts of the events (Eastmond, p. 580). John Winslade (2008) makes a similar claim in his analysis of conflict narratives in the context of mediation. Conflict stories are selection based on connecting events that support a particular position in the conflict and the meaning that is anchored by those stories is more critical than finding an overarching or concrete truth. Often times these stories are inflected by broader cultural discourses or dominant narratives that are harnessed in order to make sense of otherwise divergent experiences in life (Winslade, 2008, Eastmond, 2007).

The story selection process is not necessarily a conscious choice; narratives have a trajectory of their own. However, there are many possible stories that can emerge from an event. It is not that there are multiple ways of looking at a singular event—reality itself is always multiple, meaning is always multiple—we diminish it by falling back on an image of thought and representation (Deleuze in Winslade, 2009). The narratives that Mampujan tells about their experiences support their identity as innocent victims who have been blessed by God’s grace and support. These narratives of the “milagro” and the prophecy have narrative branches that link up with the subtextual storylines that are harnessed to Christian notions of “blessed community” and the “prosperity gospel.”

The “prosperity gospel” is a Christian belief that claims that God rewards those who follow his teachings with security and prosperity. Faith in God and sometimes donations to the Christian ministry will bring wealth to the people. In Colombia, there are many clergy tied to the evangelical tradition that are criticized by outside observers for espousing the prosperity gospel to line their own pockets. In the case of Mampujan, their story is inflected by the notion that prayer and faith and belief in god will bring wealth, prosperity, and security (as we see with “el milagro”) to their community. Taking a closer look at the reflections that many of the community members hold, these narratives performed a service to the community that made them legible to people and the stories have been circulated around Colombia just as I am circulating them here.

These narratives functioned to give meaning to the community’s experience of violence in the moment as well as to invite people into their story of victimization and displacement over time. They provided the foundations for the community to take action regarding their circumstances by producing “narrative security” and purpose; to live up to God’s will for the community. This manifested in different ways especially over time as the community became involved with the state and master narratives about transitional justice and rights discourse entered the narrative landscape. Tracing the history of transitional justice processes in the community provides a way for understanding how the narratives of Mampujan took hold and led to their involvement with the state and how they came to be invited into the judicial processes.

## The Chosen

It is through the telling of these stories and their circulation that Mampujan was selected to be part of the reparations process being put forth by the 2005 Peace and Justice Law. People in the region offer many reasons as to why the magistrate selected Mampujan to be part of the trials, ranging from geography because of their accessibility to the road, to their leadership capacity, to the fact that no one in their community was killed, or because a young woman who came to do a research project was compelled by their story and urged the magistrate to include them. Two community leaders, Daniel and Celino, say that they were chosen because other communities were not willing to accept the terms of involvement being offered by the state. This confluence of narratives begins to tell a story about the people of Mampujan as “good victims” willing to participate with state processes-- with the justification that God would shepherd them through. Many of the reflections, especially from the four main leaders of Mampujan, Felix, Daniel, Celino, and Graciela, help trace the development of the “good victims” through their processes leading up to and during their engagement with the state.

## Commitment to Unity

The concept of unity characterizes the narratives that Mampujan tells about itself and their forced displacement. Unity is a point of pride for the community that dates back to the moments immediately after paramilitary forced them off their lands. Still today, community members claim that they have achieved success because of their unity. From the first days of their displacement, the 1500 refugees from Mampujan faced chaos

and disorientation because of the violence that forced them to take refuge in public buildings, a local school and the Cultural Center in Maria la Baja, the closest neighboring municipality. One community leader, Felix, reflects on this time,

*From this moment we were thinking about how to make it so that the people didn't disperse, not to leave, because we always, since that moment, dreamed of how to save Mampujan, how to reconstruct it. And we said that no one leaves, that we have to remain together, that Mampujan could not lose its identity, that we were not going to wash away, that we had to continue being the same. Then the people saw the hope, and, indeed we stuck together and we vowed to work hard to maintain our unity, to recuperate the community.*

The unity was tantamount at the time because they were living in so much fear amidst the common knowledge that there were paramilitaries operant in the area that had close ties to the police and local politicians. As a result, the community feared leaving the central neighborhoods of Maria la Baja. For about two months, until June 2000, the newly displaced community of Mampujan took refuge there. The mayor placed the displaced families in an old brothel in town and Felix was in charge of finding local families willing to take in members of the community. However, tensions arose as frustrations set in about youth missing school and the situation being unsustainable. In collaboration with the government's Solidarity Network (Red de Solidaridad) they were able to secure funds to plant 200 hectares of ñame (a local root vegetable) and build 200 houses.

Finding land for this project proved to be difficult and the community was not happy with the undesirable location offered by the mayor. It was then that an Italian priest in the region offered to purchase a lot where they would be more comfortable, and where the current community of Mampujan has resided for the past fifteen years.

Securing the land proved to be a complicated negotiation because they feared that the timing to find new lands would compromise the funding that they were receiving for food and shelter from the Fundación Panamericana para el Desarrollo, (Panamerican Development Foundation). There was also resistance among community members who were hesitant to relocate in the midst of heightened tensions between the church and the political entities over the process. Because Felix was part of the city council at the time, he was also implicated in the tensions.

Eventually, they secured the lands, the titles, and completed the legal processes so that they could start to construct “cambuches” or temporary shelters with tent material, for the families. Families were reluctant to move to this open space outside of the town out of fear, however, their already untenable situations in the city’s center forced them to concede to the process. The entities helping them at the time were the social pastor with the cambuches, the church with the land and the mayor with the lease. The Solidarity Network gave them kits of sheets, mattresses and other basic necessities. They received so many goods that it became politically charged in Maria la Baja because other displaced people were not receiving any attention or material benefits. The mayor approached Felix and proposed that he appropriate or “steal” (Felix’s word) from the goods of Mampujan in order to give it to others. Felix refused the mayor’s proposal and was, subsequently, put on a list of people that were being threatened by the paramilitary and accused of being guerrilla supporters.

It was a slow process getting the community into a condition that was livable by any standard- sewage, water and transportation to take the youth to and from school. The

following July they celebrated the Fiestas Patronales (festivals for their patron saint) for the first time. Felix collaborated with the mayor to provide a sound system and a generator (because there was no electricity) and a traditional celebratory meal of “sancocho” and “mondongo.” Celebrations of this type were signals that communities were on the road to rebuilding in the aftermath of violence and were often used as a way of providing renewed hope and joy to the people.

The community took it day-by-day and attempted to adhere to any kind of routines. Throughout even the first years of displacement, the campesino farmers continued to return to their own lands in Old Mampujan to work the fields. While they were too fearful to be there in the afternoons into the evenings, at sunrise they would travel the seven kilometers to plant and harvest their fields. The price of yucca and ñame were so high that peasants felt encouraged to continue their agricultural work. There was a period of economic potential within their displacement and the people of Mampujan started to say that “estaban desplazados más no deplataados.” (This is a play on words that means that they are dis-placed but not dis”money”ed.) But as time wore on, crisis arrived as more people moved to the land they were living on and people were having a harder time finding work because there were no resources, not even to transport them to their fields in old Mampujan. But when they could, they would travel back to their lands and transport materials that they could use to reconstruct their homes. After a while they received subsidies that they used to build the houses made from red bricks and they began to get more functioning.

## Role of leadership

Mampujan's success in maintaining unity during the preliminary years is often attributed to Felix's administrative work in Cartagena before the forced displacement that enabled him to create opportunities and organize with the local entities in Maria La Baja. Government entities and advocacy organizations often laud the presence of strong leadership in communities and work to capacitate promising individuals as such. Sembrandopaz after years of experience working in the region considers strong leadership an essential part of the backbone of organizing social movements and social change. Colombia more broadly is known for being extremely hierarchical, making leadership an important element for progress in rural communities with little voice.

Daniel, Celino, Graciela, and Felix were the primary leadership at the time of my research, although, the community had different configurations historically.

Sembrandopaz had also recently supported the community to develop a council comprised of twenty-five elected individuals that would serve as advisors to the leadership in order to support the community work, relieve the four leaders of some of the pressure they worked under, and to spread opportunities for others to weigh in on the developments of the community. However, their participation had not yet been fully integrated into the leadership activities.

Daniel valued his role as a community leader and dedicated his life from the time of the displacement to the present to the service of Mampujan. He considered it a great personal sacrifice that he undertook in order to benefit his people. He described, " You have to continue working and that requires that people are committed to giving up

everything, to sacrifice their family for the cause, to sacrifice their time, employment and I could have been working, and they have offered me jobs, but the jobs separated me from the community and I prefer what I'm living and doing here-- before I resolve my personal life-- those questions will be answered later.”

Celino, Felix, and Graciela largely shared the full-time commitment to leadership of the community, although Felix and Graciela also worked outside of the community. The amount of time and dedication that the leaders allotted to working with the state and other non-governmental entities on behalf of the community for reparations was unprecedented and their “success” with the processes has often been attributed to this ability and willingness. Because of their visibility, the leaders were often the center of conversations and also the target for threats. Daniel traveled to official events with armed escorts from the regional police.

The leaders constantly rotated in and out of the community attending events both large and small to orient themselves toward the processes and benefits that the state offered to forcefully displaced victims. They liaised between outside organizations, local and international, state level institutions, researchers, NGOs etc. and the community. It was after they received the first sentencing that their fame and notoriety would elevate their visibility and increase the demands on the community and its leaders and that their victimhood would be fully realized. That path to victimhood began with their introduction to the 2005 Justice and Peace Law (Law 975) and continued through the implementation of the 2011 Victims Law (Law 1448). The process was punctuated by highs and lows, emotional turbulence, and marked by landmark successes.



The people of Mampujan faced what Daniel has called a “catastrophe” that led to their displacement and long road to recovering from violence. With their compelling stories of prophecies and miracles, the community was able to make themselves legible as victims. By adhering to values of unity and developing strong leadership, they were able to garner attention and support for rebuilding their community materially as well as recovering their “damaged identities.” It has been a long and arduous process for the community over the past sixteen years since their displacement, including their work for eight years struggling for a judicial sentencing of paramilitary leaders in the region. It is critical to view the process in order to understand how the community engaged with the state and the master narratives of transitional justice law and how those dynamics evolved the community’s narrative over time.

#### First Steps: Invitation to the Process

In 2005 the government rolled out the Justice and Peace and Law and, eventually, in 2008 Mampujan was selected to participate in the tribunals. Graciela explained to me how the community was selected:

*...well, the justice and peace process was a law from the government and that didn't catch the attention of some communities. What happened here is that a young woman that works at a university, the University of San Buenaventura came here because Mampujan was valued by Jaraviana University through a young woman named Elisa. They came to do a study of Mampujan's displacement. She was doing an investigation like you are doing and in her research she took down the history and everything. So she is from Bucaramanga and at that time, there was a key process of justice and peace and the prosecutor 11, Yolanda Gomez is also from Bucaramanga and a friend of Elisa's and in conversations she mentioned Mampujan's case to Yolanda and when she had to prioritize a community to engage in the process, they chose Mampujan. So they began the process with Mampujan because they were advanced in the research process.*

Daniel adds to that account:

*“On August 16, 2008, I remember one morning around 9am I was living in that house, the one on that side. A man from the prosecutor’s office asked for Daniel. I don’t know how he got here but here he had an identification card on a lanyard around his neck that said prosecutor CTI. There were prosecutors assigned to the case of Mampujan and they had reference to my name, I say, because of the different forums I went to where they spoke about the 975 law. I registered my name there. It was complicated because in those days there was also a network of people who cooperated with the government of Edwin Uribe Velez, who created a strategy whereby for each person that you identify as a member of a guerilla group, the person that did the identifying would receive 1,500,000 pesos. So, many peasant farmers were signaled for being guerilla members and so they compensated people. In this way, many innocent peasant farmers were imprisoned as if they were guerrilla members because this was a strategy from showing results.*

*So, when a man from the prosecutor’s office came asking for me, it startled me because I thought that someone had identified me with whatever barbarity, however, God’s purpose was something else. What did they want to know? How many victims were from Mampujan, who were they and I had a list of all of the victims from Mampujan and in that moment, I gave him the form that I had with the victims names and their identification card numbers and I took him to Old Mampujan to see its state of abandonment because, now you see how it is, but in 2008 it was fully overgrown because it had been abandoned for 8 years. They began, then, to arrange hearings in the tribunals in Baranquilla and we started going.”*

Both of these stories told by the leaders about how Mampujan was enlisted into the processes with the Peace and Justice Law rest on their visibility as a community.

Graciela had a connection with people at Jaraviana University and Daniel had resources to go to meetings where they were teaching about the law and how it related to victims.

Connections with organizations like Sembrandopaz who provide funds for community members to attend meetings also contributed to accessing such opportunities.

Often times, Mampujan’s convenient location immediately off the main road between Maria la Baja and Cartagena is cited as a reason for their visibility. Literally, their geography makes them more accessible than most of the other communities who

experienced violence in the region. In some cases, it would be impossible to reach a community without knowing someone who knows someone who is willing to help you get there, either by motorbike or donkey because of the narrow, steep, rocky terrain. Getting between communities is extremely taxing with some commutes by donkey taking anywhere between two and seven hours. This highly influences the number of meetings that communities can even consider attending, therefore making visibility challenging. Therefore, Mampujan's geography is not insignificant when it comes to making themselves seen, accessing resources, and being accessed.

When I spoke to Celino about Mampujan's judicial process, he spoke to me for hours on end. One claim that he explained to me in great detail was his view that other communities were not interested in entering in the process. Other communities according to him were dissatisfied with what the government was offering in terms of reparations and their hatred of the paramilitary offenders kept them from agreeing to participate. They were deterred by the reduced sentences being offered in exchange for the paramilitary confessions. In Celino's words:

*What they [the law] are saying is that, if the perpetrator cooperates and tells the truth they are going to receive a reduced sentencing from 50 or 40 years to 8 or 5 years in jail maximum, or 3 years in jail. So, the victims were frustrated. How can it be that a criminal did so much harm and now they are going to get compensated because they say what they did? That is the same analysis that we had as leaders but also that we couldn't stop. That is, we knew that they were going to receive the benefit that, if they did their part, they had a right to. What we did not want to accept was the state getting away with their part. The outgoing government gave the benefits to them [victimizers] and the victims were left with nothing. We said fine, you give them the benefits but we'll continue to work because, the other part the government fulfills their part even though they say it's very little...*

The leaders of Mampujan felt that they could enter into the process in order to achieve what little the government was offering in the form of reparations or they could sit on the sidelines and allow the state to get away with their complicity in the violence. As a result Mampujan spent four years working with the state in order to become the first community to receive a judicial sentencing. That process was extremely drawn-out, cumbersome and, at times, harrowing for the community, especially the leaders. Graciela often refers to the book she wrote, “Vivencias” that chronicles the countless meetings and much of the emotional tax that wore on their bodies in order to meet the demands of the state. The amount of paperwork that the community was required to generate in order to prove their victimhood in order to be part of the processes with the state were incredibly onerous and frustrating at times.

One of the first tasks required of communities to enter into the reparations process with the state is to carry out a “Diagnostico Del Daño” (Diagnostic of Harm) in the community. The diagnostic involves community interviews with the regional government representatives who collect information accounting for the nature of the violence and subsequently, the impact- material and psychological. In addition to those processes, the community was responsible for documenting each individual and each family’s holdings and anything that was lost as a result of the violence. Producing the necessary paperwork to be counted as victims was work. The amount of time, effort, and logistics to comply with the stipulated regulations was laborious and frustrating at times. The quantification of household holdings prior to the conflict demanded precision and, yet, was an elusive process. Because they are an agricultural community, they had to

account for their losses of livestock and other animals. The counting of the chickens is emblematic of this in the peasant farmer communities. In order to make claims for the chickens lost as a result of the violence, they had to provide an accounting for the number of chickens they had before the violence and the number that they have now. However, people in the rural communities do not keep written records of their farm animals. Additionally, their practice is to allow animals to roam free- without keeping close tabs on them. Sometimes chickens might get confused between neighbors making exact numbers difficult to ascertain. In order to account for some of this fuzziness, the government required communities to get signatures of two witnesses that would attest to the number of chickens claimed by the victim. Not only was this an onerous process but, it antagonized people because they were mired in rules and regulations that asked them to provide information with such detail, that it created fatigue. The feeling that the government cared more about papers and forms than the people themselves was a ubiquitous commentary among victims resulting from such requirements which were many.

However, their experiences were not all negative. The stories that they privilege often account for big events that characterize their unity as a community and of hard-working campesinos who are innocent of the accusations that allowed the paramilitary violence in their community. These quintessential events as is exemplified through their “milagro” and the “prophesy” continue to be inflected by their relationship to God. As the judicial process progressed, representatives from Mampujan and surrounding communities were invited to the capital, Bogota, to give their testimonies.

Mampujan distinguished itself from other communities by sharing their story of displacement with visitors and researchers who were connected to individuals involved with transitional justice processes. Because they were willing to accept the terms of the processes that allowed paramilitary leaders reduced sentencing in exchange for truth telling, the community advanced in the process in ways that other communities refused. It was laborious for them to quantify the harm done to them in the necessary spreadsheets and produce themselves as victims according to the state's parameters, but the community was supported by internal leadership as well as by the help of Sembrandopaz employees. The capacity of the leadership in Mampujan along with the guidance of Sembrandopaz became critical to their progress in the judicial process with the state and was crucial for translating the laws and processes for the broader community. The processes were marked by critical moments that are widely heralded by many in the community including judicial hearings, the sentencing, marches and commemorations to name a few. One of the first big moments transpired when victim representatives were invited to speak during the judicial hearings.

### Forgiveness and Reconciliation

As part of the process with the Peace and Justice Law, the communities were invited to Bogota to participate in the tribunals where two men were being charged for their leadership role in the forced displacement and massacres in the Montes de Maria region. At the time, Sembrandopaz counseled the community in an effort to ensure that the largest number of people could participate and benefit from the hearings. Ricardo

negotiated with the government representatives that the hearings be simulcast in three different communities on the coast, one of them being Mampujan. Ricardo also insisted that, rather than commission outside vendors to organize the event, that the government funds be allocated to the community to prepare the food and organize the event so that they could financially benefit from the process. For one week, meals needed to accommodate the roughly 1500 people daily who arrived to watch the hearings. Sembrandopaz supported the organization and running of the event so that community members could maximize their participation. There are many stories that emerged from that week of hearings and it is a highly remembered time for the community and for the employees at Sembrandopaz.

A pinnacle moment took place when Celino spoke as a representative of Mampujan at the tribunals in Bogota. Victims were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions of the two perpetrator defendants, Edwar Cobos, alias ‘Diego Vecino’ y Úber Bánquez, alias ‘Juancho Dique.’ Originally, Celino declined to participate in the tribunal process, because he noted, “there was a lot of anxiety, fear, because in reality the victimizers were ghosts. We didn’t know who they were and since they dominated the territory, we knew that even though they were imprisoned, they continued to commit crimes.” However, eventually, he conceded at the insisting of his childhood friend and fellow community leader, Daniel, who implored that he would not attend without him.

Celino recounted his experience of the trial to me for hours one afternoon in his house; first seated in wooden rocking chairs in the living room and then while he cooked

dinner for the family. I watched as he labored to hollow out a coconut, blend the flesh, and then squeeze the pulp to free the juice, repeating the effort multiple times, to use for cooking traditional Caribbean-style arroz de coco (coconut rice). He spoke in great detail about the days he spent in Bogota, with special emphasis on the topic of forgiveness.

One of the victimizers, Diego Vecino, after multiple days of testimony and fielding questions from victims about the violence he was responsible for ordering, gave a commentary. In his comments he claimed he did not deserve forgiveness for the atrocities that he contributed to, but that he knew that he had caused pain and suffering.

That night, in Bogota, Celino reflected on Vecino's words as he considered what he would say the following day when he spoke to the tribunal on behalf of his community. Upon reflection, he realized that the other victims during their testimonies shamed the perpetrators with harsh words, lambasting them for their actions, refusing to forgive. But after hearing Vecino's words, Celino felt forgiveness in his heart; that anyone who seeks mercy, indeed deserves to be forgiven. He reflected back on that moment:

*There were already headlines in the media, "Victims and Victimizers Meet" and some of us began the trial with very hurtful questioning. There wasn't a lot of response either. ...but the victims felt hurt and, in fact, it's fair for them to be able to express what they carry inside. So the people began to cry, those who were participating, because the perpetrator asked for a turn to speak and they went to the podium. Then in one moment they said, one of them said, 'I know that what I did was very bad. I'm not asking for forgiveness from you, I know I don't deserve it. I have caused you much harm and so I don't deserve to ask for that forgiveness, which you aren't going to give.'*

*When he said this, I thought about something. I believe that everyone deserves forgiveness. What is necessary to be able to forgive is repentance. If I repent, that is sufficient demand for forgiveness. Then from there I thought we would do something different. We would give these people a bible. Yes- we gave them a bible. That bible says that he who confesses his sins and departs, finds mercy... I offered forgiveness in the*



*name of the community, we forgive you, we forgive you- not without saying a little something beforehand.*

*Not fighting things, or of laws, or of violated rights, we talked about how a human being causes so much harm to another human being-- with what face do you look at your brother kneeling, and you mistreat him and you torture him and hear him clamoring and clamoring and you have the audacity to continue doing it? The thing that makes it more interesting is this is not fighting. I said, when you were a boy what did you think? Did you say that this is what I'll be? The dream of a kid normally is to play, to be a professional, to study, to get their parents ahead, to be able to help their parents, and I said, some day, did you think in your life of taking the lives of other children, of other human beings? How in the mind of a human being fits the life with that conscience of how many fathers you killed, leaving many children and women widowed that today that don't have food to eat, that today cry for the loss of their loved ones, and you, how do you carry on, how do you sleep with this conscience?*

*There wasn't a response to that and the magistrate insisted that he respond, to respond to the victims, the victim was asking, so, I said, but fine, you drugged yourselves to do this, because it can't be that a normal human being kills his people like that. And they told me no, in the organization it's prohibited to use drugs, they were not under the effect of drugs, they would have been justified to be crazy on drugs to do the barbarities like that...*

As Celino stood by the stove relating the contours of the moment in the courtroom, his eyes were alive and half-smile rounded his face. I asked him why he was smiling and he continued,

*I am remembering their faces. I don't know if my eyes deceived me but I remember seeing them with tears in their eyes and one of them, when I went to give him the bible, showed me his hands and said to me, No more! No more! No more arms for my hands, never again will my hands take up arms. No more, no more. So for me, I liked that. Some said that it was a pure lie, but I liked it. Because I saw it, he looked at me. I did not stop looking and I felt that what he said to me was sincere. To the other, I gave a hug and I told him, I can hug you? And he said, of course, I am not worthy of it, so, if you want than with much pleasure, and I hugged him...*

*I spoke, I said it on behalf of the community. We forgave them on behalf of the victims of the Montes de Maria, we don't know how to carry grudges.*

Meanwhile in center of New Mampujan, hundreds of community members looked on and as Celino delivered his speech and the bibles to the defendants and the people rose

to their feet, clapping and cheering. It is a moment that many recount with fondness. The moment is spoken about less as a way of relating to the forgiveness but more of a recounting of their uniqueness vis-à-vis the other victims who would not forgive, and the exciting spectacle that took place in their small, displaced community on the side of the road. Giant screens in the central square framed that moment, surrounded by film crews, government entities, and a festival-like atmosphere, once again, raising the visibility of the community and distinguishing them in the eyes of the public and the state.

On a more personal level, I wondered as Celino recounted this story, if in these moments, guided by his belief in God, he acted as he was “supposed to,” or if he genuinely felt forgiveness in his heart. When I asked him if the forgiveness was true for him, his response began to unravel his approach to forgiveness and its relationship to the bible and the Old Testament. At times his actions reflect dominant narratives of forgiveness, but he, eventually, reveals the complexity of the process of forgiving for him as an individual; how hatred creeps in and he must remind himself that he has forgiven and to suppress his emotions.

*Yes, if not, I wouldn't have said that. I very seldom say what I don't feel. If I'm annoyed with you, I'm annoyed with you and you know. I am not the type to fake it that I care about someone if I don't. So, if what he values is that he said he isn't worthy of our forgiveness and what I think is that no matter how bad a person is-- they always deserve an opportunity, if they are looking to change. Because if it's to deceive again, it doesn't make sense...*

*So, when I said, I forgive you, I said it with my heart, in truth, and today I say, when I hear the things that they did the feelings cross me, I want to feel so much hate for them, but I remember that I forgave them and if I forgive them, well, I should manage my feelings. They are human beings that made a mistake and I shouldn't hate them...I decided to forgive them, because I believe that there should be forgiveness that erases this sentiment.*

*Alison: How did you come to this idea?*

*Celino: Yes, it's in the bible. I read that Jesus said, love your enemies. To those who speak badly to you, bless them, to those who do bad to you, do good, forgive those that offend you. I remember one time, very young, I read that word in the bible and it touched me...in my life as a Christian, I went on learning that Christ came to show us the reign of love, waging to change hate for love.*

*Santos governs Colombia, but I am free. If one is free in his or her heart, no matter what, no one governs it...Violence, I say, generates more violence and one day I was thinking if someone killed my father and I saw it, I could just kill them, but thinking in this work that I read, so I also thought, fine, so I kill the father of a son and that guy realizes that I was the one who killed him. When he grows he is thinking that he is going to kill me and the son that I have also is going to kill and the family. So, in that day, I concluded that violence generates more violence and I understood Jesus.*

*My purpose (in my speech) was to affirm to the people of Colombia that when they see the news, in truth, they would realize that these people couldn't be guerrilla. Because the people that did everything that they did instead of coming to discuss, to fight, they came saying that they forgive, we find solutions, we are going to reconstruct the country. We'll do something to change Colombia. I invite to those who damaged to compose between everyone. My hard work was because I realized that Mampujan couldn't be guerrilla, people like that don't take up arms, so the people understood that forgiveness would liberate."*

In this rich and dense reflection from Celino, he articulates the complicated web of emotions and actions that constituted his experience of forgiveness and how it is tied to God, the violence, and the community's relationship to the victimizers and the state. As he makes meaning through the telling of his experience in the tribunal, complexity emerges that one would not have access to simply by hearing the narration describing his actions in the moment. At one point in our conversation he made reference to an incident I had recounted that day about an aggressive bus driver I encountered and Celino commented that he probably would have "thrown fists with him," demonstrating that his peaceful ways are not always perfect.

