One degree of separation
An exploratory and anthropological approach to rethink post-conflict and reconciliation in Colombia

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AUC: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-defence Army of Colombia)
BACRIM: Bandas Criminales Emergentes (Emerging Criminal Bands)
CNRR: Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation)
CNC: Centro Nacional de Consultoria (National Consultancy Center)
DAS: Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (Administrative Department of Security)
DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ELN: Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
EPL: Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)
FARC-EP: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army)
GMH: Grupo de Memoria Histórica (Historic Memory Group)
IDP: Internally Displaced Persons
IOM: International Organization for Migrations
MAS: Muerte a Secuestradores (Death to Abductors)
NIAG: New Illegal Armed Groups
TJ: Transitional Justice
INTRODUCTION

Colombian academia started to talk about post-conflict about a decade ago. Some of these discussions are summarized in Preparar el futuro: conflicto y post-conflicto en Colombia published by Universidad de Los Andes and Fundación Ideas para la Paz in 2002. While studies on conflict still occupy most of the interest of the academia, the researchers’ discourse on post-conflict is becoming more notorious. Academically speaking, a consensus on whether Colombia is or is not in a post-conflict stage has not been reached. On the contrary, the position of the current Government is very clear on the matter and has recognized, this year, the existence of an armed conflict in the country. This represents a huge contrast with the government of Álvaro Uribe who during eight years exhorted several times the denial of the conflict in Colombia.

On the other side, 88% of the Colombian population still thinks that the country is in a state of conflict (CNC, slide 11) while only 11% thinks it is instead post-conflict. These percentages varies per region, depending on the impact that the conflict has had in the area but interestingly the most optimistic number is only 20%. Even more interesting is the discovery that the percentage of acceptation of an existing conflict in the country is inversely proportionate to the income level. In other words, the higher the income level is the higher the percentage of people who think that there is still an armed conflict in the country (id.) Furthermore, the work of some scholars on post-conflict (Rettberg; Guerra & Plata) suggests the need to promote a cultural transformation in order to provide for a better transition. Inspired by this idea both from an academic as much as from a personal perspective, this research attempts to shed light into to what extent has conflict impacted a small group of middle to high income Colombian adults.

Taking into account that the country is currently undergoing a transitional justice (TJ) process this exploratory research is meant to open the floor to rethink post-conflict and the possibilities of reconciliation. It must be taken in to account, however, that TJ processes are often said to shape an umbrella covering not only the people who were directly involved in the conflict, but it also includes all the civil
society as an indirect beneficiary of this process: “A country-wide process of revealing and confirming past wrongs is said to facilitate a common and shared memory, and in so doing create a sense of unity and reconciliation” (Hamber & Wilson na). Nevertheless, in cases where TJ is not the result of a political transition towards a democracy, this research argues that the general population\(^1\) is often left out as an spectator of the process or is given little attention, despite the fact that most of the success of a transitional justice process in terms of reconciliation depends on the general society (“Entrevista Alejandro Éder”). An example of this is visible at the local level in the South African case, which is said to be a model of TJ. In many cases reconciliation at the local level was not possible because the people and even the Military could neither forgive, nor trust the demobilized. This created new waves of violence and executions directed mainly towards the ex-combatants:

No IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] members from Kwa-Madala have successfully returned to any of the Vaal Townships from whence they fled in the 1990-91 period. To the contrary, some IFP members, such as Dennis Moerane of Sharpeville, have been summarily executed by armed ANC [African National Congress] Special Defence Unit when they have tried to return to their former homes in the townships. This is partly the result of the lack of any dispute resolution mechanisms within the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] framework to negotiate a lasting local peace and the return of former pariahs to the community. (Wilson 83)

When revising the bibliography on transitional justice and particularly the material related to truth-seeking and historic memory, it is evident that little attention is given to the impact of conflict in the segment of the population that is not normally considered a victim. Also within the academic sphere there is little research regarding the impact of conflict in different segments of society other than the direct victims. However, as evidenced through the voice of the victims at the local level (Beah; Londoño, Ramírez & Monrroy; Theidon) long lasting conflicts bring about cultural changes in society which are translated in the adoption of attitudes, values and behaviours developed to survive. This is what some anthropologists have called

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1 In this research the terms ‘civil population’, ‘general population’ and ‘Non-victims’ will be used in the same way unless something different is mentioned. This is, as all the people outside the scope of the definition of victim given under Law 1448 of 2011(Victims’ Law) recently adopted by the Colombian Congress. As used here, the term does not include members of any legal or illegal armed group.
culture of war or conflict. Aside from the discussion on whether conflict is embedded in culture or not (Sluka 24), it is true that cultural changes caused by spread long standing violence might shape the society in a way that would make it difficult for it to overcome conflict if sociocultural aspects are not tackled. In this sense if civil population is not addressed adequately, reconciliation can become difficult and the cycle of violence might continue under arguments of revenge, hate, because conflict has become the *status quo*, or simply because the population has adopted a logic which rejects the idea of a communal social project. As suggested by Sluka “understanding the cultural context is essential to understanding any specific instance or example of social conflict” (25). Understanding conflict as the product of specific types of social relations (id. 24) and thus turning to the lower levels of social structure provides a bottom-up perspective towards the subject. This perspective allows to understand and identify in which places of social life conflict is located and reproduced. As noted by Nordstrom & Martin “violence is not a socioculturally fragmented phenomenon that occurs ‘outside’ the arena of everyday life for those affected. (...) if we are to understand peace and conflict it is to the people themselves, to the social dynamics and cultural phenomena that inform them, that we must turn” (13-14).

Acknowledging the voice of those who are not involved or affected by conflict will open the door for learning about different perspectives that the population might have about it. This is particularly important in contexts where there is not sufficient information on one or more actors. The lack of this sort of information might create a gap in history, politics and the understanding of conflict and the role of its actors. It might also prevent from thinking about post-conflict from a different perspective. This is partially evident in a recent survey done by the Centro Nacional de Consultoría (CNC) in Colombia. This survey brings to light two important aspects related to the perception of conflict by civil society: First, there is a lack of confidence on a close and possible resolution to conflict. Second, in some cities people are still afraid to call illegal actors of the conflict by name, either the paramilitary or the guerrilla (CNC, slide 13). These aspects are independent of the economic or educational level of the population and even though the percentage varies per region, the feeling is generalized.
Whether the lines above can be said to be a symptom of a “culture of fear” or not, can be debated. However given the Colombian context it could also be asked to what extent the conflict has been institutionalised. The fact that urban inhabitants refuse to call the paramilitary or guerrilla members as such might imply that there is some sort of taboo around those groups even in urban areas where their presence has not been strong. In fact the refusal to call the members of illegal armed groups as such is also present in rural areas of the country that have been under the direct actions and jurisdiction of only one group or both. In some of those places, the names used to refer to the paramilitary speak on their own about the cruelty of the group. Either way, whether it is a culture of fear or an institutionalisation of conflict “[t]error and fear, made cultural, saturate a social group’s vision and distort its capacities to act” (Margold 64). Although this might be said to be a psychological repercussion resulting from conflict, it can also be a symptom of the penetration of conflict within the culture. It might apply to any level of the social structure of a society that has experienced conflict for several years disregarding the level of exposure to war. Notwithstanding, Guerra & Plata mention the need that the Colombian society has to carry out actions focused on promoting cultural changes towards a culture of peace (89).

Within this frame, there is still another voice that should be listened to in Colombia: that of the population that does not fit under the definition of victim given under Law 1448 of 2011 (also known as Law of Victims), as follows:

For the effects of the present law, victims are considered as all those persons who individually or collectively have suffered damage from the events occurred since 1st of January of 1985, as a consequence of the violations to the International Humanitarian Law or any serious violations of the international norms under Human Rights Law as the result of the armed conflict. (art. 3)

The consequences of three decades of conflict in Colombia are not just

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2 During field work for other research in 2006, I visited some municipalities under the control of the paramilitary in the north-west region of Montes de María, Colombia. The adjective used to refer to the paramilitary was “head-choppers” (mocha-cabezas). In the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta the names are rather related with hierarchical order, calling them ‘the chiefs’, ‘the upper ones’, ‘the Misters’, etc (Ramírez-Nates 83)

3 Law 1448 also recognizes as victims the family members or permanent companions of the direct victim if the person in question is death or disappeared.
political or economic. They are also social and cultural and as outlined above conflict transforms the lives and culture within a society, undermines trust and breaks the social tissue. Evidence of this can be found in the narratives of direct victims of conflict in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Peru and Colombia (Beah; Rubio; Londoño et al; Theidon) to name only a few. When conflict is chronic, its effects expand to segments of society which commonly are not seen as direct victims of it. In fact, the title of this thesis evidences how close is the target of this research to the victims of the conflict and calls for stronger attention on the topic.

In an attempt to bring to public light the impact of long lasting conflicts in the general population, and the importance of addressing another segment of the population, this exploratory research will address the issue through the examination of the Colombian case, which has recently experienced a process of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) and has developed an advanced legal framework focusing on the victims.

This gap has been approached by Madariaga (2006) who in a research carried out in Urabá (northwest of Bogotá) explored the influence of the paramilitary on daily life practices, the response to paramilitary law by the local population, the impact of the paramilitary presence in emotions and the significant ethical changes in the population after a decade of paramilitary presence. This ethnography was carried out with women that despite living in an area considered as one of the most difficult of the country did not identify with the category of 'victim'. Among her conclusions, Madariaga writes:

Language, affective relations, and moral judgements are probably the spheres where the impact of the conditions of violence and the type of authority ruling the context are more visible (93)

To stimulate the thinking on this regard, this research proposes a similar perspective. It is instead focuses in a completely opposite target to the one covered by Madariaga. The main question framing this proposal expects to shed light on to what extent conflict has impacted middle to high income Colombian adults between

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4 United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia  
5 “El lenguaje, las relaciones afectivas y las valoraciones morales son probablemente las esferas en que es más visible el impacto de las condiciones de violencia y el tipo de autoridad alas que están sometida”
the age of 27 and 34 years.