Celino also expressed to me that he was nervous about his actions. He had no way of knowing how the community would respond to the decision that he took on their behalf. However, upon learning about the standing ovation that his remarks and actions received on the other end of the simulcast, he found solace. As the case advances and eventually wins, his is a story that would be taken up by different organizations making documentaries about Mampujan, displaying their uniqueness as a “community that forgives.” Meanwhile, as the processes progress, the narratives of the community leaders become more complex and start to reflect the language of rights and transitional justice.

#### We Have Rights! Justice and Accountability Through Non-Violence

“First it was very difficult because we didn’t understand this law. The government didn’t do or hasn’t done any sort of pedagogy to help peasants like us to understand these laws.” (Graciela, 2015)

Graciela described the first meetings she, Daniel, and Celino attended in Bogota in 2008 to discuss their involvement with the tribunals that were created to hold paramilitary accountable for their violent actions in the region. It was their first time in an airplane and setting foot in the bustling capital city, intimidated by the sheer density and the fast pace. They attended meetings with lawyers, government officials from various units, all speaking a bureaucratic language that was formal and unfamiliar to them. Over the years, these interactions became more commonplace and Graciela, Celino, Daniel, and Felix, became increasingly fluent in the language of justice, reparations, and reconciliation that was used by the state. Their fluency increased as their involvement with the state processes of reparations placed increasing demands on their time and they became de facto translators between the state and the community. Within

the context of these processes and with the help of Sembrandopaz, the people of Mampujan came to understand themselves as victims; victims proud of their history, victims with rights.

This story of rights was punctuated by a sense of agency and self-determinism, however, a constrained agency, defined in large part by the parameters of the reparations law to which they were responding. As they described their history and the evolution into this new victim identity, consolidated through the mundane and tedious responses to bureaucratic requirements for reparations and alongside critical events such as commemorations, tribunal hearings, and marches, their stories about the role God and the prophecy became more complex in their articulations.

Daniel for example claimed that the community could not expect the government to follow through on its promises but that since God is with them he knew that they would succeed in their endeavors. And then continues to share, “in order for that to happen, they have to make plans for the long term. If you make long-term plans, you will succeed.” Daniel’s shifting narrative foregrounds the acknowledgement that hard work and sacrifice would actually get them reparations, as opposed to the will of God, demonstrating the complex negotiation between the continuity of the prophecy narrative and the victim/constrained agent narrative enacted through state processes.

Two years later, in 2010, the judicial sentence resulted in Mampujan’s favor, and the magistrate convicted the paramilitary leaders and sentenced them to the reduce amount of eight years in compliance with the 2005 Justice and Peace Law. In the event that they did not comply with the conditions set forth in regards to providing reparations

to the victims, they would face an additional forty years in prison. The mandate stipulated the coordination of reparations between the convicted paramilitary and the state at the municipal, regional and national level.

However, an appeals process initiated by the state resulted in a shift in the language of the sentencing; not only reducing the monetary amount awarded, but also removing the strict parameters and associated time frames for administering the funds. Rather than “requiring” that the government fulfill reparations, the court “exhorted” the demands. This crushed the spirits of the community who, given the history of spotty confidence in the state, feared that the government would not comply. Around that time, the 2011 Victim’s Law gained traction and offered lower sums of money to those who produced themselves as victims. Because the law would be the mechanism through which Mampujan received their reparations, they feared their sentencing would be further reduced or compromised in ways they could not predict.

As they engaged in these processes with the state, the community leaders became conversant in the issues framed by transitional justice laws. Once the sentence was achieved, the task of understanding its contents was an arduous undertaking that was only accomplished by the leaders, with the help of Ricardo and Sembrandopaz. To this day, most people in the community have no idea what the sentencing says or what the requirements are for carrying out the measures. Only the leaders have combed through it to truly understand its contents to the best of their ability. They knew that, even then, there was still an incredible amount of work to be done; not just to educate the people

about the contents but to educate the government itself. State institutions needed to be informed of their obligations and to be held accountable for assuming them.

The leaders were never alone in their deliberations. Through their ally-ship with local and international organizations they began to learn about their rights as citizens of Colombia and how to distinguish those rights from their rights as victims. The leaders each spoke about this shift in their knowledge and capacity as leaders and how that shaped the way they interacted with the state. Graciela shares:

*So I began to know for example, in my case, Celino, Daniel, we began to know that we had rights that we didn't know. For example, when the displacement began you think that you have to earnestly beg the government and the leaders, to beg that they please help me and that is a favor that they are going to do. Then we understood that they aren't doing a favor-- that it is a responsibility to attend to you and that you have rights. (Graciela 5/7)*

Daniel's reflections build upon the ideas of rights and how that changed the way that they viewed themselves in relation to the state.

*I think the Mampujan's success and progress happened because we made the process visible. It wasn't something that we managed in an office; rather we started receiving many allies. International agencies could accompany us and recognize if there was compliance [by the government] or not and how we could convey our rights to the government.*

*It's one thing to know you have the rights that you claim and another thing to know that you have the rights that you fight for. We believe that the best way to move the state or the government is through peaceful dialoguing and convincing them of their obligation to respond to the problems that they, the state themselves, permitted.*

As the community leaders moved into this new understanding about their rights, their own sense of agency began to develop. However, distrust mounted in the community as they met with silence from government in the year following the sentencing. The lack of progress compelled the leaders to contact the magistrate residing

over the process who responded by ordering a follow-up hearing between the government, the judiciary, local functionaries, the convicted perpetrators, and the community. This hearing was a demonstration of the commitment of the judiciary and lead to greater accountability for the reparations measures to be carried out. Soon after, the community would engage even more deeply with the state as they mobilized to receive the reparations.

As the processes began to develop over time, the narratives of the community began to complexify. Until then, mostly God was the protagonist in their stories, providing them with the meanings for the violence of the past and for their suffering over time. However, as the community and especially the leaders begin to articulate more with the rights discourse, they emerge as more agentic and their references to God become inflected with the actions they take. In other words, their own agency becomes foregrounded in their narratives about the past. One event that they often narrate that exemplifies the intersection between God, transitional justice, Sembrandopaz, and the state is the mass march that they organized in order to get their voices heard by the state and demand the state heed their rights to reparations.

### The Peaceful March for Reparations

After almost a year, the state had not complied with the mandate for reparations and with the introduction of the 2011 Victims Law, the community leaders worried that they would not get their reparations award through the sentencing that they had worked for. Under the guidance of Sembrandopaz, they decided to take action to fight for their



rights. Sembrandopaz encouraged the community to use non-violent strategies that helped them gain more visibility and see themselves as agents in their interactions with the state.

### *Celino- The March*

*...we were afraid that with the new victim's law that the justice and peace law was going to be set aside. And since our sentence had been under the justice and peace law, we didn't want to get the reparations that were stipulated under the new 1448 law, we wanted our reparations which were already dictated by a judge through the 975 law. And that made the community come together and look for some solutions that would be peaceful. And that would make the situation in our community visible. And some of these were doing Article 23 of the constitution, gave the opportunity to the average citizen to demand explanations for things that were happening. So if you do these formal demands, the government was required to respond in fifteen days... So, we decided to have the march and I think it impacted the unity of our people. I think it's important to point out that this has been a very long process, it hasn't been easy, and it has forced us to unite... And so we always say that if you are doing good things, God will be with you. And so we decided to do this march and we decided to join up with Sembrandopaz. And the seeders that Sembrandopaz had in the zone played a key part. This was going to be a first time experience for Mampujan so it was kind of scary. But that didn't stop us. And we want to highlight the participation of our brother Ricardo Esquívia. He was really a crucial piece of this. And he always insisted that this be done within a context to peace. To respect everyone and to not even block anyone from the main road.*

*So it was a very early morning and among those of us who were leaders in the process there was a lot of anxiety and movement, because the day had arrived and we had to start marching. We had done all of this publicity we had invited all of these institutions, and the police was committed to accompany us. And people were really looking forward to seeing this march that Mampujan was going to do. But we were concerned. What if our community didn't respond? So we got up and went out to the main road, and we had these long faces just waiting to see if anyone would show up for this march. And we started to see people, women with their small children, youth, and we started to get happy and we were like this is going to work. Soon, there was a lot of people in the road and it was time to start. And that is when we started to leave the indelible footprint of the story of Mampujan. And we learned it was possible to unite ourselves.*

*And after this long march in which we were very tired, that unity provides very good results. So we walked all of that day under the inclement sun and we want to also point out the elders were very committed to the process and the kids. We were so concerned about them that we got some busses so that they could ride to Cartagena but they were so committed to this peace march that they refused to ride the busses and walked with us.*

*As Mampujaneros they felt that they needed to march as well. And I think this really moved all of us.*

*We arrived to Turbaco where we stayed that night. There was no sort of comfort where we were sleeping. We accommodated ourselves as we could. What was glorious is that we felt that God joined our March. Because as we arrived to Gambote when the sun was at its height and people felt they couldn't take another step, all of a sudden out of nowhere it started raining and wetting everyone and they were all so thankful that they all exclaimed, 'thank you. God.' That was the gift that we needed in that moment, and we gained our strength again and that's the day that we made it to Turbaco. A school opened its doors to us. It was programmed that way so that the people of Mampujan could rest that night. And I think our march was transcendental because many people united and gathered to it. And even as we marched passed communities the people cheered us on. And I think there we also learned that the people have sentiments of love and peace and even though Colombia looks the way that it does, I think we can judge it by the things that we saw that day, with the march. We left very very early the next day for Cartagena and again at 10am the sun was so hot, like here right now. And as we approached the main stadium the main plaza of Cartagena, once again, God sent just a light rain. We were refreshed and with a lot of great decision we were able to finish the march. We walked without stopping to the center of Cartagena to a school where again people were waiting for us with food, water, and the food was already made. They prepared food for us and it was there when we arrived. But we had also sent the people of our community who had committed to cooking ahead on a bus and when we arrived, they had done their work. And we want to highlight again the work of the seeders in the process. We believe that the gringos are very good about organizing things and creating discipline. So we didn't have to do anything with the discipline, we allowed the seeders to organize things. So, that was a great alleviation and we rested.*

*That afternoon after we gathered once again and could get ourselves together, we thought about the positive and negative scenarios that we might encounter when we went to the governor's house. So we had to think, what would be our reaction to the different scenarios. In that moment we affirmed that whatever happened, we could not work outside of a concept of peace. We prayed and we came up with our marching strategy. I want to point out something that made us laugh a lot. As we were leaving, everyone has these ideas about how things should be done like a brainstorm. And someone said we should leave the children behind. And that seemed like a good idea. Because the children were probably exhausted. We thought that they didn't want to walk any farther and so most people agreed with that. But this peasant came up, someone who is very honest and sometimes you don't even notice people like that even though they are in your midst. And he spoke up and said, I believe we should take the children, because they have marched, because they want to keep marching, and because they are going to help us when we need to create pressure when we arrive to the governor's house. And we feel that from the moment we left Mampujan, those children have been so important. Even though they say that in spaces like that children shouldn't be present, but we point out the*

*march that happened and the children were an important piece of that. So, I think, people try and teach us and organizations try and tell us about children's rights and that they shouldn't be in situations like that. But our experience showed us the men, women, children, elders, and everyone in every age participated in this march and a march that had the result of putting Mampujan in a place of dignity.*

*And so I want to conclude. So we got the governors palace in the afternoon and they were waiting for us. So we had some dialogue and we came up with agreements. And we thought we would just stay there as long as it took, but it wasn't necessary to stay any longer and we came back that night. So out of that march, we continued working on our sentence through the justice and peace law and it made it become a reality that they would fulfill their responsibility in the community of Mampujan. And even though we have to say that not everything has been achieved, it really did awaken a bunch of fulfillments of the sentence. You can see this big warehouse for our agricultural products, we got a truck for the community and to transport our agricultural products to market, we got financial compensation for many families, really among many other things in the "measures of satisfaction."*

*Thank you.*

*Daniel:*

*This march is very important because in that moment in the history of Colombia, no one went out and marched. We had a government that wouldn't let you march. And out of these community achievements that we had, really had an impact on a national level.*

The impact that these events and the story of Mampujan had at many levels cannot be underestimated although they are not the only community to gain recognition from the state or reparations, their story has managed to reach unprecedented attention quite broadly. The story about them as the unique community, that forgives, grounded on their belief in God and the power of their unity and innocence, carried their visibility to lengths they could not imagine as a result of the convergence of the judicial sentencing, the march, and the initiation of the 2011 Victim's Law. "Being victims," and responding to the attention that they received from all sectors nationally and internationally, required dedication, energy, and the telling and re-telling of their stories.

A seeder from Sembrandopaz lived in Mampujan from 2011-2013 during the height of the chaos that emerged as a result of the sentencing and the road to reparations. She tenuously navigated her roll as an accompanier of the processes between the community and the state, largely assisting with the minutiae of documenting victim's information into Excel spreadsheets on an old laptop. In her blog, she describes one week during her time living in the community:

*Mampuján is generally in a state of chaos, but this week has been even more intense than normal. There is an interview team in town, which I somehow ended up being the point-person for, who want to interview at least 35 people a day from different families about the justice and peace process. Graciela, with the help of all of us, is writing a book sponsored by the USA Embassy, so we are frantically trying to meet publication deadlines and work with dying computers and lost archives. A government institution is here to provide some sort of capacity-building by teaching people how to make pizza (don't really understand that one). Some group from Europe is planning on coming to talk to land restitution recipients. Payment dates keep on being scheduled, so we do all the organizing, and then cancelled. The ladies from the church are having an activity that involves prayer and soup. A team of psychologists are coming and want to meet with 50 people from the community. The lady working on the return from the Unidad de Víctimas should be here today. Another government group was here to inscribe people in different courses about business management, sewing machines, and small motor repair. All the kids in the community got dressed up and then drenched in a rainstorm for the Day of the Afro-Colombian. My supervisor was here for a long day of evaluations. I have been helping Daniel and Celino send and label photos of all of the different agricultural projects. I'm sure other things happened too, I just can't remember everything. Anna Vogt, Llama Diaries*

Eventually, as this entry from Anna indicates, the work of being victims became all consuming and onerous. Mampujan became the emblematic victims, telling their story and having it re-inscribed in television and newspaper interviews, documentary films, official state documents, and, eventually, this dissertation. (Admittedly, I wanted to resist the story that captivated the hearts and minds of so many, however, I could not.) The number of stories that the community shared that exemplify the complexity of the

community's experience of themselves and the state are innumerable. Organizing to cater to all of the different capacity-building workshops, trainings, and projects proved to be a complicated negotiation for the leaders.

One morning I sat in Graciela's home while three of the leaders strategized how to handle the organizational demands on them for that day. They had forgotten that they had promised one entity a group of fifty victims they could work with and another thirty-five victims to another. But they had a bus ready for another group of fifty victims already poised to leave for a workshop in a neighboring town. They eventually settled on merging two of the workshops and shifting victims from one to the other and identified how they might find another group for the third organization to meet with.

On top of this, they were struggling to meet the administrative demands of the Victim's Unit in order to ensure that all of the paperwork was complete for them to receive their reparations. Small progresses were met with challenges and the learning curve was high for the community. Community members reflected often that the state cared more about the paperwork than the victims. It seemed that the inscriptions of their victimhood onto paper and through other material objects became essential to the process. The free t-shirts that victims were given that proclaimed the benefits of reparations and the abundance of marketing material circulating the promise to victims of healing through reparations was remarkable. It eventually became difficult to distinguish which materials were being pushed by the state and which were supporting the grassroots efforts of the communities.

Eventually, in August 2011, the state completed the first symbolic measure of

clearing Mampujan's name in the national newspaper, El Universal. However, they did not consult the community before printing the announcement. When the community saw how makeshift the first announcement was, they immediately elected a committee to work on the wording, the layout, and the placement of it. They wanted it to be located in a prominent place where readers are known to look and they wanted it to include phrases that confirm their innocence in the conflict, explicitly clarifying that they were not at all affiliated to or associated with any armed group. They also wanted to include photographs of the twelve victims from the massacre of the neighboring village of Las Brisas in the announcement. The leaders themselves went to Cartagena to ensure that these requirements were met.

As the community leaders realized that they could challenge particular outcomes in that way they gained more confidence and felt more empowered to speak more freely with various entities. Later that year, in December 2011, the department of justice of the U.S. embassy visited Old and New Mampujan, which was something amazing for them. It helped them advance because so many aspects of the reparations processes required that the leaders travel to Bogota and they needed help with the funding. The U.S. Embassy treated them very well on these visits, providing comfortable lodging and ample food, making up for all of the sacrifices the leaders made during previous unfunded trips, going without food and spending what little money they could just to ensure a community representative of the victims was present at meetings. They attribute much of this focused attention on the participation of the leaders to the commitment of the magistrate Uldi Teresa Jimenéz, who acknowledged that they were the ones that know their

communities best and therefore need to be part of the conversations.

However, dealing with the government entities was not without frustration. Processes were often challenged by staff changeovers, with individuals taking with them institutional knowledge of the community and the progress of their processes. The community learned over time the importance of identifying key individuals at all levels of government to support them in their process. They leaned on the relationships that they built over time with regional functionaries as well as longer standing organizations to that end. As Daniel notes:

*Then we could identify officials within the institutions, key officials who might have an attentive ear to help solve the problem because not everyone has the will or the vocation to help. Some officials are in institutions to earn a salary, others are there to transform things. Then we had had the virtue, the advantage of being able to identify such things. And the dialogue has not been easy with the state because also we have noticed that at times they have wanted us to settle for what little we have received and I say little even though to others it can look we have received a lot... (Daniel 6-19)*

It was clear that the relationships that the community had with regional and local organizations and state entities were longstanding and intimate. There was camaraderie between the leaders and organizational representatives that visited the community to check on processes and see what the developments were. In one instance a government employee told me she had been working in Mampujan for almost fifteen years and it showed as they laughed in between more serious discussions.

However, at times the government's interest in the community's processes related to healing occurred at the expense of the community being able to remember together and make meaning together about their experiences. In March of 2012, the community honored their first commemoration of the twelve-year anniversary of their displacement.

According to descriptions from the community leaders and the seeder living there, the government-funded and organized event resembled more of a spectacle than a sacred space, used to showcase the administrations commitment to rebuilding the community of victims. Members of the community expressed mixed sentiments around that event and the following year, in response, the community organized an intimate procession from New Mampujan to Old Mampujan. They ate traditional food prepared by each family and reflected on the past with rituals that felt more tied to their land, honored the gravity of their experience of violence, and elevated the significance of sharing a meal in the main square where their lives had been spared.

The process with the state coupled with the broader attention that Mampujan received proved to be chaotic for the community at times. As the community became more legible to the state garnering more support, the visibility also compromised some of their own ability to be together as a community without the involvement of official or organizational entities. Important events became complex negotiations with varying results. However, as they told their stories and the more they circulated, the more coherent they became to the outside world, at times contrary to their actual experience. Their big storylines about God and the prophecy, in conjunction with the master narratives of transitional justice, began to overshadow some of the complexity of their lived experiences. Their story had gained so much traction, however, that it became a priority of the state to ensure that that community succeeded in receiving reparations and to guaranteed the community the right to a dignified return.



## Priority Victims: Reparations and The Right to Return

The more nuanced experiences of community members of Mampujan were not the ones expressed in the broadly circulating stories about them. As their story circulated, the struggles, the tensions, and the challenges were largely left out. At the time of this research, the community had received a large portion of their reparations and had begun allocating the funds to various personal projects and endeavors. Individual families busily remodeled their homes, purchased motorbikes, constructed corner stores, and invested in second homes, while as a community they received a truck and a storage facility for their agricultural surplus. Shortly after, the state began constructing houses on their old lands. The state also provided a central police unit housed in a trailer in the center of the community, sharing the main square with the twice-rebuilt playground.

There was a lot of pressure to ensure that Mampujan remain free from violence. The police, who provided 24/hour surveillance, expressed the magnitude of their responsibility in contrast to other sites where their colleagues were posted for duty. According to their accounts, Mampujan was not a violent community and experienced low incidences of crime, relegated to noise complaints about rowdy teenagers and “normal everyday” disputes. While other police posts may have resided in more dangerous environments, there was a clear state mandate to secure the surroundings of Mampujan, mounting the responsibility the officers felt. They held their posting with pride, knowing that they were part of something larger than they might otherwise have been in another community.

The police circulated this narrative about Mampujan as a “special” community that was given extra care and attention from the state. The investment made throughout the process to make the community a success reached a point where it became too important to fail. The work on all fronts to showcase Mampujan as a success story to the nation became tantamount; and the further away the story got from the everyday lives of the community, the less it represented the possibility for others to receive the same attention. The amount of resources allocated to the success of Mampujan out-weighed the capacity of the government when taking into account the over seven million displaced victims in the country. The need for the state to produce a successful story, however, provided the conditions for Mampujan to be a success as well.

One incredible story about the community ascended to the national level providing a unique lens into how a small group of women making sense of violence could capture the imaginations of the national and international eye. The experience of these women is exemplary of what might happen when the story about an intimate process reaches the national and international stage. It is the story about a group of women who sewed themselves to forgiveness and fame, reinforcing their uniqueness, the presence of God, the value of mediation from outside organizations, and visibility that follows in becoming legible to the state. It is grounded in their self-assessment as well as the uptake of their narrative as “special.” As a process it falls outside of the master-counter narrative dynamics, which often limits the movement of a story in relationship to the state. Following is my telling of the telling of the story of the “Mujeres, Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz” (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace).

## The Special Community: Re-inscriptions and Narrative Uptake

The people of Mampujan tell their story of forced displacement, anchored to their prophecy and their “milagro” and the belief that they are living out God’s plan. The blessed community that they frame themselves as, positions them as a unique and special community in their region. Eventually, they reached a point where they began to believe in the importance of telling their story. Their “uniqueness” because of the breach that no one was killed during their forced displacement was the starting point of the creation meanings system of being special in relationship to the overall violence, and as they became part of the broader government processes and eventually received the first judicial sentencing, this frame of the special community and a breach was further taken up in the public domain. It became incumbent on the community to perform their victim story repeatedly to the various entities. However, in the process of developing as a community and becoming increasingly more visible and tending to outside entities, the community created a more intimate space where different kinds of stories and meaning systems could emerge.

When I spoke with Ricardo from Sembrandopaz about their involvement in the creation of the women’s sewing group he asked that the details remain confidential. However, what has been shared publically is that Ricardo and Graciela met through meetings held by Christian networks in Maria la Baja. Graciela approached Ricardo to ask if he could assist her because the women in her community, Mampujan, felt as though they were being left out of the reparations processes. In response, through his connection with the Mennonite Church, Ricardo invited a psychologist and artist to work

with a group of Christian women from Mampujan to teach them a cloth on cloth quilting technique for creating tapestries that depicted their experiences of violence. The hope was that through the process of weaving images into stories of the past, the women could begin to speak about their experiences of violence.

When Teresa arrived, the community had already experienced interventions by unskilled volunteers and worried that this would be the same. The process was slow and incremental, first with learning the actual technique, with women initially resistant, eyes looking down and quilting in silence. However, eventually, the women began sharing their thoughts extemporaneously. As they became more comfortable, they became more intentional about what they were sewing and soon they started representing the conflicts and the specific people in their lives who were threatened. Some of the women now describe it as a cathartic process.

Graciela reflects on that time,

*In 2006, Teresa came and taught a small group of us a technique that brought us a lot of peace, because the people didn't like to talk. And through this technique - like we are doing now— we were sewing and talking and sewing and talking. But one person said, I don't want to talk, meanwhile others cried, but we also learned that we were scared to cry. For the first time together, we realized that there were feelings that emerged about experiences we had before the displacement— sexual abuses that happened before and other types of things that had happened to people beforehand. Painful feelings surfaced including some women dealing with emotions that at first they didn't understand very well.”*

Graciela shares how there were differing experiences within the circle. However, the space continued to be meaningful. The quilting project progressed and eventually became a gathering that the women looked forward to, filled with laughter, storytelling, and talking about and making sense of the past, present and future. The women hung the

quilts in their community and received a lot of praise for their work, creating a sense of pride and dignity and, eventually, they named themselves “Mujeres, Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz” (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace).

Quilting as a technique has a history for raising women’s voices and is a traditional method of creating social text in the Mennonite Church. It has also been used more broadly as a mechanism for communicating messages for hundreds of years (Ball, 2002). The space that was created for the women of Mampujan in the process of learning and executing this technique, created a new domain for narrative evolution that challenges, or even subverts dominant transitional justice discourses that shape the contexts for speaking that often marginalize the voices of women and, therefore, their limit their visibility. It is often that women are left out of peacebuilding processes or that transitional justice processes fail to include them. This is especially the case in tribunals and more formal truth-telling apparatuses, where women often do not participate or, when they do speak, it is not their own experiences or stories of violence that they share, rather those of their spouses and children (Ní Aoláin, p. 219).

In this regard, the quilting circle animates the power of unique, community-driven processes that transcend the axioms of transitional justice by creating a venue for making meaning in ways that are unpredictable and are not policed by the state or the male gaze. The women draw not only on speech and storytelling, but the process of creating text through quilting that enabled stories to be woven that were, in a prior time, unable to be told. It became a place for new stories to emerge as well as a new way of being with each other in their community, depicting stories of violence that transformed into stories

of hope for the future. It reconceptualized their victimhood and was one way of constructing meaning in their lives that lead to transformation.

From a master/counter narrative perspective, rather than producing narratives that directly challenged state processes or dominant narratives of transitional justice, the women created a space where new meanings could emerge about their experience without relying on hegemonic processes or getting caught in “lines of force” that are often silencing or delegitimizing. In this way they resisted normative frameworks, producing narrative “lines of flight” that loosened the constraints of institutionalized discourses about healing. This made available new sets of possibilities for becoming, expressing the unexpressed, and acknowledging that subjectivities are multiple and evolving (Winslade, 2009).