My interest in this segment of the population is simple: research on the impact of armed conflict has always been centred on the direct victims and so have the initiatives for the reconstruction of the historic memory. However in conversations with Colombians whether they are IDPs, NGO workers, local government representatives, friends or family there is always a common perspective: that the conflict has left a sore and distrusted nation, covered by a culture of fear and a crisis of values at all levels. Thus it could be said that the conflict has permeated all spheres and layers of society to lay its roots in the lower level of social structure, this is, the people, their perceptions and their relations with others. This embedment has created attitudes and feelings which are considered normal but when reflecting upon them they can be identified as small reproducers of grudges, hates and violence on different scales. Moreover, the survey done by the CNC shows that 88% of the population of Colombia still considers that the country is currently in the midst of an armed conflict (slide 10).

With this research I do not pretend to deny nor comply with this affirmation. My main interest is instead focused on the arguments and meanings behind this feeling. In this sense the general motivation driving this research is the desire to understand the effects that long standing conflict and the way the different governments have approached it have had on the civil population, how that impact can affect (positively or not) a perspective towards post-conflict and what the role of civil society would be in that new stage. Given that this is just an exploratory research the previous questions will be tackled on a smaller scale through the perceptions that the target has about the actors of the conflict, their role within conflict, the conflict and the socio-cultural impact it has had. Thus, the questions driving this research are:

- What has been the socio-political context between 1980-2010 influencing middle to high income Colombian adults between the age of 27 and 34 years?
- To what extent has the socio-political context 1980-2010 influenced the

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6 References on this matter for the Colombian context are endless and from multiple disciplines. A short approximation to some of these studies is displayed in the first chapter. However, I invite the reader to take a look into the online catalogues of Fundación Ideas para la Paz, CODHES or CINEP.

7 The target of this research is defined in the methodology
perception of conflict by middle to high income Colombian adults between the age of 27 and 34 years?

• To what extent is the influence visible within the social life from the perspective of middle to high income Colombian adults between the age of 27 and 34 years?

This paper will be divided into four chapters. Chapter one presents the conceptual framework and the background of this paper. The second chapter tries to answer question one by providing an overview of the Colombian background. Question two is addressed in chapter three, dealing with the perceptions of the actors and the conflict by the target. Chapter four will respond to questions three by addressing the sociocultural impact on the target. Finally a short conclusion will be done.
CHAPTER 1

FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

Methodology

Data for this research was gathered from different sources. I conducted semi-structured and group interviews with Colombians living in Barcelona (Spain), Geneva (Switzerland), and Colombia. Interviews conducted in Europe were done face-to-face and the ones in Colombia were done using Skype (video or audio). A total of 20 persons were interviewed while fourteen persons answered the questionnaire.

Interviewees were primarily contacted through social networks such as Facebook and Couchsurfing and secondly through their social network. For the questionnaire people were contacted mainly through my personal social network in Europe and Colombia and secondly, through Facebook and Couchsurfing.

Additionally, a review of printed and online documents such as academic articles, newspapers articles, websites, national laws and documentaries was conducted to help shape the argument.

Originally I wanted to do the research just with Colombians living in Europe; however the beginning of the fieldwork coincided with the start of summer holidays and many of them left on vacations. This forced me to amplify my scope. The final profile was people between 27 and 34 years old with at least some level of postgraduate studies, from middle to high income level, who did not identify with and no member of their nuclear family was covered by the Law of Victims.

The income level was defined using the Colombian classification of socioeconomic levels defined in article 2 of decree 700 of 1990 in which Socio Economic Level is an indirect way of measuring the income of a family through the housing conditions. The rank is given between one and six, where one indicates lowest living conditions and 6 indicates highest living conditions. This level is given according to where the location of the house and takes into account the facade, the access to green areas, and the state of the access roads. For this research all the

8 Interviews were divided in sixteen single interviews and one group interview of four persons.
participants belonged to socioeconomic level four to six.

This profile was chosen on two bases directly related with the relevance of the research. First, the age group is symbolic of the historical stage Colombia is going through at the moment as this is the generation that was born, grew up and is now witnessing the demobilization of the paramilitary. Second, this research aims to focus on a segment of the Colombian population in which there is no existing research on the impact of conflict: the one that is neither considered nor identified as a victim of the conflict. Taking into account the previous background the target was also chosen on the basis of opposition: it is normally well educated persons who do the research on others, but there is no research on them/us.

Data gathering and analysis was done under the Grounded Theory methodology. As an anthropologist I would have preferred to use ethnography, however the impossibility of travelling to Colombia to conduct the research forced me to look for other possibilities. Grounded Theory provided sufficient freedom to build different categories of analysis, and most of all it did not force me to limit the interviews and questionnaires I had to do but allowed me to play with them as necessary to reach representativeness. Another question that came up was how to solve the issue of saturation of information. In Grounded Theory the number of interviews conducted is not necessarily related to an absolute number but rather to the saturation of the information.

The theoretical sampling allows the researcher to choose the cases to study according to their potential for expanding the concepts or theories developed. “Theoretical saturation” means that new cases will not help to include or develop new properties to the categories. (Soneira, 156)

Opposite to statistical sampling, the theoretical sampling allows to choose interviewees in regard of the direct theoretical interest of the investigation rather than in regard of their representation or typicality (Riba 11). Creswell (in Soneira 156) mentions 20 to 30 interviews should be enough. For this research 20 interviews were enough as to reach saturation of information.

Relevance, reaches and limitations

Relevance of this research is located in the historical place occupied by the
DDR of the paramilitary and the subsequent Transitional Justice Process. This process can be translated as the end of one stage of the conflict and the beginning of another one.