Maria Pia Lara (2007) provides another analytic lens for spaces like that of the women’s circle by taking a closer look at what she terms “disclosive” spaces as venues to explore one’s judgments in order to discover new lines of power that are not tethered to dominant narratives. The women in the quilting circle, could engage in “morally interpreting historical experiences from the past to construct a new understanding of the present” through the exploration and elaboration of their narratives (Lara, p.58). The significance of these narratives in addressing the post violence context is that they opened up, through the creation of social text in the quilts and the social telling of their experiences, the opportunity for understanding the past, events, as well as to constructing new meanings by introducing new elements to stories.

These disclosive spaces are created by using open understanding, moral imagination, and reflective judgment that emerges from debate, discussion and dialogue as opposed to “the conceptual knowledge restricted by rules that determinant judgments follow (Lara, 2007, p. 5).” In other words, the stories told and interpreted in these disclosive spaces have greater opportunity for meaning making, more evaluative framings and imagination of the future than more structured or policed spaces offer. Narratives and their associated meanings are impacted by where and under what conditions a story is told, which could limit the trajectory of a story or to allow one to see things they could not see before. A core characteristic of narrative change is that in places where narratives have been thinned by binary representations, introducing new story elements and having those elaborated by others creates a thicker more complex story that then increases the discursive resources available to draw from in the future.

Therefore, in these disclosive spaces, the development of these type of narratives are important especially in places where official stories occupy the social imaginary, legitimize violence, and, therefore, are silencing. The determinant judgments provided by more formalized transitional justice process do not allow adequate consideration of the complexities of various localities or to engage stories through imagination, potentially stunting meaning-making processes and the development of moral judgments or evaluative frameworks which would be genuine and real for the communities in their particular contexts. The critical capacity of disclosive language relies on “powerful historical accounts that name events in a certain way and set forth their description with its new conceptualization to the open public (Lara, 2007, p. 26).” The “miracle” story

and the “special” community are storylines that shift away from the judgment of evil and privilege conversations about “how the community healed” as exemplified by the women’s sewing group. Elaborating narratives through mechanisms such as the women’s quilting circle offers more agency to those who suffered from violence and allows for creation of meaning and moral judgment locally. This is especially critical in contexts where particular narratives are silenced, such as those of women.

The quilting project significantly increased the visibility of the women of Mampujan not only in their own community but they received funding to travel to other communities around the country to share their story and the quilting technique with other women. This follows the second element in Lara’s (2007) theory of disclosive spaces whereby reflective judgments lead to new responsibilities and actions toward the community. After the women experienced their own transformation through the quilting process they opened up and deliberated their representations with other communities creating opportunities for new conversations and reflective judgments that are not based on the perpetrators but are based on women’s own experiences. These conversations are a form of action.

The initial project funding for the women’s group lasted two years and the women received so much outside attention for their quilting that they were unable to accept the additional funding that they were offered after the two years because of their busy schedules and the other capacities they held, for example as mothers or full-time professionals while raising children. The women continued to quilt, however, it became less structured and more of a pastime than a transformative space for healing.



Graciela continues to collaborate with communities to share the quilting. The neighboring community, Las Brisas, where the paramilitary massacred twelve of their loved ones after leaving Mampujan on March 10, 2000, is working with Graciela to design tapestries with the faces of those who were murdered. She irons blown-up photographs of the murdered community members onto tapestries and reproduces the clothing in the pictures by quilting together pieces of fabric to represent each one artistically.

One Saturday, Graciela and I traversed the steep and rocky terrain on the backs of motorbikes from Old Mampujan to Las Brisas so she should present the first piece that she was working on to the community. That day the Historical Memory Center was visiting the community in order to celebrate the finished construction of the thatched roof, open-air, memory museum that they had funded as part of the community's reparations package. Also present was the director of the masters in peacebuilding program the University of Cartagena, the head of human rights for the regional police, and the local infantry marines who provided funding for the traditional lunch for the ceremony and accompanied all formal processes with the community. It was on that stage that Graciela unveiled the first tapestry with the face of a murdered community member.

While the reaction was not overly emotive, the community agreed that the tapestries she produced would hang as the first installation in their new memory center. The media crew that accompanied the Historical Memory Center documented the event and interviewed Graciela about her quilting work and the purpose of her gift. While

projects like this one continued at the hands of Graciela, a few in the quilting circle now operate as a small business and the tapestries are sold to visitors to the community and commissioned by others. Graciela informally allocates the commissions to different women to account for parity.

At the time of this research Graciela, who became the spokeswoman for the group, had been commissioned to produce three tapestries for an exhibit in the National Museum in Bogota. During an initial conversation, Graciela shared her pride and excitement to gain the recognition and saw it as a “foot in the door.” She contemplated titles for the tapestry that would represent the Afro-Colombians as part of a larger exhibition. Through some cursory research she landed on the term “Diaspora” which excited her, however, the representative of the museum would not allow it for an explanation that was not clear. The quilting circle gained so much recognition that they would be featured in a permanent exhibit in the museum, but it also meant that they had to conform to the standards of the curator. The tapestries are now on display and community representatives, friends, and family participated in a formal opening of the exhibit in Bogota.

The women quilters continue to be recognized at the national level for their contribution to peacebuilding in their region and are continually held in higher regard for the work of their group. Most recently, in November 2015 they were awarded the National Peace Prize of Colombia for their community healing and reconciliation efforts. The group of fifteen women was honored on national television for their noble, tireless work using the quilting circle to cleanse themselves and other communities of hate, pain

and trauma and replace it with forgiveness. As Graciela delivered a moving speech on the group's behalf, some of the women from the group and their children stood by on the stage holding one of their tapestries in front of them for the country to see. While Ricardo knew he wanted to help the community develop a process that would set them apart, I do not think that the people of Sembrandopaz, nor the community themselves knew how their story would capture the hearts and imaginations of the broader society.

### Reflections and Epilogue

The story of the women's quilting circle made its way to the national stage in Colombia after almost ten years. It is an emblematic story within an emblematic story. The narrative heft of healing and forgiveness in peacebuilding raises stories like those that characterize the experiences of Mampujan. First they were the first to receive a judicial sentencing in 2010, then the first to receive reparations and land restitution 2012, then to represent afro-Colombian communities in the national museum in 2014 and to culminate in the national peace prize in 2015. With each big event, the story of Mampujan becomes more coherent and their successes more easily articulated.

I learned about the national peace prize on Facebook when my news feed produced an incredible number of posts congratulating Graciela for winning it. It was not until I found a video of the event that I realized the prize was for the whole group of women with Graciela serving as the spokeswoman. She accepted the award on behalf to the group by delivering a heartfelt and eloquent speech with tears in her eyes. Her words invoked God throughout much of the speech as she described the healing and soul-

cleansing that the women quilters had experienced. Watching the scene of the women of Mampujan standing on the stage in the limelight being recognized for their grassroots project aroused deep and mixed emotions inside of me. I reflected on their process and how hard they worked to spread the technique they had learned to various communities and imagined how honored they must feel to be recognized at such a level.

Subsequently, I thought about the hundreds of women from Mampujan who were not invited to be part of the women's group because they were not Christian. These thoughts made me realize how complex a peace prize can be and the difficulty in representing an entire community.

As Graciela finished her speech with the words, "We don't have silver or gold, but what we do have, we give," the crowd erupted, and as the camera spanned the audience, tears began to fall from my face. The onlookers, the majority of whom were white and dressed in suits gave a standing ovation for the women and I could not hold back my tears. I am still working out those tears out as I write, but they were not tears of joy, there were not tears of pride, they were tears of discomfort, of disorientation, of disconnect, of wonderment of what I had just witnessed. I was not there, and I have not spoken to the women since the award. However, I could not help but wonder what had become of this once intimate, disclosive space that was now heralded on a national stage where people were giving a standing ovation for how these women had been "healed." Would there be any political change as a result of this recognition or would it fall squarely into the category of making a community legible but only within the parameters defined by the state. I witnessed the new public gaze on the women and I felt

uncomfortable with what felt like the colonial gaze. At the same time I wondered, how am I any different from them?

The video produced in recognition of the award opens with professional women speaking about the importance of the award and the work of Mampujan. The voices of the women quilters are barely presented apart from one young girl responding to a question about what she had learned. In her response she said, “I learned to leave out the hate and the bitterness and hold on to the good memories.”

A former Sembrandopaz volunteer who lived in Mampujan for two years attended the award ceremony for the peace prize. She shared her experience of the private gathering afterward in her blog post, “What is a Peace Prize?”

*At the very anti-climatic after party, we hopped into private cars and went to the colonial home of an artist friend. As we sat in easy chairs and ate take out chicken off china plates, the artist and a university professor explained over the heads of the exhausted women, with a contribution every now and again from Graciela, about what it means for the women to win the prize, without ever once asking them. The winners seemed to fade into the background as their accomplishments were lauded without their participation.*

This raises the question about what the significance is for the transformation that the women experienced and what it has, itself, transformed into. With their stories on display at a national museum and visitors coming to purchase their “local artisan crafts,” what is that doing for the visibility of the women? Is the social text actually doing political work or has it been re-appropriated and commodified in ways that depletes the meaning that was once driving the women to quilt and create? In a video made in tandem with the national peace award, Graciela states, “In this moment we are no longer ‘the women victims of Mampujan,’ rather ‘The Rural Businesswomen of Mampujan.’”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oLoa7gKZNI>. These questions call for an attention to looking into coherent stories to understand the lived experiences behind them.

### **The Coherence of Success**

As Mampujan's story moves further and further into the spotlight, the narratives in circulation become solidified, more coherent, and less complex. As success is donned on the community by the state, the processes and difficulties are overshadowed by someone else's descriptions of the community. In the case of the women's quilting circle, it raises serious questions about what it means to be "healed" and how that is deemed the final destination of the women, who still struggle in their daily lives to make sense of the past in the context of the ongoing processes they are still involved in with the state. The community does not feel repaired and has many outstanding promises that have yet to be delivered as part of their reparations process. The honor of the peace award should not be understated because the women should be honored, however, it raises questions about the outward-facing story that gets revealed to the public which is much more stable than the reality. According to Sara Cobb (2013), "the subtle and complex resonance that constitutes legitimacy and its underbelly will collapse in time, as people move toward closure and stability. What is new and different becomes the foundation for sameness (Cobb, p. 266)." Therefore, while a process in a disclosive space has the potential to be transformative, it will not continue ad infinitum. And once the story gets taken up, the narratives become less complex and the voices of the women

fade into the background as talking heads make pronouncements about the greatness of how the women overcame and forgave without there being any complication to consider.

As individual stories of healing are raised, does it obscure the millions of others who are still living in conflict? Do the stories get sanitized eliding the complexity of the community's narratives and processes? As a famed afro-Colombian community, how does it fit in the more dominant storylines of other Afro-Colombian communities around the country fighting to have their voices heard and struggling to make themselves legible to the state? These questions reveal that the "success story" requires further examination as this example and the broader story of Mampujan reveals tensions and erasures that emerge as they become more and more legible to the state.

### **Erasures and Tensions**

The story of Mampujan has been weaved in tapestries, lyricized into religious and cultural songs, told and retold, written in formal texts, and articulated with a vision for the future. It has captured the hearts and minds of many as notions of innocence, forgiveness, God, prophecies and "milagros" anchor what are normally stories of violence and abandonment of the state. Mampujan has become legible not only to the state but to academic researchers, documentarians, and non-governmental organizations. There is so much that is compelling about the case of Mampujan that begs its telling and re-telling, as is demonstrated by all of the attention they have received over the years. However, this story is not embodied or accepted by all and raises particular tensions and erasures when taking a closer look at the stories in and around the community.

The most recent example of the women's quilting group reveals that sometimes there are complications to having your narrative taken up by the state, media or NGOs. And while the community more broadly made incredible strides within the frameworks provided by transitional justice law through the judicial sentencing, reparations, and land restitution, this is only the most visible part of their story. Part of the narrative coherence that grows from their telling and retelling is not because of the way they intentionally told their story, but resulted from the dynamics between the community's telling and performing and how the various outside entities interacted with it and carried it to the public realm. The state, in particular showcased the community at every turn as an exemplar of their commitment to victims. As for the documentarians, NGOs, researchers and the like, they reflected the stories back into their projects as well.

A number of the activities the community engaged in transformed many lives; whether participating in a play about the violence funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, or receiving reparations to build nicer homes with amenities that relieve women from cooking ten hours a day. The women's quilting project received the national peace prize honoring the work of the women who engaged with communities around the region and the nation to teach a craft that might help create other disclosive spaces for meaning-making and reflective judgments.

However, this work over the past fifteen years has not been without its tensions. Within the dominant storylines characterizing the community and its processes, there are critical elements that get left out. They are critical because they demonstrate that these processes are not as neat and tidy as one might gather from hearing the stories that are



prominently circulated. It is not to say that the community's stories are not nuanced or lack complexity writ large, but they do not give enough of a picture to show how their "success" was reached and how that path constituted relationships within and outside of their community. In the consolidation of the big storylines about God, forgiveness, the "milagro," unity, and the "good victims" that made the community legible in the public eye, certain threads are left out, ignored, erased, and tensions emerge in the process.

### Hierarchy of Victimhood

The question of "why" Mampujan was chosen to be the first community to enter into trials with the state in accordance with the 2005 Peace and Justice Law and subsequently first repaired under the 2011 Victim's Law is a complicated one that was pondered by many different entities. While, arriving at a particular conclusion to this question is unlikely, there is some merit to building an understanding for the conditions under which the "why" question emerges. People and organizations who work with other forcefully displaced communities in the region, in addition to victims themselves, would like to know why it is that a community that, in their eyes, has already received a great deal of support for rebuilding is now being privileged under the law when they were not victim to any massacre. This question was explicitly posed to me by members of the Mesa de Víctimas (Victim's Table) in Bolívar, by NGO workers, by peasant farmers at victim conferences, and by a group of people with disabilities (some as a result of the conflict and others not). The question in the majority of cases was not one asked out of

sincere curiosity, rather as a way to establish that there were victims who had suffered more and were getting much less attention, if any.

The “why” question pointed to the differentiation that existed and was constructed through the dynamics of the state’s definition of victims, people who defined themselves as victims, and those working with them, resulting in creation of a hierarchy of victimhood. The hierarchy was grounded on claims that suffering has gradations and certain experiences of violence are worse than others, enlisting a justification narrative about or from Mampujan. One of the most immediate confusions about the story of Mampujan raised a curious question at outset of my research. Why is it that the news reports, the court case, and government documents all talk about the “Massacre de Mampujan” when there was no massacre in their community?<sup>25</sup> For example, the online news source [verdadabierta.com](http://www.verdadabierta.com) ([opentruth.com](http://opentruth.com)) reports, “The High Court of Bogota adjudicated two former paramilitary leaders, Edwar Cobos, alias ‘Diego Vecino’ y Úber Bánquez, alias ‘Juancho Dique’ for the massacre of 11 peasant farmers and the displacement of 300 families in Mampujan, a township in Maria La Baja, on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of March. This and other headlines that refer to the “Massacre of Mampujan” seem to contradict the story about the “milagro” which the community shares so widely, indicating that no one from their community was killed.

When Mampujan entered into the process with the state for reparations, they were operating independently. Other communities were afraid to enter into the processes

---

<sup>25</sup> “El Tribunal Superior de Bogotá juzgó a los dos ex jefes paramilitares Edwar Cobos, alias ‘Diego Vecino’ y Úber Bánquez, alias ‘Juancho Dique’ por la masacre de 11 campesinos y el desplazamiento de 300 familias en Mampuján, un corregimiento de María La Baja, Bolívar, el 10 y 11 de marzo.” <http://www.verdadabierta.com/la-historia/2530-ipor-que-las-Víctimas-apelaron-la-primera-sentencia-de-justicia-y-paz>

because violence still threatened the region. However, with approximately two weeks approaching the final moment when the reparations process entered into the final stages, other communities such as, Las Brisas, San Cayetano, Pela el Ojo, Aguas Blancas, Arroyo Hondo, Casingui, all hamlets of San Juan township, joined the case.

State functionaries initially wanted to enlist other communities from Maria La Baja, but they were too afraid. However, some did not attribute the last minute inclusion of these other communities to fear. A member of the Mesa de Víctimas (Victim's Table) in Bolivar claimed that the communities were squeezed onto the case at the last minute because Mampujan did not have any massacres and the state need to incorporate "real" victims into the case in order to legitimize the attention they were giving to it.

However, according to Daniel, it was more the fear that kept people from joining in the process and he and Celino both agreed that if they banded together as a unit it would make it more difficult for any kind of retaliation for participating in the process. Daniel expressed that it made sense that the other communities were afraid, he was too, but "the other communities were more psychologically affected than we were because they [paramilitary] killed twelve members of their community. A victim whose family-member was tortured and killed is not the same as a victim who suffered displacement. I don't want to say that victims have different levels, only that emotionally, the impact is distinct, so they are more afraid."

Interestingly here, Daniel himself distinguishes Mampujan from other communities who experienced more intense kinds of violence with different associated psychological impacts. Though, he ensures to explain that the difference in the severity

of the violence does not make them more victims, just different. Not all of the communities outside of Mampujan maintain that same perspective. There was friction between Mampujan and Las Brisas that was not spoken about freely, but certainly was broader common knowledge. According to leaders of Mampujan and employees at Sembrandopaz, tensions between the community leaders manifested because the people of Las Brisas, who lost twelve of their community members, felt their victimization was worse than Mampujan and they resented that Mampujan was getting heightened attention and disproportional material support from the state. Las Brisas' massacre was subsumed into the title of the case of Mampujan, obscuring their own community who lived in the wake of the national acclaim that Mampujan received.

The two communities met to dialogue about the situation and to address the issues. However, according to Daniel's account, "...there were some really uncomfortable things because the state, the way it intervened in a partial way sometimes caused friction between the communities and people." Furthermore, there were geographic limitations to their participation that was exacerbated by what Daniel characterizes as the community of Las Brisas' lack of leadership capacity to ask for things or dream of what they wanted in the way that Mampujan did. In Daniel's reflections, he emphasized Mampujan's struggle with the state in order to be clear that what Mampujan has achieved has not been easy.

*Some believe that we are responsible for what they do. I think it's selfish of them because they (the state) are not giving us any gifts here. It has been a continuous struggle for the community it has not been easy. And as I said just before, we believe that we deserve things, as do those by our side. And they have to motivate themselves to get things. They are not giving us anything for free. And I do not know if I am ungrateful because, although we have achieved many things, I think we have nothing even though our process*

*has moved us beyond what we had before this moment.*

Through Daniel's words, he articulates the tension between Mampujan, the state, and other communities, highlighting the gap between the reality of his experience and that which gets appropriated onto the community. While to the outside, it may appear that Mampujan has gained strides with the government that no one else has, he believes that what little they have has been extremely hard-earned and not necessarily on par with the effort expended to achieve it. Celino maintains similar sentiments about how their community is viewed from the outside as filling their coffers while other communities are ignored. But, this is work and they work. They engage in processes that other communities believed were impossible or not worth the effort, and then when something is achieved, Mampujan gets criticized for being favorites of the state. "...we accept that they repair us with these little things that they give us. We knew that. We don't deny that. But we accepted to enter into the process, because it is better to receive part of what we consider reparations; to dignify the people is better than to live everyday resenting them [the state] because they never repaired us, because we never spoke out. So this is better."

What emerged through the process with the state ultimately bred new tensions amongst and within communities. I attended a meeting one afternoon through happenstance with Felix's wife, Melita, who is a strong woman and the caretaker for her grandson who has developmental challenges understood to be a result of microcephaly. Melita helped organize a weekly meeting for people with disabilities in the old church in New Mampujan where they spoke with visiting social service agencies and amongst

themselves about their experiences. A vibrant young man in a wheelchair spoke very passionately at that meeting about his frustration that he is not considered a victim because his paralyzing incident falls outside of the parameters of the victim's law, precluding him from any of the benefits that Mampujan receives. His voice did not express outrage, per se, but reflected the deep frustrations of living in oppressive conditions without access to government assistance in the same way as the people from Mampujan. His story was powerful and revealed nuance in the hierarchy of victimhood created by the transitional justice laws operant in the region, highlighting the politics of visibility and who gets to be a victim, who gets to be heard, and who does not.

It was widely accepted that it was better to have the "condition of victim" than displaced persons because of the advantages according to the law. The Victim's Law provides a broader and more comprehensive approach to working with those who are "victims" under the law than did Law 387 from 1997 addressing forced displacement. This made victimhood a status that was coveted by many who were not directly affected by the violence of the conflict. However, people who lived in poverty and suffered negatively from differential treatment, but did not experience overt violence as outlined in the Victim's Law, were not eligible for any of the benefits. As a result, not only were there tensions between different kinds of "victims," but there were questions and resentments that existed between communities that were not even eligible as victims under the law.

Being a victim comes with material benefits to the persons/communities who could make themselves legible to the state. More and more it became clear that it was not

clear how that status was actually conferred. For example, certain people who were not victims according to the law were considered to be victims publically. These questions were amplified when I learned that two of the main leaders and spokespeople for Mampujan, Felix and Graciela were not present during the time of the forced displacement, and Graciela was not even from the community. Felix's family was originally from Mampujan although they mostly lived in Cartagena at the time of displacement. When community members contacted him the same day of the displacement he immediately traveled by bus from Cartagena to Maria La Baja and never looked back. Graciela was born and raised in the township of San Juan and became connected to Mampujan through church activities. Eventually, she and Celino fell in love, were married, and Graciela moved to New Mampujan to be with him and start a family.

Given that they both had such an incredible presence in the community and so often represented them in the media and at events, I was very surprised to learn that not only were they not present, but also that she and Felix are not considered victims according to the law. In Graciela's case, despite her role in assisting the reparations process, she did not receive any money as part of the individual indemnification. However, her representative role in the community raises a number of curiosities about who speaks on behalf of whom and who the state listens to.

I eventually learned it was not entirely uncommon that individuals living in Mampujan were not present during the displacement. Many people who were closely and distantly related to community members moved into the community because it was seen

as a place for growth and development amidst otherwise untenable living situations in other communities. However, I wondered if it was public knowledge that Graciela was not a “victim” or a privileged knowing because of my relationships with Kat and Sembrandopaz that brought me to Mampujan. How does it fit into transitional justice processes for victims, if the people that are leading them in the communities are not victims of the violence?<sup>26</sup>

As Graciela shared this news with me, we sat in her partially renovated home in wooden rocking chairs supported by a dirt floor, facing a twelve-inch television with fuzzy reception that was often tuned to baseball. A small oscillating fan circulated the air at our feet to offset the stifling heat. Graciela sewed as she spoke, now and again digging through a sack with scraps of cloth to add to her craftwork. Family members, the dog, and people from the community moved in and out, asking questions, interrupting, listening, as Graciela described her childhood and her personal “displacement story.”

Graciela is an educated and independent woman in ways that are unusual for anyone in her community (Mampujan and evangelical community) but even more so for a woman. Graciela has a difficult history behind her. It was after hearing this story that I fully understood her conviction for being a spokesperson for a displaced community that she was not born into. She, regardless of her presence during Mampujan’s displacement, considers herself a displaced person who found a place in Mampujan. Graciela grew up in a troubled environment with many brothers and sisters and an abusive father. She and her mother had a contentious relationship and Graciela felt very unsupported as a young

---

<sup>26</sup> This was the case in another community that I visited called La Haya where the woman who was a vocal leader in their processes was not actually from the community but was assisting them.



child. Her mother moved her to Venezuela when they were having a hard time making ends meet so that her mother could work in someone's home- not an uncommon move for women looking for work. Graciela tells a story about her difficult childhood, raised by her mother who did not believe in her and feeling mostly on her own. That Graciela graduated high school and went to college to be a teacher was extraordinary coming from her community and upbringing. She was determined to be independent and support herself; a value system that went against everything she had been taught and she struggled for acceptance. She received backlash for not marrying right away and having children. A saying that I heard on occasion, if you haven't been married by age 20, the train has left the station.<sup>27</sup>

I share this story because it is Graciela's way of relating to the displacement of Mampujan and of feeling connected to the plight of the people she considers family in their struggle for reparations. The fact that she was not present for the displacement or a victim according to the law did not surface beyond our conversations. However, in one instance, when a group of students from Canada visited the community to hear their story and learn from their experiences, Graciela and I shared a curious moment that we never actually spoke about.

We accompanied the group to "the represa" (the same one that they took me to in the beginning of my research) where, we unloaded dozens of plastic chairs for the meeting and, in the overbearing heat, we ate a delicious meal of "sancocho" (traditional soup), fried fish, yucca, and salad. The group congregated in a circle around Graciela

---

<sup>27</sup> She was married in her late 20s and had her children when she was 28 and 30.

and, the pastor, Ellie, to hear their displacement story. (I remember feeling like I had heard it told better many times before.) The students eagerly recorded Graciela and Ellie as they spoke and asked questions with a keen sensitivity, demonstrating that they were ethical researchers, not wanting to offend anyone or pry into overly sensitive subject areas. At the end of the exchange, one young man directed a question toward Graciela asking, “After all that has happened, and all that you have experienced, how do you feel about the memories, how do you feel now, telling the stories?” There was a long pause, and Graciela responded initially, “I don’t know what to say, I don’t know what to say.” There was another long pause and Graciela smiled and looked at me before turning to the group and responding, “I feel normal. I don’t feel emotional, I don’t feel sad, I feel normal. Like a day at work. I’m happy that you are here for the first time and new people but I have talked about this so many times, I don’t have strong feelings, it’s like another day at work. We have already overcome the worst.”

Indeed I believe that Graciela looked at me and smiled in that moment because she knew that I knew she was not there for the displacement, and, therefore, not a “victim.” It raised a host of questions about representation, victimhood, whose voices get heard, and the legitimacy of the people we learn from. Would it have affected the Canadian students’ experience if they knew that they were hearing the story of displacement from a person who was not there and who married into the community a couple years thereafter? Is her voice representative of the community and the violence that they experienced? Does it matter?