As part of the TJ, the government has developed an advanced legal framework to address victims, placing them at the core of the process. Despite that the TJ process does not contemplate a formal truth commission\(^9\), it has been through the declarations of the heads of the paramilitary (all of them extradited to the United States) as well as those of the lower ranks that it has been possible to answer questions about the whereabouts of many disappeared, mass graves and the facts around the violations of human rights in different places of the country. This process gave access to new information allowing further research to be conducted providing the country with knowledge on the extent of the paramilitary’s involvement in politics.

Furthermore, with the creation of the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (CNRR) and particularly the creation of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica (GMH) of the CNRR it has been possible to bring to public light the details and type of violations that occurred in select events since 1985. This has mainly been done through the publication of reports with a more or less generic structure. The conclusions and recommendations of these reports address political, social and judicial levels. Nevertheless, they have hardly been implemented by the government and the reports are seldom known by Colombians. Furthermore, the focus of the GMH has been on the victims of particular events. This is understandable in the sense that, as mentioned by Chapman & Ball (2), due to the number and magnitude of some events it would be impossible to cover them all, thus the researchers in charge of the recovery of the historic memory have selected the most symbolic tragedies since 1985. At the time of writing this paper, there were ten reports published and three more on the way\(^10\) (GMH “Informes de Memoria Histórica”).

As an exploratory research this investigation expects to offer a different

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9In 2005 a Truth Commission was created to study the case of the Palace of Justice siege in 1985. The report was published earlier this year. However this process has been developing aside from the current Transitional Justice Process.

10 Also there are some documentaries on the topic, such as “Desde diversas orillas” (Londoño et al) and “La masacre del Salado” (Rubio). The former is a complement of the report on the same event.
perspective in post-conflict and open the door for further research on the topic. Additionally, this work also helps to complement the work of the CNRR and particularly that of the historic memory by providing another perspective on conflict, its actors and their roles.

Limits of this research are related with it being an exploratory investigation. Thus it does not expect to draw results based on gender, age, or income level. Without ignoring that the conflict dynamic has been different in every city, this research does expect neither to present nor to compare regional perceptions. It does not expect to draw conclusions about the Colombian population, but it is mainly an invitation to conduct further research on the matter.

Also, although I tried to cover all different perspectives it is clear that there were limitations regarding the methods of contacting people. Particularly, I would have liked to have a better balance between the different perspectives within the target. Moreover, opposite to what I had expected, contacting people through Couchsurfing and Facebook was more difficult than anticipated, the interviews took longer to finish and the responses to the questionnaire were also lower than expected.

One last aspect that can be as much of an advantage as a disadvantage is my condition as a Colombian. On the positive side the level of knowledge that I have about the context and the culture serve me greatly for the purpose of this research. On the negative side this very same advantage might betray my judgement and become a bias. I have made great efforts to take distance when writing, when not possible I have tried to make it explicit. I hope I have succeeded. The role of taking the emic-etic position at the same time has largely been avoided by anthropologists, partly because of the origins of the discipline and its prior purposes, partly because of the biases it might provide. However I am among the ones who argue that if done properly, this position can be of great advantage, mainly in difficult settings when you often need a link with the field to conduct research.

**Conceptual framework**

Violence is usually seen as an action to cause physical damage or, in the extreme case, to eliminate the other, or as an extreme use of coercive force.
However, this interpretation limits the comprehension of the effects of its practice as it leaves aside other forms of violence which go beyond the physical limits, and that breach the barriers of distance and presence.

The anthropological approach used in this thesis studies violence from a cultural point of view, and in particular through analysis on the micro level structure of a society. As Nordstrom & Martin notice “conflict [violence] is culturally articulated: movies, myths, and murals convey rhetoric and ideology; spirits become arenas of contention, and time, irony, and historical narrative become modes of resistance and rebellion” (11). In this sense, the relationships, values, language and other cultural expressions such as art, literature, music, films, TV shows and even sense of humour work as a mirror where the different perceptions and opinions about conflict and violence are reflected. In many societies, these media have become tools to express disagreement or frustration in a context where these feelings cannot be expressed freely, or where the violence, even symbolic, is so widespread that the population is forced to adopt coping strategies to survive. For Nordstrom & Martin “violence starts and stops with the people that constitute society; it takes place in society and as a social reality; it is a product and manifestation of culture” (14).

All these cultural expressions, in which popular culture develops and mutates, not only provide a scenario for studying hidden resistance, but also allow us to elucidate the impact that violence has on population. The concept of hidden transcripts in the terms of James Scott provides room for understanding the contradictions within speech, actions and logic.

The theoretical framework is rooted on the work of Scott, Nordstrom & Martin and in particular on their work regarding conflict and forms of resistance. These studies provide useful elements to understand how, from the everyday life practices, a society faces conflict. Through what Scott has called public and hidden transcripts we can read the struggle that individuals, as much as collectives, face in order to coexist together in a distorted environment, or at least, in one that is

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11 Scott defines public transcripts as “the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” (56) which might be verbal or include non-speech. In contras position “hidden transcript thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speech, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript” (Scott 58)
perceived as unfair. The work of Scott is largely based on the power relations between peasants and tenants and slaves and their masters. Despite this bias, his classification of the representations and actions from a binary power relation resulting from a hierarchical relation can help us to elucidate the cultural impact that conflict might have in a society.