When I posed these questions to Ricardo, he believed that it was not important that she was not originally from the community. In his view, what matters is that the story gets out and that the community becomes visible however it can. He believes her actions are a true demonstration of solidarity, when you identify with the issues and the people and immerse yourself in the work while living and becoming part of the community.

Graciela attended to many of the visitors who would come to research or do trainings and workshops and meet with victims in Mampujan. When it was possible, she was very attentive to me in the context of my research and even opened up to me more than I ever expected or asked, especially about her intimate relationships. It felt like a stroke of luck every time I was in the right place and the right time with her. She was involved in so many aspects of the process with the government that being with her and having experiences with her really opened my eyes to the way in which victimhood functioned, especially at the local and regional level. She was a famous victim and I was far from the only person who felt lucky to be around her and have what focus she could actually muster for any one individual.

### The Currency of Victimhood

Graciela introduced me to an entire feature of the life of victims that I might otherwise not have experienced, by inviting me to some of the regional meetings and conferences for victims that she attended. Much of it was a learning experience for her as well, and most definitely an adventure. One particular meeting I accompanied her to on a

whim was in Cartagena. The public defender for the region had been visiting Mampujan for an important meeting that had brought together Ricardo and other representatives of Sembrandopaz, the head of the marine infantry in the region, and the community leaders. The public defender, who traveled in a government vehicle, offered Graciela and me, by extension, a ride in the private SUV to the meetings in Cartagena. They came around to Felix and Melita's house where I was eating dinner and rushed me out of the house, tossing my fried whole fish, rice, and salad into a plastic bag, imploring that I eat it in the car.

Once we arrived at the location where the opening introductions to the conference were being held, we met with one organizer who provided Graciela with a travel stipend, a per diem, and free lodging in a modest mid-range hotel in the heart of a fast-growing touristic neighborhood. She arranged to have me as her guest in the room as well as to have them provide me with a per diem for food, which they granted without any questions. It was obvious that Graciela was well regarded by the NGO representatives responsible for the event and they were extremely grateful she had accepted to attend.

The attendees of this forum were mostly leaders from their communities. The small auditorium at the University of Cartagena held approximately 100-150 people, and throughout the day it was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full. On the stage sat a podium, with two tall flagpoles with the flag of Colombia and the university flag. The organizers used the expansive, white, back wall as a screen and there was a table off to the side for the panels of victims who spoke. Panelists who spoke on behalf of their communities had long biographies

that included the numerous titles they held, describing all of the committees, tables, and other victims groups they lead or with which they affiliated.

The victim representatives spent the majority of that morning and early afternoon sharing the experiences of their communities, mostly in the form of grievances about the state. Many felt they had been way sided and neglected. While some speakers leaned toward the motivational and inspirational side, the majority of people spoke about how their communities are filled with willing and able-bodied people who are ready to work in order to have a life of dignity. Certain stories gained more applause than others, with the one afro-Colombian panelist managing to keep the floor for a significant amount of time.

In a key moment in the forum, one man, Carlos, from a rural community near the city of El Carmen of Bolivar, spoke earnestly and with strength to the room about his community's experience. He emphasized that many of the communities represented at the forum received support from outside organizations in their processes and received more assistance from state functionaries than many other communities including his own. As he described the violence experienced by his community, compounded by the neglect from the state, the room felt unresponsive. I noted that those representatives that lodged "complaints" about the state or their neglect received minimal reception from the attendees.

Eventually, a representative from the Victim's Unit, Yvonne Diaz spoke to the victim's concerns in a twenty-minute speech, indicating that the state understood their situations and were poised to support them as they could. She also clarified the

limitations of the state, curbing some of the elevated expectations that the communities held for the unit. The victims expressed immense gratitude for her address, grateful that a government representative attended the forum to hear their grievances.

This performance of being seen and heard by the state raised a host of questions about the effects of having community leaders participate in a space for telling their story, receiving brief acknowledgement from a state representative, and then calling it a day. No action items emerged out of the event and, at least, in Mampujan, there were no reverberations back to the broader community. What significance did the forum have for the millions of victims that do not have access to these kinds of spaces? Through these meetings and the reparations process, victimhood began to emerge as a commodity, enveloped in systems of power, money, and prestige. Visibility was tantamount to gaining benefits, material in the financial sense but also in the form of social capital. The only way to get invited to the victim's events is to know someone or be known to someone who can get you on the list of attendees, as they are seldom, if ever, open programs.

At the end of the forum, I fell into a conversation with Carlos whose story had received little response and he exhorted that I come to his community for a visit to hear their story and accompany them in their process. In our conversation he reflected on how different things were in the days of ANUC (National Association for Farmer Users), when everyone used to organize. If there were issues, people would immediately come from other communities to support one another in resolving them. There were outside organizations involved but they were more effective back then and people were more

attentive to one another within and across communities. Since the war, he related, the fabric has been broken and people have lost their motivation to organize. People are scared; there is not a lot of trust. People are much more wrapped up in their own pain and experiences, or just do not want to face things. According to Carlos, even the leaders are more “egoista,” self-centered, than in the past; interested in self-promotion and often the only ones truly involved in processes.

His sentiments tied back to the role of leadership in the communities, which is touted by state entities as a critical factor in who is selected for reparations processes. Carlos argued that his community was poised with leadership at hand for being exemplary victims. However, his community lacked visibility. As the hierarchy of victimhood and the currency of victimhood began to take shape through these interactions, it seemed that Carlos was visible enough to get on the invitation list to the events, but not to have the follow-through from the state. His “elite” (my word) victim status, did not get him the attention he needed, which is why he implored that I come to his community and write about them. Conflict, violence, and war fractured broader social networks, altering the landscape of action that used to be organic and constructive at an extreme cost to people like Carlos struggling to find support networks.

Further exacerbating the victim hierarchy, when selecting representatives for even larger events for victims, the attendees at the regional meetings are one of the main pools of victims that they choose from. For example, during the lunch that followed the forum, I joined Daniel and Graciela and a few NGO representatives. They mentioned that they needed someone to represent victims in the region at an upcoming meeting in Cali and

asked Graciela if she would be interested. The smile on her face gave her away as she eagerly shared with them that she wanted to participate. I witnessed that day an example of how visibility begets visibility and the way in which the “victim circuit” (my words) operated.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, the hierarchy of victimhood had a clear currency to it. Visibility was usually tied to material resources from a supporting organization that valued leadership capacity. In the spaces that victims were invited to for meetings, they received monetary compensation and opportunities to travel in ways that never before would have been possible. These benefits only made it into the hands of the few and even within those spaces some communities received more attention and support from the state than others. These currents of inequity made for a certain dis-ease with many of the victims who did not clearly understand why their perfectly capable communities were neglected. My presence as a guest of Mampujan exacerbated those questions for someone like Carlos who understood that it was imperative to gain visibility from an international supporter in order to push his community’s process forward.

Another element of currency tied to the commodification of victimhood that grows out of this hierarchy is the international attention that communities get through

---

<sup>28</sup> She ended up going to the forum, which was one of a set that the government was hosting in order to bring victims together. Graciela came back from this and showed me a video on her phone showing how disorderly and raucous the event was. Apparently, the facilitators had no handle on the situation and people were lashing out and heckling in dismay because one of the first speakers was talking about the diversity of victims and that even the families of FARC members and Paramilitary forces who lost their family members as perpetrators were victims. And the 500 people invited there disagreed. Apparently, the facilitators did a terrible job calming down the crowd and it ended up being one of the participants that ended up finally jumping in and soothing the outrage. This event made the news. <http://www.wradio.com.co/noticias/actualidad/peleas-en-primera-jornada-de-foro-nacional-de-Victimas-en-cali/20140804/nota/2351534.aspx>



programs, for example, like Sembrandopaz runs in which they organize visits from church groups, academic institutions, and other non-profit groups. Victims profit from the money that organizations give them in exchange for arranging food, lodging, and meetings as groups come to learn about the conflict and peacebuilding efforts from their perspective and hear the stories that are seldom represented in the national or international media.

Communities receive stipends for their time in addition to profit from cooking meals that they provide for the visitors. In exchange, communities have multiple opportunities to share their histories and the processes that they are involved in with diverse and interested visitors. This explanation of the commodification of victimhood is not meant to construe it as exploitative; rather, it demonstrates how visibility leads to income generation whereby communities and organizations like Sembrandopaz profit off of stories of victimhood.

One extreme way that this surfaced was in the summer of 2015 when I brought a group of George Mason students to the region for a course on transitions and peacebuilding. When we arrived to Mampujan, students immediately gravitated to the various quilted items casually placed on a table by the window in Graciela's house. Without meeting or acknowledging the community members who were gathered around, the students anxiously discussed their Colombian cash flow while trying on quilted shirts and taking "selfies," hoping they could pool enough funds together to make their purchases. Two students on the sidelines watched the spectacle uncomfortably, with one sharing with me that he would like to write his final paper for the class on the ethics and

politics of that moment. It was obvious that Graciela was not anticipating the clamor for the products. She organized the chaos and once the negotiations for purchasing the various items were settled, we were able to begin our program and listen to the community's stories.

This moment to some, undermined the history of the quilting process that the women engaged in, because it did not come tied to an acknowledgment of their experiences of violence or any articulation of the meaning of the products. Rather, expressions of capitalistic and apolitical exchange of goods obscured the space and place where students bought local representations of their trip to Colombia, without knowing what they represented. The relationship of exchange of goods on this scale was new to the community, potentially paving the way for new relational dynamics between the community members and visitors that privilege what could be consumed with money rather than focused on a politics of solidarity. However, this remains to be seen.

These differences between Mampujan and other communities who cannot boast such visibility was not relegated between communities but also manifested in certain ways within the community. Leaders in Mampujan, for example who were invited to attend meetings locally, regionally, and nationally, no longer remained tied to the community geographically in ways that were natural before, causing rifts in nuclear families and creating new forms of tensions and distrust amongst the families. In Old Mampujan before the forced displacement, few community members traveled outside of their lands, focusing more on agricultural production and bartering between neighbors as commerce. Now, between living on the side of the road, the new influx of reparations,

and leaders who are being funded to travel, the community is constitutionally different. The image of unity that projects to the outside world in their outward facing story about themselves, obscures a major reality for the community that there is, in fact, a lot of discord.

### Unity on the Outside: Diversity on the Inside

Celino's voice was ethereal and his eyes glimmered proudly as he spoke about his community of Mampujan where relationships are punctuated by a loving honesty and neighbors would do anything for each other. Children play freely, roaming the safe roads, without a care in the world. He poetically described the utopic Mampujan in such a way that anyone would want to be part of it. However, foraying into the spoken and unspoken realities reveals a much more nuanced, Mampujan, that does boast most of what Celino articulates but is also characterized by struggle, hardship, poverty, no running water, no paved roads, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and frictions amongst leaders and other community members. There is merit to the spirit of Celino's description, however, the day-to-day lived reality is marked and not always so utopic. As the community navigates their lives in their displaced home, new kinds of issues emerged for them that many say would not have, if not for the conflict. As the community negotiates their new terrain since receiving their sentencing, the influx of money as part of their reparations packages has contributed to the new issues that have emerged for them.

## Navigating Reparations

As a result of the sentencing, which awarded reparations to the community, certain tensions emerged that still exist because some community members have been repaired while others have not. The leaders continue to struggle with the government to ensure that this is rectified because they believe that everyone in the community should be treated equally. However, some of the issues stem from glitches in paperwork, sometimes from checking the wrong box, or errors made by the magistrate and prosecutor, and sometimes for reasons they do not always know. However, as Graciela exclaims, “there are families who have not received one peso, and so that generates tension and a lot of pain, anger, imagine it. If you had been here, let’s say 1 1/2 years ago, if you had come then, everything would have been like that. Here, Daniel lived. (pointing to a wooden shack) And now he lives in that (Daniel now has the largest “mansion” in Mampujan), so look at the difference. The people were hungry, they had doubts, so what happens to the person who still continues to have doubts, continue to be hungry while others they are given a mansion, and this made people angry, so imagine it (Graciela 5-8).

Such circumstances created tensions between some community members and the leaders because they believed that the leaders were working with the state more for their own benefit than for the benefit of the community. This increased mistrust and insecurity. Because the leaders often made decisions on behalf of the community, they are under additional scrutiny for their behaviors. Celino shares, “We work, they don’t pay us, we don’t have jobs, but we work for that..but we work for Mampujan.

Sometimes we meet and we leave crying because ungrateful Mampujan says things that hurt. Because instead of thanking you, they speak badly about you, but all the same, we aren't going to leave Mampujan because of some negativity that keeps us from working.”

Celino reveals that not only do tensions in the community exist, but that the leaders feel that the efforts that they put into the reparations process on behalf of the community is thankless. With legacies of corruption and mistrust looming from the past, they are accused of acting only on their own behalf. In times of transition, relationships are often complex as people make sense of the past and engage in new processes to rebuild their communities. Not only are there psychological and emotional needs as people make sense of violence, but the influx of money from complicated processes with the state raise new kinds of issues as well. The tensions are not only between community members, but also with institutions.

### Tensions with the Church

One of the ways that this manifested is through the differences in religious affiliation. Certain tensions emerged before the reparations process, according to Daniel around 2004, when Ricardo brought attention to the community to get involved in programs that were funded for Christian Evangelicals only. In other words, those who did not affiliate with the Evangelical Church were not permitted to participate in them. This history makes certain decisions that the leaders make on behalf of the community even more conflicting. An example of this emerged when the community was awarded a church as part of the rebuilding of Old Mampujan. The decision was taken and accepted

by the state that the church would be Evangelical. Ricardo shared, “everyone thinks that the community is Evangelical but they aren’t, and some people are bothered by this.” Not everyone in the community agreed and they did not feel that they had any standing to protest the decision because it was justified by the argument that the church was Evangelical prior to the displacement and, therefore, should be repaired as such.

As the community became more involved with the state and their narrative about God and agency became more complex and the people wanted to organize for their rights, the church became more and more uncomfortable. This is not something that the people, the leaders especially, speak freely about because, eventually, the church removed their support of the community even refusing to allow them to use their meeting space as they had done in the years prior. In one instance, Graciela did refer to the tensions with the church, when asked by a George Mason University student if the church supported the community in their processes with the state. Graciela, Celino, and Daniel all chuckled after which Graciela responded,

A little but there are some problems because of the way that they interpret the gospel... Perhaps the reaction to the question is that now currently our church is pretty closed and narrow and less socially oriented and that’s something we’ve learned from the Mennonites. You know it’s one thing to say may god be with you and may peace be with you and pat each other on the back, but you have to learn the tools to go out and do peace building on the outside. It’s a slow process but we’ve been working on it.

While Graciela almost answers the question directly, she does not reveal that the church actually closed the doors to the community leaders, claiming that they are overly political.

Ricardo believes that the church is missing out on a great opportunity to follow the teachings of Jesus and God. They could be serving the community and

accompanying them through these processes but instead they are moving backward and inward. They have closed their doors and have broken the relationship.

### Complicating The Right to Return

The intersection of the dominant narratives of God and transitional justice complicated the narratives of community members, especially those particularly tied to the church. For those who did not boast as close ties to the church, their own realities and reactions to the big storylines about the prophecy, the angel coming from the sky and the “milagro” met with mixed sentiments. As I spoke with more individuals in Mampujan and observed more meetings, differing perspectives on these dominant narratives emerged. Whether it was the elder who waved his hand across his face dismissively at the mention of the angels, or the elderly couple sitting in rocking chairs who, with pain in their eyes, asked how could they possibly forgive people who would commit such atrocities. While the power of the stories was not lost on many of the people, they also made it difficult for different kinds of stories to emerge.

One of the main state processes being carried out in the community, the rebuilding of Old Mampujan, in accordance with their award under the Victim’s Law forced families to take a decision about whether or not they would like to participate in the benefit of the “right to return.” This benefit, which comes after most community members have received their individual indemnification, raises particular challenges to the community’s touted unity. For many, the community landscape has shifted on multiple levels. No longer are they located remotely away from other community

networks, public transportation, and new forms of commerce. The differences emerge largely along generational as well as gendered lines. Graciela comments, “In our situation, the adults want to move back and the youth do not. This will inevitably lead to some tension. This is part of the consequences of the conflict.” Many youth particularly fear that moving back to the old community would stunt opportunities to advance their educational pursuits and professional lives.

On one particular occasion, I met with a woman named Aurelia, who owned a small, corner luncheonette. I had seen her in trance at evangelical revivals and wondered how she would react to my presence and my questions. She barely made eye contact with me as she hovered over her traditional plate of fried fish and yucca, until I asked her about the “milagro” and the prophecy. She perked up from her plate and became almost prophetic herself as she spoke about those experiences and the masterful hand of God. As the conversation progressed, she shared with me some of the injustices she was facing because of bureaucratic mistakes that were cheating her out of her reparations compensation.

Causing her further consternation, now that the judicial sentencing for reparations is being carried out, the community has begun the process of organizing to move back to their original lands. Aurelia and her husband who is a peasant farmer that travels the 7km distance daily in the hot sun to work their land, like many other couples in the community, have different ideas about where they should reside. Now that they have their mansions and new economies for women have developed as exemplified by Aurelia’s luncheonette, many women no longer see a life or a livelihood for themselves



in the rural community from which they were displaced. She explained to me that she heard a rumor about another prophecy; that God had said that violence would revisit their community again if they “returned.” Plus, she declared, “I have my restaurant, why would I leave this behind to go be idle? No sir.”

Aurelia’s narrative responds to the constraints of the institutional state narrative of “returning” and cultural discourses about gender roles by invoking another prophecy. This shows how narratives are rooted not only in the personal experience but the institutions that support or constrain them (Bruner, 1990), in revealing and constructing a sense of self that could be changing in a transitional process. As the political processes moved forward and the community members continued to make sense of their recent past in the context of their changing environment, the dominant narrative of reparations, and the performance to respond to the requirements of the law complexified and shifted the positioning of God as the protagonist in their stories and recasting the victims as agents, albeit constrained, that emerged as they strategized their interactions with the government, and began to make decisions about their future.

In this way, God becomes a supporting role, appearing in various ways to support their decisions still anchored by the magical but making space for the story of the hard work and dedication that undergirds their engagement with reparations processes. In this way, the community is constructing new meanings in unofficial and personalized ways that are translating into future actions. As women see opportunities for themselves that would otherwise be foreclosed upon, they no longer refer to the idyllic life that once characterized their stories about the old days in Mampujan. After fifteen years of

displacement, and receiving reparations, the people's lived reality has shifted and their discourses have shifted, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about the "boundedness" of communities and the ways in which meaning is made in people's daily lives. Contradictions continued to emerge as dominant narratives of forgiveness, justice and reconciliation that anchored many of the formal processes with the state were questioned in side conversations; and murmurings indicated that many individuals did not see the angel emerge during their displacement. However, the power of these stories is so palpable that it is never openly contested, and while it is widely held that the leaders of the church are that story's champions, even those not affiliated with the church tell the story at times with deep emotion.

Even the leaders, who work tirelessly in the name of the "right to return" and have fought to have the Evangelical Church rebuilt, have no intention of moving back to the old community. While Graciela and Celino still plan to "return," Daniel and Felix, like many other who have received reparations have invested large portions of money into their homes in New Mampujan, do not. Listening to Daniel reflect on the life he lead as a youngster in Old Mampujan, he no longer feels compelled by the lifestyle of a farmer. While he is committed to advocacy on behalf of farmers, he believes his body can no longer withstand the arduous days working the fields under the hot sun. Furthermore, though at the age of forty he has only finished the equivalent of a third grade education, he aspires to pursue a law degree.

Ricardo believes that one of the greatest achievements of Mampujan is the capacity that the leaders developed through their interactions with the state, where they

“became experts in managing things, transactions, in contacting organizations and negotiating with them, they became experts in interacting with the press and the media.” In his estimation, however, this was at the expense of the relational quality that the community had before the process. Now, he states, “the people think more about money and subsequently of their relationships in terms of what people are offering or could offer, and in this way it fractured some of the solidarity in the community. It derailed plans about returning to their previous lands.”

For Ricardo, the friction within the community about the return could lead to the “fall of the community.” He sees their unity as something that is “artificial, more spacial and geographical.” The fact that they were chosen by the state has made them the enemies of their neighbors and the local government. Even the leaders, he claimed are enemies amongst themselves, before retracting and re-stating that, “They aren’t enemies, but they don’t work together. Each one has their own motive and to achieve doing something together is complicated.” Based on these observations and interpretations, Sembrandopaz has been working in Mampujan to expand the leadership base to include twenty-five additional elected community representatives to partake of important decisions and make things more inclusive for the community.

The changes that characterize Mampujan are many, depending on with whom you speak, some would say it has changed for the better while others are nostalgic for the simplicity of the past; especially the elders who feel the youth are losing their way to the exposures of life outside of the village, which exposes them to drugs and other wayward activities. Speaking about these tensions and erasures is less a judgment about whether

or not what is emerging in the community is good or bad, but rather to reveal the complexities that need attention in the process of entering into a community with idealistic notions about transitional justices and big frames such as “reparations” and the “right to return.”

### The Case of the Massacre of Mampujan

The implications for the erasures and tensions can be quite serious. In the case of the “Massacre of Mampujan,” as we have seen. Only seeing the case from the outsider perspective occludes the complexity and the messiness of the processes that the communities are involved in or that the case even involves the other communities that were added on toward the end of the process. Likewise, it obscures that fact that Mampujan did not experience a massacre.

The sentiment on the part of the leaders, especially Daniel is “we always think that Mampujan should be the bridge so that the state and the other communities can have the same interlocution and obtain the things that we have.” However, the nuance of this exemplary case, the story and the path to reparations, are actually not replicable. Besides the uniqueness of the their story, the shift in the laws make it illegal to get judicial reparations through the 2005 Justice and Peace Law and administrative reparations through the 2011 Victim’s Law. Mampujan’s case straddled the timing of the two, putting in a “state of exception. (Agamben, 2005)”

In their case, they received an amount of monetary reparations that exceeds what is now being offered through the Victim’s law being carried out today. Already there is

question as to how the state will generate the funds to compensate all registered victims at a level much more modest than they awarded Mampujan through their judicial sentencing. As the community rebuilds on their lands in New Mampujan, constructing their mansions with their financial reparations the state is also building the community new homes on their original lands in Old Mampujan. They are the first community to receive lands as part of the land restitution section of the Victim's Law. However, these double reparations, to the extent that it has been awarded, would be impossible to replicate given the existence of the parameters in the 2011 Victim's Law. The leaders of Mampujan recognized this, which was one of the catalysts for their historic march.

With the influx of finances and the building of new houses in the community, the state regards the community now as social and political subjects. However, there is question as to whether their political participation has actually changed. Through understanding what the community has gained through the processes with the state, there is no indication that there has been any structural change. Many in the community still struggle to make ends meet and there is still disparity among those who received reparations and those who did not.

As an afro-Colombian community, Mampujan as a successful case also could gloss over some of the deeper understandings about the conditions that lead to and still produce violence in the region. Afro-Colombians who have been disproportionately affected by the conflict still fight to be included in the national-level peace processes. In the region more broadly, violence still exists in various manifestation. This is the most important aspect to the current environment that the case highlights. They are a beacon

in the midst of ongoing narratives of abandonment, violence, and differential treatment in the surrounding region. There remains a lot of fear and trauma in Mampujan and in the neighboring communities that as yet goes unaddressed and that do not necessarily heal from reparations.

### Reflection

The case of Mampujan provides a lens into how a the state and one community made themselves legible to each other through the implementation of transitional justice laws and the production of victimhood. Through these narrative dynamics, the politics of legibility as tied to the production of victimhood can be described through the reparations processes with the state. Because Mampujan is touted as a “success” story, it merits a closer look at the narrative dynamics in order to understand how the community narratives tied to religious discourse not only supported the processes immediately following their forced displacement, but also in making them legible to the state and other national and international organizations. The master narratives about God that anchored the community’s sense of self, provided a meaning making architecture for understanding the violence, keeping the community from completely fracturing. It was also a narrative that did not counter the master narratives of transitional justice articulated and implemented through Colombian law.

However, as the story of Mampujan reveals, the more coherent the story and the more attention it gets from the state the less complex it is and the less potential for variations to exist. While the community boasts its unity and leadership capacity and

their willingness to play into the narratives of the state, it eventually surfaces that their processes are much more complex in their execution than in their telling. Tensions exist within the community and are articulated about the community by other victims and victims advocacy groups. A closer look at what people are talking about shows that some of the grand storylines of forgiveness and reconciliation do not hold for everyone and that even the quilting circle of women exhibits a diversity of experiences.

As the community's story is rehearsed and coheres the leaders eventually become the only ones who can tell the story as it is. The narratives of unity, God, and forgiveness does not support the people whose stories exist at the edges or the margins of the community's dominant story. However, these are the stories that circulate the most widely and serve to organize other community's stories about the community, making the people of Mampujan appear unified and coherent. It is often the most simplified stories, stories that lack complexity that get taken up by the state. Because Mampujan's story positions their forced displacement as part of God's prophecy, it shifts the attention away from the state's culpability.

However, it also distances them from other communities in the region who have not had the same success with the state-initiated processes. While Mampujan's story is archetypal making their victimhood emblematic, it is not representative of the victim narrative of the region that is characterized by stories of abandonment and neglect from the state. The community is positioned as an exemplar by the state and as an isolated case by many the broader region, meanwhile the communities affiliated with

Sembrandopaz benefit from learning the successes and challenges faced by Mampujan through their connection with the organization.

Ties to Sembrandopaz contributes to the politics of legibility, as some communities do not have such mediating organizations to shepherd the processes and help translate the laws and victim's rights. Sembrandopaz is also critical for elaborating the community's story. Additionally, through work with the community the organization accompanies community processes such as the women's quilting circle that provide alternative spaces for meaning making of the past to take place. However, their intimate quilting group story also gets taken up by the state and feeds into the community's recognition by the state as a "success" story.