Although there are more than two the actors among the Colombian conflict and particularly for the target of this research the relation with them might not be exactly hierarchical, hidden transcripts allow evidencing the practices assumed by a population as a result of the violence. These actions are set in practice in the relation with the State, the armed groups (legal or illegal) and society itself. Particularly interesting is the relationship, roles and actions executed by the individual towards the society. This number of roles and actions that each individual holds together constitutes a collective subject; the practices that, *grosso modo*, are performed by all members of society in one way or another. The problem with these practices is that while they are an individual response towards a context that is not perceived as safe and trustworthy, they inhibit the construction of a collective social project given that social trust is also diminished. This has as a result the tendency, or rather the habitue of the individual to think only about the individual and familial welfare but not social welfare. This way of thinking creates a logic that promotes actions based on resistance and survival as a response to a wild environment and sacrifices the common construction of a social project of Nation-State building. This way of thinking is typical from the IDPs who first have to save themselves and then think on how they will survive (CNRR 150). In that sense it could be said that the Colombian population has inherited not only the mentality of drug trafficking but also that of the displaced. It is on this basis that Guerra & Plata argue that it is necessary to generate cultural changes to create a culture of peace (89).

Additionally, if we think of symbolic violence not in the terms of Bourdieu or Comaroff, but as a set of actions, images and discourses that given their intangible and ethereal characteristics manage to filter through all layers of society, although the intensity in which the violence is experimented, it will be possible to understand how the violence executed in Colombia, despite not touching the people of this research directly, has managed to grow virtual arms that have surrounded the civil
population. I do not pretend to deny the real and different types of violence within the Colombian context, neither to diminish the tragedy of the victims. My argument here is that for a segment of the Colombian population, given the privileged position they occupy in relation to their distance (physical and geographical) from the scenarios where physical violence is happening, the type of violence they are subject to is mainly symbolic since they receive information about the conflict through the news, the official discourse and alternative media. In this sense, and for this segment, the violence becomes real through the experiences of 'the other', whether it is family, friends, IDPs, or survivors. That is to say, the violence becomes real when they meet the victims. Generally the population has an idea of victims that corresponds to that in the Law 1448. Meeting someone falling under this category is not difficult for they are now part of the urban landscape. However a person who is forced to pay the paramilitary to protect their property or who cannot go back to the finca because they refuse to pay the fee is seen as normal. The title of this document refers to this sort of victims too. Between the questionnaire and the interviews 20 out of 24 people admitted knowing someone who had been a victim of conflict. In this sense there is only one degree of separation between the non-victims and the victims.

Background of the studies in Colombia

The studies on the cultural impact of conflict in Colombia are mainly focused on the victims as defined in Law 1448. Either from the perspective of the historic memory or from the academia, these researches have been focused on the people or the communities that have lived in person the tragedy of the violence. Just by typing the word desplazados (displaced) in the online catalogue of the public library Luis Angel Arango the results show more than 600 documents related to this category in different formats. And this is only the database of one library; probably the biggest one in Colombia, and does not count the multiple theses from different universities that are written yearly about the subject, nor the productions of NGOs as Fundación

12 The concept used in this question included also people victim of bombs during the Cartels War, those who had to pay paramilitary to protect their property, and those who could not go back to the fincas because of the presence of illegal armed groups.
Ideas para la Paz, neither is it a specialized library on the matter as CINEP\textsuperscript{13} or CODHES\textsuperscript{14}. Therefore the number of records mentioned here is presumably low compared to the existences.

Truth be told, the impact of the conflict in Colombia, mostly that related with drug trafficking, jumps to the face of any observer. Just by visiting the national literature section\textsuperscript{15} in any bookstore in Bogotá, the observer will be able to see the great number of stories related with drug-trafficking. The same can be found if one looks at national film productions\textsuperscript{16}, TV Shows\textsuperscript{17} and music. On the other hand, arts\textsuperscript{18} and the once white walls of public Universities have long been the traditional (although still present in the other scenarios too) and preferred anti-establishment spaces towards the conflict related with the paramilitary, guerrillas and the State.

The information present in these channels speaks for itself: it is the reflection of the cotidianity of the national conscience, the reflection of the news and the facts. It is, most of all, the reflection of growing up and living in a country where 68\%\textsuperscript{19} of its population has been born within internal conflict (or so we have been told). Even though the mirror is simply reflecting the base of culture the studies from the anthropological perspective on the matter are few, and the access to them is difficult from Europe.