That "success story" obscures the reality that many families in Mampujan still struggle to make ends meet even though many have upgraded their homes as a result of the reparations they received. The tensions that manifest within the community are one type of erasure that is omitted from the more public stories circulating about the community. Other, more serious, erasures became visible through meetings and interviews with individuals and communities around the region, especially stories of the fear and violence that is still widely felt. While the state considers the region a zone of rehabilitation and is no longer subjected to forced displacements, there are still selective killings, sanctions for anyone considered to be affiliated with guerrilla groups or leftist politics, and legacies of violence. It is critical to understand the dynamics of fear and violence still operant in the region that contribute to people's ability or inability to



interact with the state and engage in new peacebuilding efforts that could evolve longstanding conflict narratives characterized by mistrust.

## CHAPTER SIX: PUBLIC SECRETS

One of the most critical erasures resulting from the dominant storylines that circulate about the case of Mampujan is the lack of attention to the broader context of violence that permeates the landscape where peacebuilding efforts abound. In conversations with international organizational representatives from USAID and USIP in the U.S., working on peacebuilding initiatives the context of violence in Colombia was back grounded rather than foregrounded. While the government and judicial apparatuses attempt to hold perpetrators accountable and implement peacebuilding activities in the form of reparations, the processes pay little if any attention to the conditions that made the violence possible in the first place and fail to acknowledge that it still continues in communities today. So, while apologies are launched, reduced sentences are awarded, truth processes about violent acts are recorded, and material indemnification is distributed, little do these processes add up to a deeper understanding of the conflict or the ways in which over seven million people displaced and those who lived through hundreds of thousands of murders, many of which were of people accused of being guerrillas without evidence still live in fear and amidst violence. While evidence supports that the state was complicit in the violence and that politicians and military often acted in partnership with the paramilitary, this was not something that was spoken about openly, and still presents its dangers.

When researchers and practitioners of transitional justice claim that Colombia is a “pre” post conflict context in which transitional laws are being implemented, what does it actually mean to be “pre” post-conflict? Does this refer to continued FARC operations, which are being addressed in the current peace process in Havana, Cuba? Does this refer to the continued marginalization of rural communities in setting the terms for peace? Does it refer to the continued violence that communities experience still today in regions that are deemed to be zones of peace and reconciliation, like that of the Montes de Maria? Does it refer to the fact that Colombia touts one of the largest incidences of landmine deaths? What about the drug trafficking violence? Perhaps, all of the above?

The “success” narrative of Mampujan and the peaceful ways of the community who have already received reparations and are exemplars of forgiveness and reconciliation, obscures stories about these dangers. While individuals express fears once conversations become deeper and more nuanced, most do not speak openly about their fears, raising a question about whether that is an erasure because they are an exemplar of peace, therefore suppressing stories about fear, or if the community is rather unique because of their exceptional status with the state. On more than one occasion, Daniel and Celino expressed to me that there was no reason to be afraid in Mampujan. However, when having conversations about the guarantee of non-repetition with community members, they express that repetition of violence was their greatest fear.

There is a particular presence of “security” that follows the visibility that the community boasts, which is commonly heralded as the path to continued assurance of reprieve from violence or threats of violence. The state provides special police

surveillance for the community, leaving them feeling less vulnerable. Likewise it was suggested that, because of the judicial sentencing, it is in the best interest of the former paramilitary leaders to ensure that no violence occurs in the communities associated to the Case of the Massacres of Mampujan, lest their reduced sentencing of eight years be increased to the forty plus they would endure should they break the parameters of the sentence.

However, it is widely accepted, that the peace and justice law only superficially or symbolically demobilized the 30,000 paramilitary and that their operations are still largely operational under the guise of what are called “bandas criminales,” criminal bands or gangs that claim to be decentralized. Likewise, there are many government officials taking on seats of power who do not mention their ties to paramilitary activity. While stories about violence and threats of violence do not emerge frequently in conversations in or about Mampujan, it is not completely absent. For example Daniel travels with full security detail when he attends various events for victims, however, it is something that is deemed unnecessary by others in the community, including the other leaders who do not have the same protection. However, it was through spending time with Sembrandopaz and traveling to other communities around the Montes de Maria, such as Pichilin, Libertad and the Alta Montaña that revealed the need for deeper attention into this so-called end to violence and threats of violence that still operate in clandestine yet public ways.

Before one of my first visits to Libertad, Kat and I met with the seeder who was living there for lunch in the main municipality of San Onofre. The two had a

conversation in which the seeder described the nature of the violence that had been prevalent in the weeks prior. In the community of Libertad, a man was seen running from attackers, minutes after which he collapsed dead in front of one of the neighbor's houses. The man had a knife in his chest and was evidently murdered. Community members recognized the butcher and attributed his fate to retaliatory measures taken against him for selling the meat of stolen cows. This attribution traces then back to "ex" paramilitary in the region who are the proprietors of much of the livestock in the region. However, the community members also understood that it was possible that the butcher was not clear that the meat had been stolen, which shook the community greatly. The seeder living in Libertad spoke to the woman who lived in the house where the man collapsed and passed along this story to Sembrandopaz.

Much of the violence is widely attributed to "ex" paramilitary who still function in organized and institutionalized ways, sometimes even lead by incarcerated leaders. However, there is still an understanding that military and other state actors are often in collusion and still turning a cheek. Local NGOs, community organizations, victims advocates, and communities speak about these threats and acts of violence in safe spaces, yet, they are not spoken about openly for fear of fatality. For this reason I have termed these acts "public secrets" alongside Taussig (1999) and Tate (2007) who also use the term in the context of the Colombian conflict. Taussig (1999) defines the term, as "that which is generally known, but cannot be spoken" (Taussig, 1999, p. 50).

This frame provides a category for understanding particular dynamics of insecurity that formed in and around the communities in the Montes de Maria region.

While the state touts the region's stability and hails it as a zone of rehabilitation, the presence of "public secrets" operates to destabilize the daily lives of those who inhabit communities within that zone. Because the narrative goes unchallenged, hence the "secret," the government continues to boast the success of its project to create peace in the region.

Historically, one of the most egregious public secrets, "false positives," led to the death of thousands of innocent civilians. Between 2002 and 2008, during a period when Colombian forces engaged in forms of social cleansing, army brigades rounded up poor farmers and other marginalized groups with the promise of offering them work, killed them and then dressed them up to look like guerrillas to pass them off as such. This was done when the military was under great pressure by the Uribe administration to demonstrate their success in the fight against guerrillas. The army committed approximately 3,000 false positive murders in order to inflate their numbers and to appear more successful in the fight against guerrilla groups. The parties of the current peace process discuss these murders as part of their agreement for peace moving forward, which some say will lead to impunity for the acts.

However, during the time of the conflict, speaking out against the government or the military was a fatalistic endeavor and still is today. One of the first stories I heard when learning about the various ways in which the conflict still lives on for people, was the story about the father of one of the Sembrandopaz employees. At first details of her life seeped out in everyday conversation—"oh, this is the first time since what happened that she has taken public transportation," or, "she's the only one in her family that doesn't

travel with security detail,” or, “talk to Moni, she is heavily involved in an organization called MOVICE (Movement of Victims of State Crimes).” Eventually, I learned that Moni’s father was a politician during the years of the Uribe presidency. As the mayor of his municipality he was one of the only ones in the region that refused to receive monetary handouts in support of paramilitary activities. His lack of compliance led to attempts to frame him for failure to carry out appropriate administrative duties, leading to investigations, which failed to uncover anything useful. At that time, the president held public hearings where Moni’s father denounced the actions of his contemporaries. He implored that the region was overrun by para-politics, whereby the politicians and the paramilitary collaborated in the massacres of civilians. As he revealed this link between paramilitary and local politicians he also pleaded for protection, asserting that he would be killed for sharing this information publically. Ten days later he was assassinated and no one has been held accountable.

These are two examples of extrajudicial killings that stained the relationship between civilians and the state and exacerbated fears of being accused of supporting guerrilla activity or speaking out against illegal activity pertaining to paramilitarism or the state. In order to have public secrets, this compliance is tantamount; otherwise there is no incentive to keep the secret. Part of what makes public secrets successful is that communities learn what it is they should or should not “know” and make sure that they cannot get caught “knowing” something they are not supposed to know. Because the government has made strides in lessening the death count and violence has been on the decline, the Montes de Maria region is considered to be a zone of reconciliation,

however, violence still exists. There are still random killings that are not responded to by the state—everyone knows they are happening and yet, it is still dangerous to talk about them. Doing so would undermine the work of the state and its trust-building in the form of peacebuilding activities. There is an appearance of peace and security in the region, but the presence of public secrets undermines it and keeps communities unstable or destabilizes them.

Public secrets operate in multiple ways and take on a variety of forms, which I argue are an outgrowth of the conflict that operated to maintain fractures within communities. From my research, four main categories of public secrets emerged *pamphlets*, *rumors*, *public erasures*, and *embodiments*. While I have categorized them, as such, sometimes there is overlap between them as they are not neat and tidy phenomena. As a brief introduction, *pamphlets* are written leaflets with threats and accusations supposedly created and distributed by paramilitary and military, *rumors* are stories that circulate, usually, by word of mouth about deaths or violence in the region, *public erasures* are elements that are left out of public stories or that cannot be told and *embodiments* are physical manifestations of threats of violence that provide visual cues about experiences or threats of violence. In order to understand the features of each and how each type of public secret operates, I will give examples from stories that I heard as well as share my own experiences. These public secrets do not operate outside of their historical roots in the landscape of the Colombian conflict before the current transitional phase and, where possible, those histories are included in the descriptions.



## **Pamphlets**

Pamphlets (“panfletos”) are an artifact of the violent conflict that have a long history and sustained presence in Colombia and in the city of Sincelejo, Sucre, where Sembrandopaz is located. Pamphlets are written leaflets circulating in cities and communities with threatening messages on them often attributed to “ex” paramilitary groups still operating in the region. However, sometimes they are issued by the military as well. Pamphlets appear both randomly and at more expected times such as during elections, however, are frequent enough that I was exposed to them on multiple occasions.

How pamphlets are used varies, but one common occurrence of them historically was to warn residents that if they failed to vacate their homes within a particular time frame, they would be killed. Usually, the pamphlets would be signed by the paramilitary or “ex” paramilitary group issuing the warning in order to maintain and accrue legitimacy. Pamphlets became such a ubiquitous tool for anonymous threat that civilians not involved with any armed groups took to using them as a method for addressing disputes. As one employee of Sembrandopaz, Elliot described, although these pamphlets do not normally circulate anymore, it is common for everyday citizens who are in conflict with their neighbor for example to print up a pamphlet with their neighbor’s face on it and a threat to kill them, passing it off as being from a gang or paramilitary. Eventually, these fabricated pamphlets came under scrutiny and were uncovered as being false because they would bear the name a gang or paramilitary unit located in a different region. Elliot explained that was likely done by the person strategically in order to avoid

backlash from locally operating armed groups. However, actual pamphlets were not just used to terrorize with empty threats, they sometimes lead to serious consequences of forced displacement and actual deaths.

I learned about pamphlets first-hand by happenstance one evening when I was visiting the community of Pichilin. People in the community often related to me that they no longer live in fear since the overt violence in the region had ended. However, the way they spoke about their daily experiences and described certain reactions revealed something more complicated. For example, it used to be that cars could drive freely from the village of Pichilin to the closest major city and community members would hitch rides with private vehicles or passing taxis. However, since the massacres and displacement in 1996, traffic no longer passes along their route in that way and until the proliferation of motorbikes in the region the only way to get to a nearby town was by donkey. Instead of being a thirty-minute journey to buy food, it took almost two hours each way.

Similarly, one afternoon Don Felipe told me a story about the previous night. Apparently, a white truck drove by his rancho and he and his family who had been sitting in front where they often congregated, got up and moved to the back out of sight. So, while they speak of feeling safe and secure, when an unrecognizable vehicle passes through their community, they take precaution.

These examples demonstrate a narrative instability through these contradictions in their stories and reveal that the people in Pichilin do not fall in line with the dominant narrative of the state that the region is safe. This instability continued on the evening I

first experienced a pamphlet. It was the first time I spent the night outside of the main village of Pichilin, with part of the family who organized a small satellite community about thirty minute walk away, depending on the heat of the day. I was sitting with Kiki, whom I had just met and was keeping me company. We looked on as the young, mostly boys, anxiously awaited their turn to play their Friday evening soccer matches. At the time, the adult men occupied the field, so the younger boys were running around kicking the ball between them, sometimes hitting our plastic chairs. The sun was finally setting, bringing an end to the oppressive heat of the day and as the pleasantness of evening fell, I felt myself begin to idealize this community's simple life.

On this compound, everyone is related and all of the men and boys were either brothers, cousins, uncles, or dads, all communing on the soccer field after a long hot day in the fields, at school, or at the rare office job in the neighboring town. I met the gaze of a young curious boy, around the age of nine, whose comportment seemed more mature than many of the other boys. He sat in the seat that Kaki had vacated and we talked about his school, what he likes to study; he asked me about life in the United States. For a moment he disappeared, and when he came back, he was holding an 8x11 white piece of paper that he wanted to show me. It had a photograph of a white truck and in big letters on the top was a warning to beware of a man and a woman in a big white truck who are kidnapping young kids and selling their organs. Dumbfounded, I asked the boy where he got that piece of paper and he told me the police gave it to him. I asked him if he was scared and he said "No...." and after a pause he asked, "Are you?" I told him I didn't know if I was scared because I didn't understand the nature of the paper I was looking at.

Everyone in the community eventually learned about the paper, which became known to me as a pamphlet fairly quickly. It was immediately evident that there was a difference of opinion about whether or not it was “real.” Some people dismissed it as a warning about activity taking place so far away that it was unnecessary to worry. A general sentiment of uncertainty around the whole situation dominated conversations. Around the time that I learned about the pamphlet, Kaki had received a phone call from her husband who had heard rumors that the truck had been spotted in the region. She told me with absolute certainty that the paramilitaries were behind it but they did not leave the usual signatures on the piece of paper.

That night families monitored the news, thinking that, if the threat was real, they would hear about it there, but there were no stories. I went to bed thinking that everyone had brushed the whole thing aside only to find the next day that none of the children had gone to school. When I inquired about it, I was told by most that they did not want to take any chances and one mother made no mention of the pamphlet and simply said the kids did not go to school. I was in a tenuous position myself, not wanting to ask questions that might escalate the situation further in the event that people were not afraid, or if they preferred to worry in silence. Although the purpose of the pamphlet was unclear, what unfolded in the community was a ripple effect engendering fear among them. I did speak with one mother who felt that the precaution was unnecessary considering parents accompany their children to school, eliminating or at least reducing the possibility that the alleged couple could access them. Aside from believing the

pamphlet was not an imminent threat to them, she felt that whatever the threat was, it was not enough to keep her from taking her kids for their education.

This moment was not only illuminating in the context of a conversation about whether or not people are living in fear, but it opened my eyes to the existence of pamphlets, which are not only historically part of the system or networks of violence in Colombia, but remain so. It raises questions about what it means to live in fear, and illustrates the precarity of life in a context that is both working toward peace and still characterized by episodes of threat and uncertainty. It also raises the question about what it means when the bodies committing acts of violence are no longer visible but their presence is still deeply felt behind an unknown truck, or a warning pamphlet. The stories that circulated about these pamphlets made me wonder if their truth even mattered. Their very existence provided enough fodder for worried parents to keep their young ones home from school. Pamphlets whether true or not destabilized the community's narratives.

The Sembrandopaz staff was not surprised when I told them about the pamphlet experience in Pichilin. Of course, they were well aware of pamphlets and their history in the conflict and in the region. What I learned then was that the military distributed a pamphlet threatening local and international staff at Sembrandopaz, accusing them of doing "political work" which is code for supporting guerrilla activity in rural communities. Two volunteers who worked for Sembrandopaz on "religious" visas were accused of being in violation of their immigration status and the office of the prosecutor opened a case against them to have them deported. The accusation against them affected

their work as well as their movement in the region because they felt they were under surveillance. After approximately eleven months, and a great deal of effort by the legal representative at Sembrandopaz, the case was closed, clearing the women of the charges against them.

In an even more complicated case, a pamphlet leveraged against a community member in the Alta Montaña region where Sembrandopaz works, led to the imprisonment of Jorge Montes. He has been incarcerated without charges for two years under the accusation of being a guerrilla supporter. His arrest came at the same time as he was fairly elected as a City Council member, which signaled that he was gaining popularity and advancing politically. The authorities released him from prison to accept his position publicly, while in handcuffs. This case has generated a solidarity movement in the Alta Montaña region and Sembrandopaz is working diligently to exonerate him of the charges against him. The pamphlet that led to Jorge's arrest first circulated around his arrest in 2013. Pamphlets around election time are still standard and in October 2015, the pamphlets that circulated sent terrorizing messages to influence the coming elections; to curb any kind of support of leftist politics, movements or support.

The final incident with pamphlets that I experienced happened when I went to visit Jeanette, the head of human rights for the police force in the region. When I arrived to the police station on the outskirts of Cartagena, she was speaking with a man wearing a bulletproof vest over top of his clothes about the situation of victims in the region of Bolívar. The man, José, was a main contributor to the state-funded book describing

peace and reconciliation processes in the Montes de Maria region. He has had many threats and accusations launched at him creating fear for his life. He explained to me that people in his neighborhood in Cartagena had been killed. In this case, the pamphlet threatened to kill his neighbor if he did not vacate his home within ten days; and when he did not obey he was killed. He was there at the police station to enlist Jeannette and the Colonel of Cartagena into a set of conversations to strategize an approach to security. It was the only instance I had heard of an attempt to intervene in the threats of a pamphlet. José's hope was that they could mitigate deaths like that if they worked together.

During the conversation, José gloated over the work that Jeannette does for human rights and accompanying communities. He expressed that her accessibility and willingness to listen to the grievances of community members has helped him tremendously. In my conversation with her, she conveyed a deep empathy for and commitment to the communities in her territory. She is available to them 24/7 and responds to as many of their requests as possible to attend their important events. However, here is still so much corruption and lack of trust and it remains to be seen what concrete strides come of the newly created position Jeannette occupies.

Pamphlets are still a common occurrence in Colombia and in the Montes de Maria region. Some pamphlets present ambiguous threats to children in a community, serve to create fear among international volunteers, lead to incarceration, and ultimately, end in more deaths. As written documents they circulate within the narrative landscape and have a destabilizing effect on how people make sense daily lives. There is no uniform approach or reaction to them and they engendered different levels of fear and response.

This form of communication executed by the hidden paramilitary or ex paramilitary has a legacy in the region and operates in very violent ways. These instances of violence are not spoken about publically and, historically, are not acknowledged publically by the state. This secret that is legible on people's dead bodies through their lived experience, is made illegible by the state because it cannot be spoken. There are alternative ways that public secrets are circulated, however, that do involve particular kinds of speaking. Rumors while, not completely distinct from pamphlets, are a mechanism for locating where violent activity might be transpiring and how fear still characterizes daily life.

### **Rumors**

Pamphlets as a written form of accusation or threat sometimes catalyzed the rumor mill, as people attempted to make sense of them and collect information, as was the case in Pichilin. Likewise, in Jorge's case, his arrest is largely attributed to rumors corroborated by community members about who saw him where and with whom, rather than any kind of concrete evidence. Rumors are a separate category because they usually happen by word of mouth and are grounded in community networks. Rumor is a substitute for news; in fact it is news that does not develop in institutional channels." (Tomatsu S Hibutani 1966 in Bernardini, p. 14) and, as stories, participate in and extend narrative systems and have the capacity to stoke fear (Bernardi, 2012). Because of the way that people communicate more generally in the rural areas, often without electricity and only more recently the youth having cell phones, there has always been a reliance on word of mouth. This took shape in different ways during the conflict years.



Historically, during the violence, rumors manifested as people saw incongruities in their communities that could not be openly discussed. For example, the military enlisted civilians as hired informants who would provide names of individuals, often from their own communities, whom they suspected to be so-called enemies. Rumors spread about people who wore civilian clothes by day and uniforms by night, creating ambiguity about who perpetrated violence and who did not. This created insecurity in communities because of the uncertainty of who was an informant or supported the guerrilla, generating risk around even sharing a cup of coffee with the “wrong person.”(Rodriquez, 2011, p. 99) In some instances, the military persuaded informants, who had little income and grieved terrible losses that still remained unexplained as a result of the conflict to remember things in particular ways that would benefit the military. In this way, fear and distrust continued to permeate even after the most violent massacres and forced displacements occurred.

In daily conversations between community members in Pichilin, it was not uncommon for someone to ask if anyone had heard about the deaths that happened two communities over or, if anyone knew the status on the health of the person in “x” community who was attacked. While certainly there were deaths and attacks not directly related to institutionalized mechanisms, the community members in Pichilin made sense of these rumors by attributing them to the land restitution process being implemented by the state. As certain communities received land parcels from the state as part of their reparations packages, so too did they receive death threats and ultimately many did and

do meet their deaths. According to the rumors, “ex” paramilitary executed these violent acts, wanting to maintain their stronghold over desirable lands in the region.

### **Public Erasures**

As communities learned about what they were and were not supposed to know or talk about, so too, did politicians tell stories in particular ways that created erasures. In one particular instance Felix and his wife Melita from Mampujan attended the swearing in of the new governor in the region of Bolivar. Dressed in their formal attire, they spent the afternoon under a white tent with refreshments, while they watched the processions and listened to the various speeches. The incoming governor’s words struck Felix because as he spoke about the region both its past and present, he boasted about the elimination of guerrilla and the successes under the Uribe leadership. Not once in his lengthy oration did he mention the paramilitary presence in the region. Felix explained that he knew that it meant that this new governor was one of the many politicians that collaborated with paramilitary forces during the height of the violence and, likely, still did. He shared that this was not just his own personal understanding but a general one that the public knows but does not speak about publically.

This kind of erasure is part of the national narrative that leaves out the role of the paramilitary violence during the conflict that by many statistical measures was more prevalent than guerrilla activity (WOLA). However, these erasures are significant for maintaining the state’s position that the peace process with the guerrilla means an end to

the violent conflict and obscures their own role in the massacres and displacements that paramilitary forces committed.

The Coronel of the Bolivar region, the only person from the military barracks permitted to speak with me, shared a similar narrative with the same erasure. As I shared previously, he did not mention any violence related to paramilitary activity in the region. In this interview, which I was not permitted to record, I asked the Coronel why he had not mentioned the paramilitary activity. And in a more serious tone, which took on a stronger volume, he explained to me that the military did not have the authority to act on the actions of the paramilitaries. The paramilitary, he explained, were community grown defense units that intended to combat the guerrillas that were causing trouble in the communities. The guerrillas were by law, declared enemies of the state and it was part of their mandate to go after them, but that was not the case for paramilitaries. There was nothing they could do. The Coronel shared that the demobilized paramilitary no longer existed but converted into gangs and other kinds of everyday criminals or "bandidos."

When I asked Jeannette why the military failed to mention paramilitary activity she explained that it was because the military and paramilitaries were actually so interlinked that they were almost the same. Furthermore, as far as trusting security forces, Jeanette and the Coronel agreed that depending on which armed group carried out the threats and killing determined whether the communities trust the police or the military more. However, speaking out against the army is also difficult because conscription laws mostly only apply to males from poor populations because wealthier families tend to buy

their way out of it. So, in the communities it is often difficult to make accusations because almost everyone knows someone who is affiliated with the military.

The erasures were not only relegated to the armed violence, however. The reparations processes and peace narrative on the part of the state also obscured conversations that were most important to people in the communities. While the state came in to talk about money and material compensations, some communities were more worried about their food insecurity and spent much more time wondering how that would be resolved. As part of Santos' neoliberal economic strategies, multinational agro-businesses have entered the region, taking over lands abandoned during the conflict. In addition to constructing oil pipelines these companies have starting large-scale monocrop production cultivating mostly exports such as palm oil. This influx shifts the means of production away from the communities who are forced to purchase food rather than grow it themselves.

This has been further exacerbated by what the communities attribute to "El Niño;" the weather patterns that affected temperature and rainfall in much of the southern cone. The unpredictability of the weather, the increase in temperature and decrease in rain has been devastating at times for communities. One of the most difficult moments I had during my research occurred when visiting Pichilin. The people expressed their deep concern about the drought that we had been having all summer. It was one of the worst they had ever experienced. The men had not planted any seeds in weeks, which meant there would be shortage of food over the winter. They asked me if I had access to the

delicious powdered food that humanitarian aide from Canada had delivered to them the during their past devastating drought.<sup>29</sup>

### **Embodiments**

While there are many ways in which people construct their stories to leave out particularities, or how dominant narratives block the emergence of different kinds of stories, the embodied public secret is undeniably visible yet still goes publically unacknowledged and unspoken about. The two prevalent manifestations of this visual embodiment, bulletproof vests worn on the outside of clothing and security details, voiced the fears and threats of violence for many victims and victims advocates. Diego, a community member from the Alta Montaña wore a bulletproof vest on the outside of his clothing to the bi-weekly regional meeting held at Sembrandopaz. A couple of staff members at Sembrandopaz dismissed his need for the protection saying that he really was not someone who needed to be that afraid. This reflection revealed to me that even the bulletproof vest tells a story about violence and fear that may or may not be legitimized. That characterization made me wonder the conditions under which it would be legitimized. José, the victim's advocate that I met when visiting the head of human rights for the police force in Bolivar also wore a bulletproof vest over his clothes because of threats on his life and in his community that have resulted in death.

---

<sup>29</sup> In response to this request, I contacted a colleague who works for a food security organization to ask what one might do in this situation. She responded to me that, unfortunately, no one pays attention to the individual communities suffering from food insecurity. It was too small-scale.