A great frame to do this sort of research would be the context of the transitional justice process that Colombia is currently undergoing. However, TJ focuses on the government structures, the victimizers and the victims. Although it is often said to be an umbrella covering all society, this might be partially true only in some cases but it does not apply to all. A framework dealing with the non-victims

\textsuperscript{13} Center for Research and Popular Education – Foundation.
\textsuperscript{14} Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento – NGO.
\textsuperscript{18} Two great exponents of conflict from the art perspective are Beatriz González and Débora Arango. The work of the former is particularly charged with political aspects. Maybe more popular in Europe for people out of the art scenario is Fernando Botero, who through some of his big round shapes also transmits the unease of the Colombians.
\textsuperscript{19} Percentage obtained according to the estimated population for the year 2011 (ages between 0 to 39 years, male and females) in the census done by the government in 2005. www.dane.gov.co
could also be very useful in the context of internal conflict or civil war when it is not related to a political transition to democracy, given that the way that violence and oppression affect a society vary depending on whether it is a political transition from a dictatorship to democracy or if it is rather a civil war/internal conflict. In this sense a framework to deal with non-victims should also be at hand to provide room to conduct research directly related with the impact of conflict in the society that is not considered a victim. Nevertheless, through the reports linked to the recovery of the historic memory and the memory of the victims it is possible to glimpse to what extent an event has affected the local population/victim. These reports, with a more or less generic structure, provide information regarding the facts, how they happened, the context around them, and the material, mental and moral impact on the town\textsuperscript{20}. Particularly interesting are chapters three and four of the report on the Massacre of El Salado\textsuperscript{21}. In those pages it is possible to understand the impact of the massacre on the community as a collective project and collective subject. Its reconstruction implies facing the absence of community leaders, friends and family, as much as the re-signification of the different places and spaces in town and not just those where the massacre took place. It implies thus, the whole re-construction and re-signification of the environment, including physical, mental, social and emotional places in order to achieve filling the emotional, physical and social emptiness. In other words, in order to make the town habitable again it is necessary to knit the social tissue and cotidianity all over again.

The social emptiness created by the disappearance of the town, had as a result the collapse of the cotidianity. Following some authors, Blair mentions that it provides the assurance and certainty supported by the repetition of practices which gives to human beings a quiet feeling without great emotional demands, resulting in stability; is the ‘natural’ way of things. The disappearance of the town implied the suppression of the spaces, the objects and the people that produced cotidianity. The resulting social emptiness becomes even more painful in the sense that it implies the dissolution of the collective identity, the loss of the socially constructed world and the

\textsuperscript{20} Town should be understood not just as the infrastructure but also as all the social dynamics ruling that particular space.

\textsuperscript{21} The municipality of El Salado located in the region known as Montes de María, was object of two massacres by the paramilitary. The first one in 1997 and the second in 2002.
pulverisation of a long history and the collective project”\textsuperscript{22} (CNRR 158)

Even after the return of the IDPs to El Salado, the difficulties of “rescuing” the town were great. On the one hand, the vegetation had literally taken over the church’s walls, the football field etc, on the other hand, and probably most difficult, was to try to rebuild the life in the town. One of the most important and socially significant places of the municipality were the festivities. Recovering them was one of the biggest challenges survivors had to face in order to give them a new meaning that allowed them to celebrate without “offending the dignity of the victims nor cause guilt”\textsuperscript{23} (159). Finally the recovery of the festivities was possible in 2005 as a proposal done by the Women Collective to avoid that the damage caused by the violence “would continuing on expanding until eradicating their own traditions”\textsuperscript{24} (159). Other space that had to be reformulated was the football field since it was there that most of the killings happened. As a result many have opted to play in another place.

Although cotidinanity is not something that changes for the non-victims, it does provide a scenario where the practices of survival, resistance or adaptation are set in motion. In this sense daily-life is the space where social and cultural dilemmas and contradictions are represented. The concept of “geographies of terror” developed by Oslender can be used as much at the local level as at the national level. The re-signification of social and physical places is not just a process that locals go through. This is evident in the construction of the imaginaries over the Colombian territory by its population: spaces such as Mapiripán, Bojayá, Chocó, Urabá, or Putumayo are places of terror where massacres have taken place; combats are common and are a constant reference in the voice of the IDPs. Whether it is true or not, there is a reconfiguration and re-significance of the national territory through

\textsuperscript{22} “El vacío social generado por la desaparición del pueblo implicó el colapso de la cotidianidad. Siguiendo a varios autores, Blair señala que ésta provee una seguridad y una certeza sostenidas por la repetición de prácticas que habitan a los seres humanos a un sentimiento tranquilo, sin mayores demandas emocionales, que generan estabilidad; son como el orden “natural” de las cosas. Ahora bien, la desaparición del pueblo y de las veredas supuso la supresión de los espacios, los objetos y las personas que la reproducían, y el vacío social resultante se vuelve más doloroso para los sobrevivientes porque implica una disolución de la identidad colectiva, una pérdida del mundo socialmente construido por los mayores, y la pulverización de una larga historia y del proyecto colectivo”
\textsuperscript{23} “ofender la dignidad de las víctimas, ni generar culpa”
\textsuperscript{24} “continuará extendiéndose hasta acabar con sus tradiciones”
the geography of terror.

As if the number of books, paints, songs, films and TV shows, were not reflecting enough the grievances and uneasiness of the Colombian society, the documentary about the Massacre of El Salado (Rubio) also gives room for questions about the way that conflict has affected the general population apart from the victims. In response to the declaration of the Director of Public Prosecutions about the massacre, Alfonso Gómez Méndez, the narrator of the documentary asks how insensitive our society is if we can consider a massacre to be “classic”\(^{25}\) (min 2.28). What is important is not the question per se, but what lies around it: the perceptions, the values, the beliefs, the social relations, the meanings. What has been the context in which this society has lived in in order to consider classic a massacre? is it merely an official perspective, a way of speaking or is it also the reflection of the rest of the society? Within Colombia, out of the countryside, the conflict areas and its neighbouring municipalities there is another country: One where, for good or bad, its people have not experienced the inclemency of the violence as the survivors of El Salado have, but they have also lived and grown up within the social and political discourse of the conflict, the news, the security measures (some of which are somehow misconceived as it will be seen in chapter three) and the obvious presence of IDPs in the cities.