Security detail is the other kind of visible embodiment of the threats and fears of many victims and victim's advocates. Regina from MOVICE, is an example of a lifelong human rights activist, who joined the political party, the Patriotic Union, that formed in 1985 after the assassination of anywhere from 3,000-6,000 members of the armed group under the same name. While she does not condone violence, she believed in the mission behind the struggle and joined once it became a political movement. She is now a leading member of the international group, MOVICE which is the same organization that Moni is active in for those who have suffered from crimes of the state. In her own words:

*We suffered what we call a political genocide that was committed by the state in Colombia. Since then, for 10 years, we developed the movement I spoke about earlier, for victims of state crime. To be a survivor of a party like the UP is not an easy thing. And to be a survivor of the violence is not easy- and to be associated with any leftist party. In fact, in 1993 my family had to leave the country because of direct threats against us. We've had to bury friends and coworkers from the movement and those of us who have survived have lived to tell the story. We have recorded 120 aggressions against members of our organization since 2005. Those are murders, death threats, murder attempts, court cases, court charges, information robbery, for example three armed men entered my house and destroyed my computer and threatened my daughter and mother. Between all of us, we have seven protection plans among the members of MOVICE, which of course is a severe intrusion on our privacy and shows the lack of guarantee of safety that the state should be providing. So we have to hire security guards. My family has 2 protection plans, which translates into five armed guards and two armored cars. And I think that will continue as long as we have to find the physical needs because we have no other way to protect ourselves. And because we feel like there hasn't been any progress, and what is most worrying and what we are most researching is the impunity with which crimes are committed with permission of the state. We have 200 aggressions recorded against people in our group and yet we can't get a single one recognized to be taken up by the courts. That's how it is here. It's difficult and complicated and so it is.*

Regina is not alone in her fear of the state due to their secrecy around their involvement in the violent conflict. The security detail is a physical manifestation of that fear, but the story behind it is not one that is often heard. While it announces to the

public that there is fear or threat around, the nature of that fear and the contours of that threat remain unseen and unheard. But the threats are real.

Ricardo himself has two cases accusing him of being a clandestine guerilla leader for the past forty years-- the veracity of which the military has just not been able to prove. There are hundreds of pages of documents detailing the accusations against him, which have lead to his extradition to the United States, and kept him under threat for many years. As a non-violent actor, Ricardo refuses to wear a bulletproof vest or to accept any kind of armed security detail for protection. His belief is that if he accepts this kind of protection it would counter his non-violent principles as well as his freedom. It is widely held that Ricardo's visibility on the regional, national, and international scales has kept him alive and out of prison all of these years.

There is a terrain of violence that stems from the existence of public secrets in various manifestations. Through each category, we can learn more about the contours of that terrain and the fear that it engenders through the social relationship between the public secret and the communities/individuals it terrorizes. Whether through a pamphlet, rumor, public erasure, or embodiment, the fear and violence cannot be spoken about publically is inscribed in the everyday lives of people on the wrong side of the narrative. These public secrets struggle to gain legitimacy or to be inscribed into the master narratives of the state, the elite or what Scott (1990) refers to as the "public transcript," because it would destabilize the power relationship between the state and the communities and their efforts at trust-building (Scott, 1990).

While there are instances of resistance in the face of public secrets they remain at the individual level and do not yet rupture the seats of power. Scott (1990) describes the moment when that which is excluded from the public transcript, or the “hidden transcript,” of the subordinated population first meets the public transcript as a cathartic moment that generates hope. However, in the case of Moni’s father, among many others, publicizing the hidden transcripts results in his death. These legacies of violence are documented and are especially powerful in Michael Taussig’s, “Law in a Lawless Land” where he chronicles, in diary format his two-week experience in a “Colombian town taken over by paramilitaries imposing law and order through selective assassinations- what Colombians call a *limpieza* (cleansing)(Taussig, 2003, p. xi).” Public secrets are powerful.

Given that the government is investing its time and energy in rebuilding the Colombian state imposing law and order through transitional justice and reparations, public secrets threaten the foundation of trust and stability that the state is aiming to achieve. What these public secrets add up to is the very opposite of stability; and the constant threats of violence and violent acts that get ignored by the state but everyone knows about engenders vulnerability and precarity in the lives of communities. As Judith Butler (2006) claims, all humans are vulnerable, however, that vulnerability is differentially distributed and there are those who are more susceptible to poverty, exclusion, or live closer to a violent reality, it is felt constantly or is immanent. Community members in Pichilin share that their experiences of vulnerability are fewer than they were at the height of violence, however, there are some members of the



community who will not move back to the main town where the massacres happened, and still repeatedly tell stories that absolve them from any collaboration with guerrillas.

That the state does not recognize these acts of violence undermines their own processes in the communities. What is created in the Montes de Maria is perpetual uncertainty in magnified ways—producing precarity in the sense of the unequal distribution of resources not just from a labor standpoint, but also from the lens of the value of human life. The precariousness in the region keeps social worlds and relationships contingent in ways that maintain fear, prohibit the production of new subjectivities, and stunt the development of agency. The presumption is that the antidote to the condition of precarity is to create more security, which the government has historically attempted by increasing the presence of police and military forces.

In the current climate of peacebuilding, the government is further responding by overlaying its peacebuilding industry on top of the country in order to build trust, stability, healing, reconciliation, reparations, guarantees of non-repetition, etc. However, the “public secrets” make it virtually impossible for the people to actually live into that. The government comes in from one side saying peace treaty, reintegration, and end to violence etc. as if the FARC and now ELN are the only actors. Meanwhile, pamphlets circulate, threatening people who support communities. People walk around in bulletproof vests for fear of this secret tormentor. People are still being killed or feeling intensely threatened by the unacknowledged actions and words of paramilitary and ex-paramilitary. Even though people will tell you that there are so many things that you

could not even talk about five years ago that you can today, there is not only the legacy of that fear, but it continues today.

There are contradicting stories everywhere—the people of Pichilin saying they feel totally safe and yet when an unidentified white truck goes by they hide in the back of their rancho; or, the stories that circulated about people that were killed as soon as they received land from the government through the land restitution law; or the butcher who was murdered in Libertad, apparently because he was selling meat from stolen cows or from cows that belonged to paramilitary; or how safe it is in Mampujan, but Daniel feels that he needs protection by the police and military; that military accompany every event that takes place on behalf of victims, the pamphlets that circulate pre-elections, the bribes, the corruption, the lack of interest on the part of the mayors, people feeling like they cannot trust the institutional mechanisms for reporting their grievances, Jorge who is in prison without charges after two years. There is not an ongoing, armed conflict in this region, but people are dying outside of the public eye. This subtle silencing, the kind that happens when former paramilitary take on gubernatorial positions and no one ever speaks of it, produces a perennial instability and a double illegibility. The first is that the violence is not read, it is invisible to the state, because it is a breach in the national narrative of peacebuilding. It only partially acknowledges communities-- as victims of past atrocities. The second is that the state keeps itself illegible as a violent actor as it silently supports the continued activity of “ex” paramilitary, who are considered to no longer operate.

In this scenario, there is an asymmetry to the “post-conflict” that is not acknowledged and communities are no match against the military/state. However, the state could do everything under the sun to build trust and distribute reparations, and as long as it ignores these public secrets, their attempts will be in vain. Public secrets and their marginality in the state narrative is enormously destabilizing to peacebuilding and transitional justice. Circumstance and systems remain fragile and it would not take much to destabilize the state’s effort to construct itself as a producer of peace. While it might seem unimportant compared to everything that is happening, ignoring these narratives could be perilous because they keep vulnerability and inhibit peace-and could well be seen as “narrative landmines (Bernardi, 2012).”

### Conclusion

Public secrets contribute to the overall conflict and peacebuilding narrative landscape by constraining what can be said and what cannot be said. The presence of *pamphlets, rumors, public erasures, and embodiments*, reveals the presence of fear generated from violent activities and legacies of violence that contradict the peacebuilding efforts of the state by maintaining ongoing narrative instability and precarity in the region. On the one hand communities cannot fully make themselves legible to the state as long as paramilitary activity still threatens their safety and security.

On another hand, paramilitary violence is “not legible” to the state either, making peacebuilding efforts unstable as well. As long as these narratives are not acknowledged, the people living in the rural areas live in a double bind (Sluzki, 1976), whereby the state

hails communities to enter into trust-building processes through reparations, meanwhile, they are still living in fear as the state continues to neglect the narratives of violence.

While some may claim the violence should be an afterthought when designing interventions, peace accords between the state and the FARC and grassroots peacebuilding will remain fragile as long as these “public secrets” constrain the kinds of stories that can be told to the extent that they do.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR PRAXIS**

There were moments during my research where I felt like a caricature of the intrepid anthropologist, navigating intensely muddy terrain on the back of a motorbike, weaving through the mountainous roads barely passable because of the rain, determined not to miss an important meeting in a community. It was extremely insightful for me to see the extent to which external factors dictated daily life in the rural areas. When it rained, would community members be able to leave the village for food, for an emergency, for work? Which road was the best to travel? Would there be enough rain to plant the next crop? Would the Victim's Unit be able to come for their meeting? Because the roads were impassable in the rain, and the crops could not be planted without it, much of people's livelihoods relied on it. In the absence of rain for weeks at a time, campesinos in the region experienced draught, raising concerns about food security and how they would survive the winter. These concerns that I learned by walking the narrative pathway of the communities were not just facts on the ground but also have import for understanding the embodied experience, movements that are dictated by the weather, nourishment dictated by the weather. Community members were adept at managing their movement, which roads to take at which hours, and how to organize their crops based on the weather patterns.

The lived daily experience was not only subject to weather, however, and spending days at a time in the communities allowed me to learn the creative ways in which they managed their circumstances; from the woman who used the neighbor's ovens to bake sweets to sell on the side of the road while her husband was unable to work due to a leg injury; or how communities in the high mountain region shuttle people in homemade stretchers by foot to the hospital down the mountain because it was faster and less treacherous for the patient than traversing the rocky and unstable "roads" in old, open-air jeeps. While I went to Colombia to learn about how communities are making sense of post-conflict processes, I learned much more than that. I learned about aspirations for writing books, the strength of women in their households, how politically oriented and committed some families are, how to dance to "vallenato," and the ways in which the communities or at least many individuals within them are not "victims."

There is a tendency to group people by community because it is geographically salient, or convenient language, easier for discussion, but there is a danger in representing communities as homogenous entities because it erases the complexity and diversity that exists within them. However, creating an understanding of the narrative landscape and landscape of meaning within a community is a way of uncovering how communities work, operate, makes sense of things in communal ways; not always with the end goal of finding common ground but to see how a community lives in daily negotiation with the complexity that exists.

Understanding the case of Mampujan only from an outward facing perspective such as when a group comes to visit, in the newspaper, through the national museum, or

in mainstream news outlets, reveals an image of the ideal victim. What is absent from such portrayals is the struggle, dissent, disagreement, and silence enacted by the community. The story of success obscures the pain that many still carry in their hearts, that do not forgive, that do not want to return, that are not considered victims by law, that live precarious economic lives, that, despite being the first community to receive reparations, still struggle for food security.

While no process is perfect, lifting the curtain to see what lies behind it reveals that there is a lot more going on in Mampujan than meets the eye. This by no means takes away from the incredible strides they have taken, how they have become exemplars to other communities for their strength, and capacity, but also encourages us not to hide from the messiness of it all. The processes with the state and within the community are at times fraught, joyful, chaotic, confusing, exclusive, and celebratory. The widely circulated story of Mampujan as an emblematic story obscures the intensity of those fluctuations. It is alluring to those that want to tout success, while also serving as a distraction from many aspects of lived realities in the community and the region.

Mampujan's story is enchanting. It sweeps us away into its magic realism and tales of innocence, archangels and miracles. As a sense-making apparatus, these narratives are powerful and provided meaning in times when chaos prevailed in the community. These stories grab imaginations and lure listeners into the plot, when we are told that our presence is part of fulfilling the community's prophecy. In a world where violence has the loudest voice, forgiveness and bibles appeal to ideals in the hearts of those who believe in their power for transforming violent relationships. They are stable

storylines that steer away from the acts of violence and those who perpetrated it into a world of resilience, struggle for rights, and of non-violence. These master narratives work to make Mampujan legible to the state. This is a success of Mampujan and it should be honored as such. The leaders who have sacrificed their lives in order for the community to achieve victim status in the eyes of the state are to be commended.

### Religious Storylines

At the same time, important questions for further inquiry emerged. The dominant storylines that contribute to Mampujan's legibility are anchored by religious discourse, highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between legibility, religious discourse, and transitional justice. The stories that are elaborated outside of the community hang on tropes of magic realism, religious archetypal stories, and prophecy. However, a closer listen to narratives within the community and across communities, provides an analytical lens into how those master narratives work to squeeze out or police the narrative landscape, making it difficult for different kinds of stories to emerge.

"Religion and peacebuilding" and "religious conflict" are common frames for examining peacebuilding programs and for drawing connections between individuals and groups with religious affiliation and the institutions and the practices that follow as a result. However, a narrative lens into the way that narratives grounded in religious stories generate exclusions or occlude particular socio-political realities is an area for further examination. While transitional justice literature often critiques the field's adherence to processes such as reconciliation, testimony, and forgiveness in post violent



contexts because of its grounding on Christian frames, this case contributes by illuminating the complexity of the narrative dynamics that constitute such processes and how they exist in tension with the ways that people within and across communities differentially relate to them. Their power as master narratives grips even people in the community that do not share the same religious commitments at the same time as they crowd out possible alternatives; stories that do not include forgiveness and are marked by fear or anger, stories that do not include the angels appearing from the sky, or stories about women who were not “healed” by the quilting circle.

In the broader context of victim’s processes, Mampujan’s notoriety came with some material gains but also at costs to their relationships with other victims and communities. Threads in their religious discourse generate tenuous relational positions through their articulation. The Christian discourse of the “blessed community” in the way that the leaders in Mampujan narrate themselves is double-edged. The good news is that it has helped many in the community anchor their own stories and sense of belonging in chaotic, vulnerable, and tumultuous times. However, the language of the “blessed community” also works to potentially alienate those communities around them that experienced violent massacres, have not received attention from the state and, therefore, might be considered “not blessed.” This subtly articulated hierarchy feeds the notion that there is unequal distribution of vulnerability, capacity, or even luck. As learned through the events with victims throughout the region, many, if not most, communities have not received the level of attention from the state or outside organizations as Mampujan.

## **The Caution of Coherence: Vulnerability and Precarity**

The narratives of transitional justice and the coherent stories produced and circulated in transitional justice processes often imply the goal or attainment of closure. Programs that operate in communities have an endpoint; they are finite. However, when such processes come to an end and a program is finished, communities continue to struggle in their daily lives to make ends meet, put food on the table, feel secure, and repair their damaged identities. A community cannot do that independent of the narrative environment in which it is embedded. For Mampujan in particular, that which they have gained has not provided closure, nor have they arrived at the endpoint of social and political subjectivity claimed by the state. However, viewing transitional justice as a process of legibility, Mampujan has certainly made extraordinary strides and it is essential to understand those processes and their strengths and limitations.

One of the claims made by the state about Mampujan is that they have arrived at “success” as if their processes are over and now that the three-year allotted time has passed and they are considered “social and political subjects.” The state worked with the community to achieve their status as victims, providing the opportunity for them to work for reparations. In so doing, the community leaders learned to navigate the system of reparations in order to enlist support for attaining their rights as victims. Indeed, the four leaders have cultivated new skills for negotiating with a variety of entities in the government and business sectors leading to their successful acquisition of material resources. However, this success is framed by their political and social subjectivity as victims as prescribed by the state. Additionally, the community process is far from

complete, nor inclusive, and remains part of the community's struggle for stability in the social and political realms.

Spending intensive time in the community and its surrounding revealed that the narrative coherence of the state's story about communities needs to be interrogated in order to understand the multiplicity of subjectivities that need to be constituted in the transition from violence to peace, with the victim identity being one aspect of that. Producing victimhood in order to rebuild after one event of violence obviates that violence continues to permeate and infect narrative stability in the region. Even as subjects share their coherent story, further investigation within and around the community uncovers a constant state of threat and precariousness. Producing subjects based on a singular identity reduces the multiplicity necessary to anchor identities in ways that move beyond their relationships to violence. Not only does the reparations process produce a particular kind of subject, but, it ensures that the dynamic between violence and identity remain in tact, maintaining the conditions for the uncertainty and vulnerability that constitutes precarity.

Political subjectivity is not something that is conferred, it is something that is enacted and constantly negotiated- not an endpoint. It requires an historical understanding of the conditions present on that fateful day in March of 2000 when carloads of paramilitary forcefully displaced the entire community. Butler (2006) asks, what makes certain bodies more expendable than others? How can we understand the conditions under which vulnerability is differentially distributed on the economically disadvantaged and how the process of precaritization unfolds?

## Differential Vulnerability and Precarity

In Colombia, violence is now more concentrated in the rural areas and it is documented that afro-Colombians are disproportionately affected by the violent conflict. Overt violence still persists in many regions on the Pacific coast where there is a large concentration of afro-Colombians, while communities in the Montes de Maria's Caribbean coast are considered to be in a zone of rehabilitation. However, the Montes de Maria, which is predominantly indigenous and afro-Colombian, was victim of some of the most concentrated paramilitary violence in the country. Their vulnerability was not only tied to the event of the violence, whether forced displacement or a massacre, but they were vulnerable bodies, considered to be more expendable. The conditions that existed at the time of the violence were such that these communities were differentially vulnerable. Butler (2006) refers to this differential vulnerability as precarity.

Vulnerability and precarity are not legible to the state—Mampujan was not the typical victim in that from the start of their displacement they were differentiated in terms of their vulnerability. First, the paramilitary spared them any deaths, second, they had immediate leadership capacity to work with the local government in Maria la Baja, and third, their certainty about God, anchored their narratives making them less vulnerable to narrative precarity. Other communities that experienced more violence had less capacity and less narrative stability are more precarious and less legible to the state. If the state recognizes the precarity of communities as it is tied to erratic yet continuous violence, food insecurity, and high rates of unemployment, it would destabilize the narrative about the region as a zone of rehabilitation and reconciliation.

The distribution of vulnerability and precarity are not only differential in the communities that experienced violence. This analysis also seeks to demonstrate the vulnerability of the state and their own sense of precarity. Public secrets that continue to circulate in Montes de Maria operate as potential “narrative landmines”(Benardi, 2012) that undermine the state’s story of stability about the region. The state claims that due to paramilitary demobilization and the extermination of guerrilla in the region it is a zone of rehabilitation. This narrative not only refuses the possibility that violence still exists but because of the demobilization of paramilitary forecloses the possibility that violence occurs at the hands of paramilitary or ex-paramilitary. Allowing narratives of paramilitary violence to enter into the narrative landscape would destabilize the state’s master narrative of peace in the region. This holds not only for the Montes de Maria region but also for the master narrative of peace on the national level in which the state is negotiating peace with members of FARC without direct acknowledgment of the ongoing existence of paramilitary violence.

The stability and coherence of the state’s narrative of peacebuilding as trust building supposedly necessitates that public secrets remaining hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990). Keeping those narratives hidden, however, is damaging to the narrative ecology and has the serious consequence of allowing the conditions for continued violence that goes unacknowledged, maintaining differential levels of precarity and vulnerability in the communities where public secrets prevail.

In this dynamic, as the state master narrative struggles to maintain its stability, its legitimacy in the communities diminishes. The state engages its peace narrative through

a complex set of laws, agencies, and bureaucratic forms through which it produces victims with whom they engage in reparations processes. These victims have narratives of abandonment, and distrust of the state that have been circulating in their communities for over a century (depending where in history you begin the story). The state-initiated path to peace predicated on the success of making a community legible to the state according to its own parameters generates greater dependence on technocracy and the quantification of harm through bureaucratic procedures than on democratic processes.

However, part of the performance on the part of the state is to make their presence known, consistent, and to assure communities that they will be awarded for their participation in the form of reparations. These promises and engagements shift community narratives of resistance temporarily. However, no matter what the state does, its peace narrative cannot gain legitimacy while “public secrets” and paramilitary violence shift community narratives to fear and death. So long as this vulnerability and precarity is ignored, the state’s narrative of peace in the region will be challenged.

However, raising awareness of “public secrets” has a long and violent history in the country. Scott (1990) describes the moment when the public script and the hidden transcript meet as a cathartic moment, one that breaks open new possibilities for organizing and mobilizing in the face of oppression and marginalization. Most of his book focuses on that cathartic moment of resistance against the state, juxtaposed by only merely mentioning that the argument does not hold if the state is violent.

The legacy of violence related to the meeting up of the hidden transcript and the public script in Colombia is exemplified by the story about Moni’s father who was

assassinated less than two weeks after revealing the “public secret” about the mayors in the region taking bribes from paramilitary. This legacy continues. While there is more of a political opening than there has been historically in which accusations of being guerrilla might not get you killed but could still get you incarcerated, that political opening for speaking about paramilitary violence is foreclosed because of the state narrative that they no longer exist.

This also has implications for the current peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba between the FARC and the Santos administration. As part of the negotiations, the FARC issued a communiqué on July 8, 2015 entitled “Propuesta de comisión para el esclarecimiento del fenómeno del paramilitarismo en Colombia” “Commission’s proposal to clarify the phenomenon of paramilitarism in Colombia” whereby they exhort that the elimination of paramilitary and parapolitical structures is fundamental to the inescapable importance of creating conditions for “guarantees of no repetition” of violence.

It would be very difficult for the state to comply with this demand (or it might have already done it) because it would delegitimize of their current narratives that are interwoven at the national, regional, and local levels. Disrupting or destabilizing this cohesive master narrative might also reveal a new depth to state’s vulnerability. In which case, the promise of Scott’s catharsis also might hold, if the public script meets the hidden transcript with the support of the state, non-state actors, communities, activists, etc. it could redistribute vulnerability and possibly reduce narrative precarity. This conceptualization of transitional justice as the reduction of precarity by increasing

narrative complexity and reducing differential vulnerability could contribute to a new lens on transitional justice processes.

Narrative precarity exists in Colombia as a function of master narratives that suppress counterstories, including violent storylines, from entering into the narrative landscape in order to ensure their own stability. In the process, narrative instability increases in the lived experiences of those who live on the margins of that master narrative. Because the master narrative of peacebuilding only acknowledges certain violent actors and actions, it obscures others. It requires that communities produce themselves as victims of violence from one particular event and not as part of ongoing marginalization and oppression over time. This partial legibility to the state leaves communities vulnerable as the state attempts unsuccessfully to shore up its own legitimacy by ignoring forms of violence that it ignored in the past.

As is often the case, the work to maintain the image of stability and to maintain the master narratives has an inverse relationship with the way that communities story the state as legitimate. In actuality the state is undermining its own process. This process of understanding precarity in transitional justice is critical to understanding the challenges of legibility processes and the criticality of increasing narrative complexity in order to create stable narratives. The partialness of the production of victimhood without the acknowledgement of ongoing paramilitary violence by the state generates a thin storyline that leaves victims precarious. While it would be difficult and even scary for the state to submit to more complexity, it would change not only the narrative landscape, giving less legitimacy to the state's own master narrative about peace in the region, increasing the



legitimacy of the community's narrative of victimhood, and would alter the landscape of violence. No longer would paramilitary violence be able to operate in the shadows. Bringing the storyline of ongoing paramilitary violence into the fold of processes in Colombia could deplete it of the currency that it currently holds while it is faceless, nameless, and untouchable.

### **Reflective Judgments**

Bringing the hidden transcript or public secret to the public script has implications for the narratives of perpetrators as well. Lara's notion of reflective judgments as it was used to describe the women's quilting circle, can be applied to transitional justice processes in Colombia in the case of public secrets and more broadly to normative accountability. As it stands, judicial processes and accountability measures as they are constructed by transitional justice in Colombia are relegated to determinant judgments that rely on formalized judicial process that require perpetrators tell the truth about their actions in exchange for reduced sentences. To date, however, since 2005, only thirty-three cases have been adjudicated. The processes also rely on transactional measures for negotiating transitions, which lead to varying outcomes, for example, by quantifying the number of years in prison based on how many people are killed or how truthful an account is. These processes leave little if any space for any kind of narrative transformation of the conflict or of relationships between victims and perpetrators or the broader society.

One of the major critiques of the 2005 Justice and Peace Law was that it did not include victim in the process. While it led to the creation of the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, that critique still holds today. The women's quilting circle in Mampujan provides an example of how a group of victims created a process that produced reflective judgments through disclosive sharing that highlights the transformative potential of non-state initiated reflective processes.

How might peacebuilding and transitional justice processes look if the narratives of paramilitaries were not ignored? As discussed previously, this would be something extremely difficult for the state to do because of how it would challenge its own narrative. However, there are other considerations for how to bring narratives of perpetrators to the fore. Currently, transitional justice mechanisms offer little in the way of meaning making processes for perpetrators. Rather than only holding accountability trials which limit the parameters of speaking as in truth commissions during which perpetrators describe or chronicle the atrocious things they enacted, what processes could be designed such that, rather than merely recount the violence linearly, if perpetrators could critically reflect on and respond to questions about what led them to take up violence? Cobb (2013) offers a variety of questions that perpetrators might be asked in such an intentionally created reflective space that could generate new information about the way violence is constructed in the life of the perpetrator and might lead to new understandings for how violence foments. This would be differentiated from normative

forms of accountability and judgment and require reflective judgments be developed as well.<sup>30</sup>

The case of the Christian women in Mampujan who created Lara's "disclosive space" for critical reflection made possible the construction of new meaning in their lives. Not only were they able to tell the stories that could not be told, but they were also able to organize reflective judgments. Transitional justice mechanisms privilege a particular kind of judgment that emerges in a particular kind of frame, for example the judgments imparted in the courtroom by a judge or a jury, or the accusations made by victims against the perpetrator. These judgments are perpetrator-focused, remaining in the domain of facts or the aspired truth of the events of perpetration, without entering into a realm of meaning making and reflection.

This could be said of conflict resolution practices more broadly that claim that the act of hearing stories about an experience or an event is enough to be transformative. On the contrary, unless processes are organized for understanding the meanings that people make from the narratives that emerge in these contentious spaces there is little possibility for the narrative evolution or transformations that are possible and necessary for peacebuilding, trust building, and reducing narrative precarity.

Reflective processes could also lead to a deeper understanding the conditions that made the violence possible. As people struggle to make sense of violence and recover from violence they could benefit from new forms of reflection, judgment, and meaning

---

<sup>30</sup> I participated in a restorative justice project in a maximum-security prison outside of Philadelphia where men convicted of violent crimes reflectively engaged. When they shared their stories of transformation they began with descriptions of the crimes they committed and their guilt, followed by the meanings that were initially anchored to those stories and how those meanings transformed through engaging in reflective processes.

that can come not only from the reflections of victims, but from hearing the reflective judgments of the perpetrators.