Besides the reports of the historic memory, other studies showing the socio-cultural impact of conflict in society tend to focus on the (cultural) heritage of drug-trafficking (Rincón; Camacho). In fact narco\(^{26}\) can be as much of a prefix (used with almost every word) as an adjective and it is commonly used in the current language, in academia and official speeches. Thus it is possible to talk of the narco-cultura which permeates all socioeconomic levels and becomes evident through architecture, fashion, sense of humour, music (with a genre of its own shared also with Mexicans: the narco-corridos), the relation/conception of the women’s body and in general a short term mentality. In the words of Rincón: “[t]he narco is not just a traffic or a business; it is also an aesthetic, which cross-cuts and is embedded in the

\(^{25}\) “¿es tan insensible nuestra sociedad que podemos considerar clásica una masacre?”

\(^{26}\) Narco refers to the illegal drug business and the people linked with it.
culture and history of Colombia”\(^\text{27}\) (147).

As it has been mentioned before, regarding the conflict between the paramilitary, the guerrillas, and the State, the objects of study are primarily the victims especially IDPs. Other than IDPs, some research can be found from a psychological perspective, on the impact of kidnapping in the families of the abducted (Molina, Agudelo et al) and the perceptions of urban violence by young people from low income sectors in Cali (Machado & Ocoro). From a philosophical perspective Quiñonez proposed an approach through the communicative active theory and the participative action research methodology to open other ways of understanding and transforming society to give the Colombian case an opportunity to re-orientate, reflect and renew the dialogue between legal and illegal actors of the conflict in the search of a “communicative and transforming exit of the politico-military conflict” (102). None of them, however, dares to approach the topic of the impact of conflict on the segments of the population that are not victims.

The work of Madariaga comes closer to the interest of this research. In her findings she describes and analyses to what extent the paramilitary rule impacts the daily life in a municipality that has been occupied by this group for a decade. Her analysis on the relation with the other is very interesting if compared with the relations from urban settings. As she points out “[i]t is a particular inversion of the logics of distrust compared to the big cities: if in Bogotá it is considered very risky to give personal information to a stranger, in Urabá it is a basic practice of self-care”\(^\text{28}\) (39). Although she does not explicitly mention the topic, it is evident in her research the degree of institutionalization of the paramilitary at the local level where the group was promoted as a security company with announces in the local radio and signs in the streets. As weird as it might sound to foreigners, to Colombians this is neither unusual nor a new practice. Although the levels of institutionalization do vary between regions, urban or rural contexts and social segments, this sort of institutionalization can be found in different municipalities along the extensive

\(^{27}\) “Lo narco no es solo un tráfico o un negocio; es también una estética, que cruza y se imbrica con la cultura y la historia de Colombia.”

\(^{28}\) “Se trata de una peculiar inversión con las lógicas de la desconfianza de las grandes ciudades: Si en Bogotá se considera arriesgado entregar información personal a un extraño, en Urabá se trata de una práctica básica de autocuidado”
Colombian geography. The work of Madariaga is significant because she approaches the segment of the population who does not identify themselves as victims despite admitting that the law ruling the region is somehow misconceived.

In another research conducted in 2006 by the Centro de Estudios Sociales e Internacionales of the Universidad de Los Andes (not published) in different municipalities of the country with different levels of conflict it was possible to identify hidden practices (Scott) of survival carried out by the inhabitants of those municipalities. I was part of the research team and we approached local government representatives, community leaders and local population to ask them about their life in the area in relation to the conflict. Depending on the level of influence of any given armed group, the practices would vary, but they mainly appeared as a way to carry on with daily life within the “normality” of paramilitary or guerrilla rule. In the case of the paramilitary presence the group ruled all the aspects of social, political and even private life, having a say on the way men had to wear their, the election of the next mayor and even on solving marital affairs. This sort of social impact is not felt by urban inhabitants. The rule of paramilitary or guerrilla has not had this sort of impact simply because in big cities it is not as easy for them to execute power and authority as explicitly as in rural areas or towns.

**Conclusion**

The previous pages show the different approaches done in Colombia towards the study of the impact of conflict in the society. Although most of these studies have focused on the segment of the population who has lived under paramilitary or guerrilla law, some other have been done with the people who, although living under a misconceived context, did not consider themselves as victims. This last perspective provides for a theoretical framework which next to the concepts developed by Scott and Nordstrom & Martin serve as a basis for the subsequent pages. Based in these approaches, the next chapters will provide for a context and analysis that will help to answer the questions of this research.
The following pages aim to answer question one of this research which is: what has been the socio-political context between 1980-2010 influencing middle to high income Colombians adults between the age of 17 and 34 years? The chapter is divided in different periods to help ease the reading and it will be focused on the main events that the interviewees mentioned during the interviews and the context around them.