Developing disclosive spaces for perpetrators outside of the parameters of the state, could lead to the evolution of narratives in ways that state-instantiated processes could not achieve. Operating outside of the “lines of force” or the state master narratives, perpetrators otherwise beholden to particular script could potentially story themselves in new ways leading to an understanding and even shift of moral frameworks. This kind of narrative evolution would increase the complexity of the narratives we have about perpetrators and provide different parameters for speaking. The ability to speak out from under the gaze from the state could provide an opening for different kinds of reflections to emerge.

Creating processes for reflective judgments for both victims and perpetrators of violence could enable to communities to create new moral frameworks that extend what is possible in the formation of determinant judgments. Rather than simply recounting facts in order to get at a determined truth, people would have the opportunity to reflect on the acts of violence in new ways and in order to understand how their lives have been altered by the violence. This kind of reflection goes beyond accusing, blaming, and transactional negotiations to reduce suffering and could lead to a deeper understanding for the conditions of violence. While these new meaning systems could emerge, this should not imply that there would be no punishment involved or accountability, however, it would shift the framework for the process of getting there.

## **“Over-stating”**

The creation of different kinds of normative accountability could alleviate the state from being the sole mechanism for carrying out transitional justice processes. The way that the system is formulated now, the onus of transitional justice falls at the feet of the state. Judicial cases, reparations, land restitution, psychosocial repair, and the guarantee of no repetition for example all encumber the state to the extent that it is not capable of meeting the needs of victims. This leads to increased instability between victims and the state especially in regions where the state was complicit in the violence. Every time the Colombian government produces a law and fails to implement it, it reduces the trust they are trying to build. However, the state will always exist and will be involved to some extent in the processes, therefore, it is critical to balance how much to involve the state in order to keep processes supported and advancing, without overly relying on or “over-stating” the state.

The role of the state is often debated when considering the transition from violence to peace. Transitional justice literature historically privileges state-building and national-level institution building in the recovery from violence. In the case of Colombia, there is another privileging of the state in the form of the country’s reliance on the government to provide comprehensive reparations for the over seven million victims. There is a tricky balance hinging whereby there is a tendency to overstate the role of the state. However, as I learned through the work of Sembrandopaz in the region, it is key not to discount the importance of the state. On the contrary, the aim is to leverage the state effectively in ways that contribute to holistic processes on the ground.

From a narrative perspective, Lara's disclosive spaces are one way to create processes that can be supported by the state that operate orthogonally to state processes and do not enter into the master counter narrative binary. However, the women's quilting circle provides a heed of caution about the involvement of the state in these reflective spaces. There was an inverse relationship between the women's authority over their story and process by which it diminished the more acclaim it received. As the story gained more attention from the state, their ownership of the story and its complexity decreased. This is reflected in Shuman's work with victims as well who observes that the dispossessed lose the entitlement of their own story or the authority of their story once it is televised or taken up by the TRC (Shuman, 2010).

As Mampujan's narratives gained notoriety, the quilting circle story was one that garnered a great deal of attention. As a result, as the story gained more momentum and popularity, fewer women were represented and the main organizer, and community leader, Graciela, became the face of the group. In what some might consider a pinnacle moment when the women received the national peace prize, their disclosive space became a story narrated by others about the quilting group. The fame and the notoriety made them symbols of success propped up by the peacebuilding industry. The women certainly deserve attention and credit for their contributions both within and across communities for building networks with women to encourage their voices to be heard. These processes in and of themselves are positive and create pathways for new stories, meanings, and reflective judgments. However, the cautionary tale resides in the potential tipping of the scales, as authority over the story and the process slowly merge with master

narratives of peacebuilding and become routinized. When the master narrative props the women who no longer maintain authority over the story it risks becoming a tool of liberal peacebuilding.

As the story is told in the video associated with the national peace prize, the women in the quilting circle are positioned as “healed” or “cured” once again reverting to peacebuilding as an endpoint or an arrival, eliding the complexity of the process and the disclosivity associated to it. A young girl, the next generation of female victims in Mampujan, shares her learning in the video, that she needs to cleans herself from hate and replace it with forgiveness; the very message that is repeated by the women who shepherd the award.

To further complicate the presence of master narratives in this nationally recognized project, another winner of the national peace prize alongside the women of Mampujan was the brigadier general of the Infantry Marines, Marina Rafael Alfredo Colón, who is known for using violent methods of “cleaning” out the Montes de Maria region of illegal armed actors. He is quoted in the Colombian newspaper as saying, “Los colombianos tenemos que entender que la única manera de tener reconciliación es perdonar. (El Tiempo, 2015)” (“Colombians need to understand that the only way to have reconciliation is to forgive.”)

The master narratives of forgiveness and healing articulated by General Colón and bolstered by the peacebuilding “talking heads” in the video sanitize the complexity of the stories told in the quilting circle and subsume the voices of the women of Mampujan. While there is something wonderful and spontaneous about what the women created and

participated in, somewhere it became an economy of its own. Like Graciela claims, they are no longer the women victims of Mampujan, but rather the women entrepreneurs of Mampujan. Now the business of quilting is divvied between the women so that the earnings can reach parity. Delivering a high quality product is central to meeting customer's needs. No longer is there disclosivity.

I would like to highlight three major questions arise out of this case. First, how can the integrity of a grassroots peacebuilding project be maintained while benefiting from state resources to support the processes, but without the state policing it or the master narratives subsuming it? Answering this question or designing practices with this in mind would lead to an understanding of legibility that would steer away from the double bind of only being able to be legible to the state within the state's parameters. Second, while the women of the quilting circle participated in a transformative process, in many ways it was deeply individualized. The fifteen Christian women who participated in the process benefited from it, however, it was not a process that every woman was invited into. What are the reverberations of such a process? If the recovery from violence is located in the individual, does that fall short of addressing the broader narratives of violence? Hilde Nelson would offer that, repairing damaged identities is a narrative process that is deeply political because it engages with macro-level discourses.

A third question it raises is whether the quilting circle as a disclosive process simply ran its course. After two years, the women turned down funding to continue quilting because they became busy with other things. Perhaps the quilting circle as it existed, took the women as far as they could go in that context of meaning making and



they needed to move on to other endeavors. However, because the story was taken up by the state, they have been engaged in a process about the process that is embedded in a number of assumptions about healing and forgiveness that warrant deeper interrogation because of the way that the master narrative threads colonize other kinds of conversations.

### **Limitations**

As is the case with any research project, this project is partial and tells a particular version of the story about the conflict and recovery from violence in region of Montes de Maria, Colombia. In the narrative call to complexity, it is imperative to examine the contours of the narrative landscape of this research and to consider what has been excluded. First, I acknowledge the possible question of my own seduction into the story of the innocence of the people I encountered, spoke with, broke bread with and learned from. In the course of my research, community members rarely, if ever, spoke about their relationship to guerrilla groups in the region, except to deny their affiliation with them. However, this exclusion is something that needs to be further researched in order to fully grasp the narrative ecology of the region and adding another thread of narrative complexity.

Secondly, my research did not take me to Bogota to explore the narratives in the locus of power that predominate the current peacebuilding and transitional justice narrative landscape. While I interacted with many governmental and organizational representatives in the region as well as those from Bogota who came to the region for special events, I did not see how the narratives live and breath in the capital. However,

the dominant narrative of peacebuilding right now centers on peace talks between the guerrillas and the state. Most of the news articles that I have read and what is privileged in mainstream media focuses on ongoing guerrilla violence. This bringing to light a reciprocal exclusion- the state focuses on guerrilla violence while the communities do not speak about it, and conversely, public secrets reveal the existence of paramilitary violence that the state does not speak of. The excluded narratives about guerrillas reveal a missing thread in my data.

A third limitation of this research is that I arrived at a particular moment in the reparations processes taking place in the communities. Therefore in Mampujan, I missed the initial dynamics of the narrative evolution of the community and examined their narratives from the point when I arrived and tracing it retrospectively. I observed in other communities, such as Pichilin the way that their community was beginning to engage with the state in ways that I could not observe in Mampujan because of their extensive history working with the state and other peacebuilding organizations.

### **Processes not Programs: Implications for Praxis**

A narrative lens on transitional justice provides an analytic frame for understanding how transitional justice is itself a master narrative and how master narratives populate and orient the processes that fall within the frame of transitional justice. By exploring these narratives in communities that are working with the state within the frameworks of transitional justice, processes such as legibility emerged as integral for understanding how the state and community become visible to one another.

When the master narratives of transitional justice interact with communities, mediated by organizations such as Sembrandopaz, narrative dynamics expose the way that master narratives, both of the state and the community, colonize discursive resources and reduce narrative complexity by creating erasures, as seen in the case of Mampujan. However, Mampujan was able to make themselves legible to the state and more broadly in ways that have awarded them much material and social capital. Many of the processes that were transformative for them and other communities, however, came not from directly working with the state, but in accompaniment processes with Sembrandopaz.

More specifically, the women's quilting circle was a process that transformed the lives of many of women that participated. It represents the pedagogy of Sembrandopaz who work with communities to develop and facilitate *processes* in communities *not programs*. The framing of a process is one that is flexible, iterative, fluid and dependent on the movement and needs of the participants themselves. This is in contrast to the institutional pedagogy of governments, NGOs, INGOs, etc. of implementing programs, which tend toward the prescriptive, technocratic, depend on expected outcomes, and are often times donor driven. Sembrandopaz operates under the insistence that they are not an NGO because they do not accept the implications of being categorized in such a way that would align them with particular strategies and practices that often do not transgress the projects of the state. The organization is extremely contingent, operating on a low budget and, yet, still accomplishes incredible amounts. Staff is hired through the organizations networks and affinity groups with the knowledge that their salaries will be

below the average of other organizations; but their connection to the work will align with their passions and maintain trust in the communities.

The organization rejects normative community intervention approaches enacted by larger NGOs and international organizations in favor of “accompanying” processes according to the needs of communities. As a result, they invest much more of their time and physical presence to communities and create processes with communities that are sustainable and meaningful to them. One could offer that less (money) in this case might be more. However, their contingency leaves them in a condition of precarity that leaves them wondering year by year how they will continue to serve the communities in the way that they do. As they resist the dominant narratives of liberal peacebuilding, it is difficult for the organization to make itself legible to larger funding opportunities, which operate with technical matrices for measuring success and effectiveness.

While Sembrandopaz does have certain programs in the communities, for example, a loan program for women to buy chickens who then return the money by selling their eggs, their main focus outside of accompanying political processes is on creating spaces for the community to gather, to beautify, to celebrate, and to engage in meaningful new conversations. They do not have rigid measurements for success nor do they count numbers to measure participation. However, the communities report feeling supported, visible, and important to the organization. The trust that they have built in the communities where they work engenders engagement at many levels, from participation in community meetings, to creating new workshops, to planting new gardens. Ricardo and employees levee these relationships and consider trust the most important relational

quality between the communities and the organization; one of the reasons why the organization only works in the few that it does. The relationships with the communities are continuous because their work is not tied to programs, rather it evolves into new iterations as the communities develop, the processes develop, and the organization itself learns and develops. My aim here is not to describe a utopian relational quality but to differentiate between pedagogies. Sembrandopaz is not fallible and they have experienced missteps along the way, but it is extremely difficult for those missteps to destabilize the narrative that the community has about Sembrandopaz, which is in contrast to the state, whose narrative of peacebuilding is only stable until the next pamphlet.

The pedagogical difference between a process and a program are vast. Borrowing from Rancière (2010), processes include the affirmations and capabilities of anyone and everyone, whereas programs aspire to fit the diversity of voices and perspectives into one consensus. Many of the universalizing projects of transitional justice and neoliberal peacebuilding tend toward the mode of programs and not processes. As organizations (and states) move into community contexts, setting the parameters of the conversation through the laws, paperwork and other modes of legibility that they require for entering into their programs, they lose the voices of the people in the process. Therefore, while the state enters into the reparations “process” with communities in an effort to “build trust” as I propose is the purpose of their peacebuilding efforts, they miss the boat, by exhorting communities into reparations processes whereby they are required to define

themselves in particular ways as victims, represented in excel spreadsheets and identity cards, for the discreet period of time of three years.

The state's inability to provide a consistent, supportive, affirmative presence undermines its own project of trust building, which is contrasted and mitigated by the presence of Sembrandopaz. Mitigated because, when the state leaves a meeting in a chaotic and unfinished way and Sembrandopaz remains present, the community is still supported and has an interlocutor with whom to process. As interpreters or mediators, Sembrandopaz does the work of trust building that may not even be reasonable to ask from the state.

The purpose of this critique is certainly not to discount the state. It once again comes back to the balance of state involvement and not wanting to over-state. The master narratives that emerge from the state fail to incorporate the complexity lived in the daily experiences of victims of violence demonstrating the need to incorporate more complex socio-political dynamics than current transitional justice mechanisms support. As it currently stands, processes of legibility required to participate in transitional justice processes are not transparent and require the performance of particular subjectivities. If taken seriously, transitional justice processes could incorporate narrative processes for legibility that require that 1. The state make itself legible to communities and that 2. Make the requirements for the legibility of communities transparent.

The recovery from violence or the transition from violence to peace cannot rely only on economic development as is privileged in current liberal peacebuilding strategies. Policies and practices need to incorporate both the state approaches as such, as well as

more accompanied processes as in the work of Sembrandopaz. Supporting mediating organizations like Sembrandopaz who can engage in the more affective work of transitional justice that the state does not appear to have the capacity for could approach greater narrative stability as trust is negotiated between communities, organizations, and the state.

The affective work, such as Nelson's narrative repair, and Lara's disclosive spaces, and I add the work of Shawn Ginwright's (2010) notion of radical care<sup>31</sup>, each transformative processes critical for individuals and communities to create new meanings and alternative narratives about themselves and the state in order to break from the hold of the master narratives of conflict that often strangle transformation. As long as master narratives remain in tact, so too does the context of violence and conflict. These narrative processes do not seek to upend the state, but rather to increase narrative complexity, which would then reduce narrative precarity, and create more stable narrative conditions for communities to repair their identities. This is essential work of transitional justice that is currently not central and would create an ethics of practices that does not aggrandize the local, but acknowledges the narrative work happening when the master narratives of the state meet up with community narratives. That difficult work might also require that the state broaden its scope of acknowledgement not only to the legibility of

---

<sup>31</sup> Ginwright's critical youth studies perspective characterizes the act of care as fostering critical consciousness and opportunities and space for political expression. "These caring relationships are not simply about trust, dependence and mutual expectations. Rather, they are political acts that encourage youth to heal from trauma by confronting injustice and oppression in their lives. (Ginwright, 2010, p. 56)" Radical care promotes cultural integrity, communal and individual survival, spiritual growth, and political change under oppressive conditions. Through care and an increase in social capital, trust builds, as does political consciousness leading to action. It is yet another way in which marginalized groups can create new meanings about themselves in order to loosen the grip of oppressive master narratives.

victims, but to the ongoing violence in the region or the legibility of paramilitary as well. It might require of victims that they do not hold the state responsible for the entirety of their recovery from violence. This project alerts us to the dangers of tightly woven and coherent narratives and calls for an interrogation of those narratives. Unlike the state's assumption of narrative closure, end points, arrivals, and the like, the narrative call is for ongoing development of complexity, art, and openings.

Creating more complex narratives requires the evolution from thin storylines, linear plot development, and binary moral frameworks, to narratives that are circular in plot, demonstrating the interdependence between parties, have thicker storylines that included more characters, and have complicated moral frameworks (Cobb, 2013). In the transition from conflict to peace, this narrative evolution is tantamount to creating greater stability in the narrative landscape. What this requires in practice is that the certainty and strength that characterizes conflict narratives need to be destabilized. This destabilization creates uncertainty or blurs the lines between what is deemed "good" and "bad," "right" and "wrong," opening the possibility from more understanding and less justification for violence. This uncertainty is not an overall destabilization, but a destabilization of certainty within a particular dominant narrative, making uncertain that one side is perfect, inculpable, or has not contributed to the conflict at all, for example the Colombian state. Once this uncertainty is admitted or spoken, ie parties admit that they may have contributed to the problem, conflict resolution processes become more possible and viable. The claim being that increasing narrative complexity leads to uncertainty (less righteousness), which leads to the greater viability of a resolution process.



Creating uncertainty in a precarious narrative environment might sound contradictory or antithetical. However, if what is needed in the transitional context are relational dynamics that are fluid, changing, and evolving, and to see our institutions as actively responsive to people, then the goal is to arrive at a set of contingencies that are constantly in motion and in dialogue. According to Mark Turner, “social institutions have to be created and re-created over time as they fail to respond adequately to social change. The process of institutionalization tends by its very nature to be conservative and cannot address the changing aspirations of new generations” (Turner, 2010, p. 31). This is a call, to create social institutions at the grassroots level that can be reflexive and responsive to a changing society in ways that would not be possible for the state. The process of creating such institutions would require community participation and solidarity in social networks that would help rebuild the social fabric.

### Conclusion

This research set out to examine narrative dynamics in reparations processes in Montes de Maria, Colombia, specifically the community of Mampujan in order to understand the way in which transnational discourses of transitional justice are translated in local contexts. The pathway into these narratives was the grassroots organization Sembrandopaz that acts as a bridge or a mediator for the communities and for translating national level discourses at the community level. Through my observations of their accompaniment, I experienced first-hand the interactions between the communities and the state in order to understand the narrative dynamics in their lived daily environment.

In this complex narrative landscape, master narratives of conflict still grip the communities who were victims of paramilitary violence and the government has introduced intensive legislation in an attempt to create processes for recovering and rebuilding in the aftermath of violence. The case of Mampujan provided a lens into how communities make themselves legible to the state in order to be elaborated and successful in the reparations process. Their stories that relied on their own master narratives grounding in religious discourse, helped maintain increased narrative stability in the face of their forceful displacement. However, the case also reveals the narrative complexity when transitional justice discourse intersects with their own stories, revealing that narrative coherence can lead to erasures and occlude alternative storylines.

Colombia at the national level has relied on international law and transitional justice mechanisms in order to address the violent conflict, but has been met with resistance. The law requires that communities produce themselves as victims, failing to recognize people's multiple subjectivities. Furthermore, because public secrets continue to threaten lives, there is a precarity and vulnerability that remains palpable for victims who were victimized- at times with the collusion of the state.

The work of Sembrandopaz demonstrates an approach to peacebuilding and transitional process that recognizes the value of the state without over-stating that value. They also work with the communities to design meaning making processes that help to repair damaged identities and create new stories about themselves that are not only tied to their victimhood. The victims in Colombia break many of the assumptions of victimhood in that they recognize that in order to gain any reparations from the state, they need to

work hard and learn how to navigate the complex terrain. Organizations such as Sembrandopaz help make that possible.

The project of eliminating chaos, and arriving at a grand notion of stability is a fallacy that undergirds transitional justice and peacebuilding. The effort of the state is to bring more certainty through the promise of material stability—but the answer to precarity is not only material, and when the state does not have the capacity to follow through on its promises, the result is dire for communities.

There is the precarity created by instability that may lead to fear, paralysis or halt agency or action, and differentially distribute vulnerability-- contrasted then with the uncertainty that can be created by loosening the grip of a master narrative, making less rigid and cohesive narratives, opening up possibility for more solutions. Rather than create processes that aim for closure, determinant judgments, or the arrival at an arbitrary endpoint, the project of transitional justice would need to create narrative stability through legibility processes, without “over-stating.” Processes would take into consideration that life is contingent and uncertain and that a life that is “normal” or “peaceful” is one where instability and uncertainty are not experienced as threats to existence.

## REFERENCES

- “1448-2011.pdf.” Accessed February 9, 2016.  
<http://www.minagricultura.gov.co/Normatividad/Leyes/1448-2011.pdf>.
- “9712912 - 1\_Joinet-  
Question\_of\_the\_impunity\_of\_perpetrators\_of\_HR\_Violations.pdf.” Accessed  
January 8, 2016.  
[http://www.dealingwiththepast.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2013\\_Course/Readings\\_2013/1\\_Joinet  
Question\\_of\\_the\\_impunity\\_of\\_perpetrators\\_of\\_HR\\_Violations.pdf](http://www.dealingwiththepast.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/2013_Course/Readings_2013/1_Joinet<br/>Question_of_the_impunity_of_perpetrators_of_HR_Violations.pdf).
- Abu-Nimer, Mohammed, ed. *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*. Lexington Books, 2001.
- Acharya, Amitav. “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism.” *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 239–75.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. 1 edition. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.
- Amnesty International. “Colombia: The Victims and Land Restitution Law: An Amnesty International Analysis,” April 17, 2012.  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/018/2012/en/>.
- Amsterdam, Anthony G., Jerome S. Bruner, and Anthony G. Amsterdam. *Minding the Law*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Ansari, Emad, Jesse Franzblau, and Harlyn Pacheco. “Historical Memory in Colombia: The Work of the Grupo de Memoria Historica: An International Economic Development Program 2012 Report,” 2012.  
[http://www.centrodehistoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/IEDP\\_2012\\_COLOMBIA\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Report\\_GMH.pdf](http://www.centrodehistoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/IEDP_2012_COLOMBIA_Human_Rights_Report_GMH.pdf).

- Archakis, Argiris, and Angeliki Tzanne. "Narrative Positioning and the Construction of Situated Identities Evidence from Conversations of a Group of Young People in Greece." *Narrative Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2005): 267–91.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Arvelo, Jose E. "International Law and Conflict Resolution in Colombia: Balancing Peace and Justice in the Paramilitary Demobilization Process." *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 37 (2006 2005): 411.
- Auerbach, Yehudith. "Resolution, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Material and Identity Conflicts." *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 29, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 41–80. doi:10.2307/23262796.
- Autesserre, Séverine. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Avruch, Kevin. "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Problems in Transitional Justice and the Reconstruction of Identity." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 47, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 33–49. doi:10.1177/1363461510362043.
- Baines, Erin K. "The Haunting of Alice: Local Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 91–114. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijm007.
- Ball, Helen. "Subversive Materials: Quilts as Social Text." *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 48, no. 3 (2002).
- Bar-Tal, Daniel. "From Intractable Conflict through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis." *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 351–65. doi:10.2307/3791795.
- "Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation." Accessed February 9, 2016.  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RemedyAndReparation.aspx>
- Bass, Gary Jonathan. *Stay the Hand of Vengeance: The Politics of War Crimes Tribunals*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Bateson, Gregory. *Double Bind: The Foundation of Communicational Approach to the Family*. Edited by Carlos E. Sluzki and Donald C. Ransom. New York : London: Psychological Corp, 1976.

- Bateson, Gregory, and Alfonso Montuori. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2002.
- Bell, Christine, Colm Campbell, and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. "Justice Discourses in Transition." *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 305–28. doi:10.1177/0964663904044997.
- Bell, Vikki, and Kirsten Campbell. "Out of Conflict: Peace, Change and Justice." *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 299–304. doi:10.1177/0964663904044996.
- Bernardi, Daniel Leonard, Pauline Hope Cheong, Chris Lundry, and Scott W. Ruston. *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic Influence*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012.
- Bhargava, Rajeev. "Restoring Decency to Barbaric Societies." In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 45–67. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Biddiss, Michael. "From the Nuremberg Charter to the Rome Statute: A Historical Analysis of the Limits of International Criminal Accountability." In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, edited by Ramesh Chandra Thakur and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, 42–61. United Nations University Press, 2004.
- Bouvier, Virginia M., ed. *Colombia: Building Peace in a Time of War*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2009.
- Braithwaite, John. "Setting Standards for Restorative Justice." *British Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 563–77. doi:10.1093/bjc/42.3.563.
- Brito, Alexandra Barahona De, Carmen Gonzalez Enriquez, and Paloma Aguilar. *The Politics of Memory and Democratization : Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Brodzinsky, Sibylla. "FARC Peace Talks Stoke Hope - and Unrest - in Colombia." *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 29, 2013. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2013/0729/FARC-peace-talks-stoke-hope-and-unrest-in-Colombia>.
- Brown, Kris. "'What It Was Like to Live through a Day': Transitional Justice and the Memory of the Everyday in a Divided Society." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 3 (November 1, 2012): 444–66.

- doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijjs023.
- Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning*. Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Buckley-Zistel, Susanne. "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda." *Africa* 76, no. 2 (2006): 131–50. doi:10.3366/afr.2006.76.2.131.
- Burnet, Jennie E. "The Injustice of Local Justice: Truth, Reconciliation, and Revenge in Rwanda." *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 3, no. 2 (2008): 173–93. doi:10.1353/gsp.2011.0002.
- Burton, John W. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* New York, 2009.
- . *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.
- Butler, Judith, and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. 1 edition. Malden, MA: Polity, 2013.
- Campbell, Kirsten. "The Laws of Memory The ICTY, the Archive, and Transitional Justice." *Social & Legal Studies* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 247–69. doi:10.1177/0964663912464898.
- . "The Trauma of Justice: Sexual Violence, Crimes Against Humanity and The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia." *Social & Legal Studies* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 329–50. doi:10.1177/0964663904044998.
- "Casos Exitosos de Las Rendiciones de Cuentas Territoriales.pdf." Accessed February 9, 2016.  
<http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/sites/default/files/Documentos/Casos%20Exitosos%20de%20las%20Rendiciones%20de%20Cuentas%20Territoriales.pdf>.
- Chayes, Antonia, and Martha L. Minow, eds. *Imagine Coexistence: Restoring Humanity After Violent Ethnic Conflict*. 1st ed. Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- Christie, Nils. "The Ideal Victim." In *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy*, edited by Ezzat A. Fattah, 17–30. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986.  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-08305-3\\_2](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-08305-3_2).
- Clark, Janine Natalya. "Reconciliation through Remembrance? War Memorials and the Victims of Vukovar." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 116–35. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijjs031.
- Clarke, Kamari Maxine. *Mirrors of Justice: Law and Power in the Post-Cold War Era*. Cambridge [U.K.]; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Cobb, Sara. "Fostering Coexistence in Identity-Based Conflicts." In *Imagine Coexistence: Restoring Humanity After Violent Ethnic Conflict*, edited by Antonia Chayes and Martha L. Minow, 1st ed., 294–310. Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- . *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Dynamics in Conflict Resolution*, 2013.
- Cole, Alyson M. *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror*. Stanford University Press, 2006.  
<http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=10322>.
- Colvin, Christopher. "Ambivalent Narrations: Pursuing the Political through Traumatic Storytelling." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 27, no. 1 (May 1, 2004): 72–89. doi:10.1525/pol.2004.27.1.72.
- . "Trafficking Trauma: Intellectual Property Rights and the Political Economy of Traumatic Storytelling in South Africa." In *Telling Stories to Change the World: Global Voices on the Power of Narrative to Build Community and Make Social Justice Claims*, edited by Rickie Solinger, Madeline Fox, and Kayhan Irani. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Coulter, Chris. *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Sierra Leone*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Cover, Robert. "The Supreme Court, 1982 Term – Forward: Nomos in Narrative." 97. *Harvard Law Review*, 4, 1983.
- . "The Folktales of Justice: Tales of Jurisdiction." *Faculty Scholarship Series*, January 1, 1985. [http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss\\_papers/2706](http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/2706).
- Crocker, David. "Truth Commissions, Transitional Justice, and Civil Society." In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 99–121. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Cunneen, Chris. "Exploring the Relationship between Reparations, Gross Violations of Human Rights, and Restorative Justice." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 355–68. Routledge, 2006.
- Dancy, Geoff. "Impact Assessment, Not Evaluation: Defining a Limited Role for Positivism in the Study of Transitional Justice." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4, no. 3 (November 1, 2010): 355–76.  
doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijq016.
- Danelski, David J. "Law and Conflict Resolution: An Introduction." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 11, no. 1 (March 1, 1967): 1–1. doi:10.1177/002200276701100101.



- Daniele, Yael. "Essential Elements of Healing after Massive Trauma: Complex Needs Voiced by Victims/survivors." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 343–54. Routledge, 2006.
- Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2006.
- De Bodard, Aliette. "Narrative, Resonance and Genre at SF Novelists," July 28, 2010. <http://www.sfnovelists.com/2010/07/28/narrative-resonance-and-genre/>.
- Deranty, Jean-Philippe. "Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle. The Critical Potential of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition." *Critical Horizons* 5, no. 1 (April 2004): 297–322. doi:10.1163/1568516042653549.
- DeWalt, Kathleen Musante, and Billie R. DeWalt. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Rowman Altamira, 2010.
- Díaz, Catalina. "Colombia's Bid for Justice and Peace." In *Building a Future on Peace and Justice*, edited by Kai Ambos, Judith Large, and Marieke Wierda, 469–501. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2009. [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-540-85754-9\\_18](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-540-85754-9_18).
- Dinnen, Sinclair. "Restorative Justice and the Governance of Security in the Southwest Pacific." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 401–21. Routledge, 2006.
- Drexler, Elizabeth. "The Failure of International Justice In East Timor and Indonesia." In *Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence*, edited by Professor Alexander Laban Hinton, 49–66. Rutgers University Press, 2011.
- Drexler, Elizabeth F. "Fatal Knowledges: The Social and Political Legacies of Collaboration and Betrayal in Timor-Leste." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 74–94. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijs037.
- Drumbl, Mark A. *Atrocity, Punishment, and International Law*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Dudai, Ron. "A Model for Dealing with the Past in the Israeli–Palestinian Context." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 249–67. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijm019.

- Dwyer, Leslie. "A Politics of Silences: Violence, Memory, and Treacherous Speech in Post-1965 Bali." In *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation*, edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, Kevin Lewis O'Neill, and Victoria Sanford. Duke University Press Books, 2009.
- . "Building a Monument: Intimate Politics of 'Reconciliation' in Post-1965 Bali." In *Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence*, edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, 227–49. Rutgers University Press, 2011.
- Dyck, David. "Reaching for a Structurally Responsive Training and Practice of Restorative Justice." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 527–45. Routledge, 2006.
- Easterday, Jennifer S. "Deciding the Fate of Complementarity: A Colombian Case Study." *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law* 26 (2009): 49.
- Eastmond, Marita. "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007): 248–64.
- Eastmond, Marita, and Johanna Mannergren Selimovic. "Silence as Possibility in Postwar Everyday Life." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 3 (November 1, 2012): 502–24. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijts026.
- Elliott, Jane. *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 1st ed. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005.
- Enns, Diane. *The Violence of Victimhood*. University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2012.
- Estrada-Hollenbeck, Mica. "The Attainment of Justice Through Restoration, Not Litigation: The Subjective Road to Reconciliation." In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 65–87. Lexington Books, 2001.
- Findlay, Mark. "Activating a Victim Constituency in International Criminal Justice." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 183–206. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijp008.
- Finnström, Sverker. *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. Duke University Press Books, 2008.
- Firchow, Pamina. "Must Our Communities Bleed to Receive Social Services? Development Projects and Collective Reparations Schemes in Colombia." *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 8, no. 3 (December 1, 2013): 50–63.

doi:10.1080/15423166.2013.863689.

Flinterman, Cees. "The International Criminal Court: Obstacle or Contribution to an Effective System of Human Rights Protection?" In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, edited by Ramesh Chandra Thakur and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, 264–72. United Nations University Press, 2004.

Friedrichs, David. "Restorative Justice and the Criminological Enterprise." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 439–51. Routledge, 2006.

Gaarder, Emily, and Lois Pressor. "A Feminist Vision of Justice? The Problems and Possibilities of Restorative Justice for Girls and Women." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 483–92. Routledge, 2006.

Gallagher, Shaun. "From Empathic Resonance to Empathic Understanding." In *Moving Ourselves, Moving Others: Motion and Emotion in Intersubjectivity, Consciousness and Language*, edited by Ad Foolen, Ulrike Lüdtke, and Timothy Racine, 6:167, 2012.  
[http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=eO5oeYnhFkcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA167&dq=info:sfm50-dE23QJ:scholar.google.com&ots=eB1EIB2QRO&sig=\\_YPkRK2rCWLqXyfp7P2FHR3mUz0](http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=eO5oeYnhFkcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA167&dq=info:sfm50-dE23QJ:scholar.google.com&ots=eB1EIB2QRO&sig=_YPkRK2rCWLqXyfp7P2FHR3mUz0).

Galtung, Johan. "A Structural Theory of Imperialism." *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 1971): 81–117. doi:10.2307/422946.  
———. "After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution: Coping with the Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence." In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 3–25. Lexington Books, 2001.  
———. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1969): 167–91. doi:10.2307/422690.

"Ganadores Premio Nacional de Paz 2015 - Gobierno - ELTIEMPO.COM." Accessed June 8, 2016. <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/gobierno/ganadores-premio-nacional-de-paz-2015/16435020>.

Gil, David. "Toward a 'Radical' Paradigm of Restorative Justice." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 499–511. Routledge, 2006.

Ginwright, Shawn A. *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing in Urban*

*America*. Teachers College Press, 2010.

Goldstone, Richard. "Foreword- The Role of Law and Justice in Governance: Regional and Global." In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, edited by Ramesh Chandra Thakur and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, vii–xii. United Nations University Press, 2004.

Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein. "Narrative Ethnography." In *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, 241–64. Guilford Press, 2010.

Gutmann, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. "The Moral Foundations of Truth Commissions." In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 22–44. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Hamber, Brandon, Liz Ševčenko, and Ereshnee Naidu. "Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4, no. 3 (November 1, 2010): 397–420. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijq018.

Hamber, Brandon, and Richard A. Wilson. "Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies." *Journal for Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2002).

Hardy, Samantha. "Mediation and Genre." *Negotiation Journal* 24, no. 3 (2008): 247–268. doi:10.1111/j.1571-9979.2008.00183.x.

Harre, Rom, and Nikki Slocum. "Disputes as Complex Social Events: On the Uses of Positioning Theory." *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 1 (2003): 100–118.

Hayner, Priscilla B. *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2010.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy, ed. *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. 2nd ed. edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2011.

Hewstone, Miles, and Rupert Brown. *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters*. Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1986.

Hinton, Alexander Laban. "Introduction: Toward an Anthropology of Transitional Justice." In *Transitional Justice: Global Mechanisms and Local Realities after Genocide and Mass Violence*, edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, 1–22. Rutgers

University Press, 2011.

Hirsch, Susan F. *In the Moment of Greatest Calamity: Terrorism, Grief, and a Victim's Quest for Justice ; with a New Preface by the Author.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Human Security Report Project. "Human Security Report 2012: Sexual Violence, Education, and War: Beyond the Mainstream Narrative." Vancouver: Human Security Press, 2012.

Hume, Mo. "Questioning Violence: Meanings, Myths and Realities." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28 (March 1, 2009): 22–51. doi:10.1111/j.1470-9856.2009.00324.x.

———. Society for Latin American Studies (Great Britain), and Conflict Resolution Collection. *The Politics of Violence: Gender, Conflict and Community in El Salvador.* The Bulletin of Latin American Research Book Series. Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

"ICTJ\_Report\_ColombiaReparationsChallenges\_2015.indd - ICTJ\_Report\_ColombiaReparationsChallenges\_2015.pdf." Accessed April 7, 2016.  
[https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ\\_Report\\_ColombiaReparationsChallenges\\_2015.pdf](https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ_Report_ColombiaReparationsChallenges_2015.pdf).

Iverson, Duncan. *Postcolonial Liberalism.* Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Jackson, Michael. *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity.* Copenhagen Denmark : Portland, Ore: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002.

Jeffery, Renée. "Amnesty and Accountability: The Price of Peace in Aceh, Indonesia." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 60–82. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijtj027.

Jelin, Elizabeth. "Public Memorialization in Perspective: Truth, Justice and Memory of Past Repression in the Southern Cone of South America." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1 (2007): 138–156.

Kaufmann, Chaim. "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars." *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996): 136. doi:10.2307/2539045.

Kelman. *In Y. Bar-Siman-Tov (Ed.) From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Kent, Lia. "Local Memory Practices in East Timor: Disrupting Transitional Justice Narratives." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2011): 434–55. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijr016.
- Kiss, Elizabeth. "Moral Ambition within and Beyond Political Constraints: Reflections on Restorative Justice." In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 68–98. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Labov, William. "Some Further Steps in Narrative Analysis." *Journal of Narrative & Life History* 7 (1997): 395–415.
- Lambourne, Wendy. "Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding after Mass Violence." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 28–48. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijn037.
- Laplante, Lisa J. "Transitional Justice and Peace Building: Diagnosing and Addressing the Socioeconomic Roots of Violence through a Human Rights Framework." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2, no. 3 (December 1, 2008): 331–55. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijn031.
- Lara, Maria Pia. *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment*. Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Lawther, Cheryl. "Denial, Silence and the Politics of the Past: Unpicking the Opposition to Truth Recovery in Northern Ireland." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 157–77. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijs029.
- Lederach, John Paul. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Lekha Sriram, Chandra. "Justice as Peace? Liberal Peacebuilding and Strategies of Transitional Justice." *Global Society* 21, no. 4 (2007): 579–91. doi:10.1080/13600820701562843.
- "Ley de Victimas.pdf." Accessed May 31, 2016.  
[http://www.centrodehistoria.gov.co/descargas/ley\\_victimas/ley\\_victimas\\_completa\\_web.pdf](http://www.centrodehistoria.gov.co/descargas/ley_victimas/ley_victimas_completa_web.pdf).
- Lincoln, Jessica. *International Justice after Conflict: Outreach, Legacy and Accountability*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- "LINEAMIENTOS GENERALES DE FLEXIBILIZACIÓN DE LA OFERTA PARA POBLACIÓN VÍCTIMA DE LA VIOLENCIA - LINEAMIENTOS

GENERALES DE FLEXIBILIZACION DE LA OFERTA PARA POBLACION VICTIMA DE LA VIOLENCIA.pdf.” Accessed February 9, 2016.  
<http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/sites/default/files/Documentos/LINEAMIENTOS%20GENERALES%20DE%20FLEXIBILIZACION%20DE%20LA%20OFERTA%20PARA%20POBLACION%20VICTIMA%20DE%20LA%20VIOLENCIA.pdf>.

- Lipschutz, Ronnie D. “Beyond the Neoliberal Peace: From Conflict Resolution to Social Reconciliation.” *Social Justice* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 5–19.
- Llewellyn, Jennifer J., and Robert Howse. “Institutions for Restorative Justice: The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 49 (1999): 355.
- Lloyd, Marshall B. “Conflict, Intervention, and Drug Trafficking: Unintended Consequences of United States Policy in Colombia.” *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 36 (2011): 293.
- MacLeod, Adam J. “All for One: A Review of Victim-Centric Justifications for Criminal Punishment.” *Berkeley Journal of Criminal Law* 13 (2008): 31.
- Maier, Charles. “Doing History, Doing Justice: The Narrative of the Historian and of the Truth Commission.” In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 261–78. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Malcontent, Peter. “Introduction- Human Rights and Peace: Two Sides of the Same Coin.” In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, edited by Ramesh Chandra Thakur and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, 1–13. United Nations University Press, 2004.
- Mani, Rama. “Balancing Peace with Justice in the Aftermath of Violent Conflict1.” *Development* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 25–34.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/mutex.gmu.edu/10.1057/palgrave.development.1100165>.
- Mayo, Jessica. “Court-Mandated Story Time: The Victim Narrative in U.S. Asylum Law.” *Washington University Law Review* 89 (2012 2011): 1485.
- McEvoy, Kieran. “Beyond Legalism: Towards a Thicker Understanding of Transitional Justice.” *Journal of Law and Society* 34, no. 4 (2007): 411–440.  
doi:10.1111/j.1467-6478.2007.00399.x.
- Meernik, James. “Justice and Peace? How the International Criminal Tribunal Affects Societal Peace in Bosnia.” *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 2005):

271–89. doi:10.1177/0022343305052012.

Melucci, Alberto. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

“Microsoft Word - Informemampujanfinal-Oct 2010 - 40. Audiencia Del Incidente Mampujan.pdf.” Accessed March 18, 2016.  
[http://www.aecid.org.co/recursos\\_user/40.%20Audiencia%20del%20Incidente%20Mampujan.pdf](http://www.aecid.org.co/recursos_user/40.%20Audiencia%20del%20Incidente%20Mampujan.pdf).

Minow, Martha. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Beacon Press, 1999.

———. *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred: Memory, Law, and Repair*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.  
<http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=445432>.

Mishler, Elliot G. “Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology.” *Journal of Narrative & Life History* 5, no. 2 (1995): 87–123.

Montville, Joseph. “Justice and the Burdens of History.” In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 129–45. Lexington Books, 2001.

Moon, Claire. “Narrating Political Reconciliation: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa.” *Social & Legal Studies* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 257–75.  
doi:10.1177/0964663906063582.

Muvingi, Ismael. “Sitting on Powder Kegs: Socioeconomic Rights in Transitional Societies.” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no. 2 (July 1, 2009): 163–82. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijp010.

Nader, Laura. *Harmony Ideology: Justice and Control in a Zapotec Mountain Village*. 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Nadler, Arie, Thomas E Malloy, and Jeffrey D Fisher. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Naidu, Ereshnee. “Memory Beyond Transitions: The Role of Memory in Long-Term Social Reconstruction.” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 161–71. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijr035.

Nee, Ann, and Peter Uvin. “Silence and Dialogue: Burundians’ Alternatives to Transitional Justice.” In *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*, edited by Rosalind Shaw, Lars Waldorf, and Pierre



- Hazan, 157–82. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Nelson, Hilde Lindemann. *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*. Cornell University Press. 2001.
- Ní Aoláin, Fionnuala. “Expanding the Boundaries of Transitional Justice.” *Ethics & International Affairs* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 213–22. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7093.2008.00146.x.
- Nordstrom, Carolyn. “Deadly Myths of Aggression.” *Aggressive Behavior* 24 (1998): 147–159.
- Obradović-Wochnik, Jelena. “The ‘Silent Dilemma’ of Transitional Justice: Silencing and Coming to Terms with the Past in Serbia.” *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, May 16, 2013. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijt011.
- Opotow, Susan. “Reconciliation in Times of Impunity: Challenges for Social Justice.” *Social Justice Research* 14, no. 2 (June 2001): 149–70. doi:http://dx.doi.org.mutex.gmu.edu/10.1023/A:1012888902705.
- Orentlicher, Diane F. “Settling Accounts: The Duty to Prosecute Human Rights Violations of a Prior Regime.” *Yale Law Journal* 100 (1991 1990): 2537.
- Pasquale, Caterina Di. “Massacre, Trial and ‘Choral Memory’ in Sant’Anna Di Stazzema, Italy (1944–2005).” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 3 (November 1, 2012): 486–501. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijs025.
- Polkinghorne, Donald E. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. SUNY Press, 1988.
- Pranis, Kay. “Restorative Values.” In *Handbook of Restorative Justice*, edited by Gerry Johnstone and Daniel Van Ness, 59–74. Willan, 2007.
- Ramírez, María Clemencia. *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship, and Identity in the Colombian Amazon*. Translated by Andy Klatt. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2011.
- Ramsbotham, Oliver, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2005.
- Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Tra edition. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010.

- Rasmussen, J. Lewis. "Negotiating a Revolution: Toward Integrating Relationships Building and Reconciliation into Official Peace Negotiations." In *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 101–29. Lexington Books, 2001.
- Riaño-Alcalá, Pilar, and Erin Baines. "The Archive in the Witness: Documentation in Settings of Chronic Insecurity." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2011): 412–33. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijr025.
- Richland, Justin. "Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice." *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 4 (December 2008): 511.
- Richmond, Oliver P, and Audra Mitchell. *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Ristanovic, Nikolic. "Truth and Reconciliation in Serbia." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, 1st ed., 369–86. Routledge, 2006.
- Robben, Antonius C. G. M. "Commentary on Avruch: Group Dynamics in Social Reconciliation Processes During Transitional Justice." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 47, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 50–54. doi:10.1177/1363461510362331.
- Rodríguez, Clemencia. *Citizens' Media against Armed Conflict: Disrupting Violence in Colombia*. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Roesler, Christian. "A Narratological Methodology for Identifying Archetypal Story Patterns in Autobiographical Narratives." *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 51, no. 4 (September 1, 2006): 574–86. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5922.2006.00498.x.
- Roht-Arriaza, Naomi, and Mariezcurrena, eds. *Transitional Justice in the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Truth versus Justice*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Rotberg, Robert I. "Truth Commissions and the Provision of Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation." In *Truth V. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg and Dennis Thompson, 3–21. Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Rothbart, Daniel, and K. V Korostelina. "Introduction." In *Why They Die: Civilian Devastation in Violent Conflict*, 1–6, 2013.
- Rubio-Marín, Ruth. *What Happened to the Women?: Gender and Reparations for Human Rights Violations*. SSRN, 2006.

- Sarat, Austin, and Joel B. Grossman. "Courts and Conflict Resolution: Problems in the Mobilization of Adjudication." *The American Political Science Review* 69, no. 4 (December 1, 1975): 1200–1217. doi:10.2307/1955281.
- Sarbin, Theodore R. "The Poetics of Identity." *Theory & Psychology* 7, no. 1 (February 1, 1997): 67–82. doi:10.1177/0959354397071006.
- Saxon, Dan. "Exporting Justice: Perceptions of the ICTY Among the Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim Communities in the Former Yugoslavia 1." *Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 4 (October 2005): 559–72. doi:10.1080/14754830500332837.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. "Undoing: Social Suffering and the Politics of Remorse in the New South Africa." *Social Justice* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 114–42.
- Scollon, Ron. *Mediated Discourse: The Nexus of Practice*. 1 edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Scott, James. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University, 1998.
- . *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press, 1990. <http://www.jstor.org.proxywr.wrlc.org/stable/j.ctt1np6zz>.
- Shaw, Rosalind. "Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 2 (July 1, 2007): 183–207. doi:10.1093/ijtj/ijm008.
- Shaw, Rosalind, and Lars Waldorf. "Introduction: Localizing Transitional Justice." In *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*, edited by Rosalind Shaw, Lars Waldorf, and Pierre Hazan, 3–26. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Shuman, Amy. "Dismantling Local Culture." *Western Folklore*, April 1993.
- . *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy*. 1st Edition. University of Illinois Press, 2010.
- Sisson, Jonathan. "A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past." *Politobis*, no. 50 (2010): 11–15.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Kay Schaffer. *Human Rights and Narrated Lives : The Ethics of Recognition*. Gordonsville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10118452>.
- Somers, Margaret R. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (October 1, 1994): 605–49. doi:10.1007/BF00992905.

- Spelman, Elizabeth V. "From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation." *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* 34, no. 4 (July 1, 2005): 398–99. doi:10.1177/009430610503400436.
- Starr, Sonja. "Extraordinary Crimes at Ordinary Times: International Justice beyond Crisis Situations." *Northwestern University Law Review* 101 (2007): 1257.
- Stewart, Katherine A., and Madeline M. Maxwell. *Storied Conflict Talk: Narrative Construction in Mediation*. John Benjamins Publishing, 2010.
- Stoetzler, Marcel, and Nira Yuval-Davis. "Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination." *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 3 (December 1, 2002): 315–33. doi:10.1177/146470002762492024.
- Stover, Eric. *The Witnesses: War Crimes and the Promise of Justice in The Hague*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Incorporated, 2007.
- Sullivan, Dennis, and Larry Tiftt. "Introduction: The Healing Dimension of Restorative Justice: A One-World Body." In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tiftt, 1st ed. Routledge, 2006.
- Summers, Nicole. "Colombia's Victims' Law: Transitional Justice in a Time of Violent Conflict." *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 25, no. 1 (2012): 219.
- Swigonski, Mary. "The Logic of Feminist Standpoint Theory for Social Work Research." *Social Work* 39, no. 4 (1994): 387–93.
- Tabak, Shana. "False Dichotomies of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict and Combatants in Colombia." *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 44 (2012 2011): 103.
- Tate, Winifred. *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia*. 1 edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Taussig, Michael. *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*. 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999
- . *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of A "limpieza" in Colombia*. New York: New Press, 2003.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." In *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, edited by Ajay Heble, Donna Palmateer Pennee, and J. R. Struthers, 98–131. Broadview Press, 1997.
- Teitel, Ruti G. *Transitional Justice*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2002.

- . “Transitional Justice Genealogy.” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 69.
- Thakur, Ramesh Chandra, and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, eds. *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*. United Nations University Press, 2004.
- Thakur, Ramesh Chandra, Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, and Martti Ahtisaari, eds. “Preface- Justice and Accountability: Local or International?” In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, xii–xvii. United Nations University Press, 2004.
- Theidon, Kimberly. “Histories of Innocence: Postwar Stories in Peru.” In *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*, edited by Rosalind Shaw, Lars Waldorf, and Pierre Hazan, 92–110. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Tint, Barbara. “History, Memory, and Intractable Conflict.” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010): 239–256. doi:10.1002/crq.258.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Turner, Bryan S. *Vulnerability and Human Rights*. Penn State Press, 2010.
- Van der Merwe, Hugo, and Audrey R Chapman. *Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice: Challenges for Empirical Research*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008.
- Velez, Isaura. “Law of Victims and Land Restitution: Colombia’s Ambitious Law Faces Implementation Challenges.” *FIU Law Review* 9, no. 2 (March 20, 2014): 451.
- Villa-Vincencio, Charles. “Transitional Justice, Restoration, and Prosecution.” In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tiff, 1st ed., 387–400. Routledge, 2006.
- Vinjamuri, Leslie, and Jack Snyder. “Advocacy and Scholarship in the Study of International War Crime Tribunals and Transitional Justice.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 7, no. 1 (June 2004): 345–62. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104755.
- Waldorf, Lars. “Anticipating the Past Transitional Justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs.” *Social & Legal Studies* 21, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 171–86. doi:10.1177/0964663911435827.

- . “Rwanda’s Failing Experiment in Restorative Justice.” In *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, edited by Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tift, 1st ed., 422–34. Routledge, 2006.
- West, Robin. “Reconsidering Legalism.” *Georgetown Law Faculty Publications and Other Works*, January 1, 2003.  
<http://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/facpub/268>.
- White, Hayden. “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (October 1, 1980): 5–27. doi:10.2307/1343174.
- White, Michael. *Maps of Narrative Practice*. 1st ed. W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.
- Wibben, Annick T. R. *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2011.
- Wilmer, Franke. “The Social Construction of Conflict and Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia.” *Social Justice* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 90–113.
- Wilson, Richard A. *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Winslade, John. “Tracing Lines of Flight: Implications of the Work of Gilles Deleuze for Narrative Practice.” *Family Process* 48, no. 3 (September 2009): 332–46.  
doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2009.01286.x.
- Winslade, John, and Gerald D. Monk. *Practicing Narrative Mediation: Loosening the Grip of Conflict*. 2nd ed. Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- Wladimiroff, Michail. “The Individual within International Law.” In *From Sovereign Impunity To International Accountability: The Search For Justice In A World Of States*, edited by Ramesh Chandra Thakur and Petrus Adrianus Maria Malcontent, 103–16. United Nations University Press, 2004.
- Yamaguchi, Kazuo. *Event History Analysis*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991.
- Zamosc, Leon. *The Agrarian Question and the Peasant Movement in Colombia: Struggles of the National Peasant Association, 1967-1981*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Zehr, Howard. *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. 3rd ed. Herald Pr, 2005.

———. “Intersection of Restorative Justice with Trauma Healing, Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding.” *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 18, no. 1–2 (2008): 20–30.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Alison Castel holds a BA in Spanish and Sociology from University of Wisconsin-Madison and a M.S. Ed. in Intercultural Communication from the University of Pennsylvania. Alison was a Rotary Peace Fellow in 2009 at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok where she earned a certificate in International Peace and Conflict Resolution. Before obtaining her doctorate, she was the International Program Coordinator at Haverford College's Center for Peace and Global Citizenship. Alison is currently on the faculty at the University of Colorado- Boulder and teaches in the Peace and Conflict Studies Program.