The period covered in this research is strongly linked to the previous decades when the guerrillas and self-defence groups emerged. Thus the Colombian conflict can be traced back to the mid-1960s with the creation of the first communist guerrillas and self-defence groups. This ‘new’ wave of violence was actually the continuance of an already exacerbated conflict that had started at the end of the 1940s, the actors and their arguments for violence as well as the type of aggressions were remarkably different. The period of La Violencia, as it has been called, was the result of a bipartisan conflict in which the Liberal and the Conservative parties disputed power. Some of its effects are still visible today. This stage socially, culturally and politically polarized society to a point that still remains today in some rural areas; the great number of displacements drastically modified the demography of the country and it gave room for the emergence of armed groups. All of the above added to the fact that many of the places where people migrated to were remote and helped people to grow apart from the idea of the State.

Due to the high level of violence peasants organized self-defence groups that later developed into agrarian movements with a communist influence. Their territories of influence were called ‘independent republics’ due to the lack of control on the part of the State. The siege of Marquetalia by the Military forces marks the change from peasant’s organizations to guerrilla movement in 1964 (Pizarro 168). The FARC was officially created in 1966 adding Ejército del Pueblo (EP) in 1982 as a symbol of the change of strategy (id. 185). Several guerrilla groups emerged during
the 1960s, all of them inspired by communism and acting under the guise of being the voice of the popular classes towards the existence of a corrupt political elite. A second wave of guerrilla parties such as M19 (urban socialist nationalist guerrilla) originated in the 1970s but they were later demobilized.

Parallel to the establishment of the first guerrilla generation, a number of self-defence parties emerged in different areas of the country under the argument of protection from the guerrillas. This practice was fully supported by the State under decree 3398 of 1965 which allowed civilians to form temporal self-defence groups (García-Godos & Lid 491). Not all of these groups were related to the defence of the physical integrity. Many of them, mostly in the 1970s, were created to protect the marijuana crops and the lands of the elite from invasion either by colonos or by the guerrillas. By the end of the 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s these groups transformed into what became known as paramilitary groups - a fully independent and structured paramilitary organization with strong links with the elite and the drug cartels.

Politically speaking the later years of the 1970's were characterized by the declaration of a State-of-siege by President Julio Cesar Turbay in 1978. Under this panorama the government established norms aimed to guarantee safety and security for the population under what was called the Estatuto de Seguridad. Under this decree the military and the police were given new rights, later translated in massive human rights violations (Gómez et al 33, 34). The actions carried out by the military and police undermined what was left of civilian trust in these authorities. It also shaped a structure within these forces that would later clash with the mandate of Belisario Betancur and would become one of the biggest difficulties in pursuing the peace agreement in the coming decade.

When peace became a tool for war (1982-1992)

The arrival of Belisario Betancur to the presidency (1982-1986) at the end of 1982 meant a drastic change in the government approach to conflict: “for the first time in the history of the country, the social and political character of conflict is recognized” (Gómez, Herrera & Pinilla 36). From the beginning Betancur established a Peace Commission in an attempt to find a negotiated exit to the conflict. The
widest amnesty done up to date in Colombia was created to promote the 'demobilization' of the members of the guerrillas. Only 200 to 400 persons were admitted into this process (id. 39), the guerrillas did not agree with the amnesty provided and neither did the Army considering it to be a political success for the guerrillas. At the same time the government started a war against Drug Cartels partly due to the implementation of the extradition agreements with the United States (US) resulting in a number of attacks in the cities as a way of pressuring the government. This added to the instability caused by the peace negotiations and the modus operandi of M19 resulted in a highly violent and unstable security situation nationwide. By the end of the decade

(...) public opinion was especially disturbed by the level of kidnapping: the number of reported kidnappings in Colombia was in 1988-92 the highest in the world and exceeded that for the rest of Latin America put together. British insurance firms targeted Colombia as a country of high potential for kidnapping insurance (Abel 96)

The Peace Commission of 1982 was the first attempt, of many to come, in which the government sought to find a negotiated exit to conflict. It became a general state policy for each government since then29 (Valencia & Mejía 61). According to Socorro Ramírez (in Gómez et al 37) the search for peace was as much a national desire as a need of the government to recover part of the legitimacy lost in the previous period.

In 1984, as a result of the previous negotiations with M19 and the FARC, different agreements between the Colombian Government and multiple guerrilla groups were signed establishing a cease-fire by all the signing parties including the army (Prieto 1st part min 9:28). But the character of the Army was still strongly permeated by the times of the Estatuto de Seguridad and they did not have much will to engage in dialogues with the guerrillas. This was partly because the strategy of M19 up to date was to use armed pressure towards the Government to achieve its demands but mostly because the Army believed negotiations were, in the words of

29 From 1980 to 2002, Colombia witnessed multiple peace dialogues with thirteen illegal armed groups, signed eight humanitarian and ceasefire agreements, as well as twelve preliminary and procedural agendas and agreements and nine final peace agreements (Valencia & Mejía 62).
General Landazábal\textsuperscript{30}, a “tool to exert pressure over the government” (Gómez et al 52-53). Also none of the agreements considered disarmament. In the case of the FARC the group was given one year to organize itself socially, economically and politically. This gave origin to the political party \textit{Unión Patriótica (UP)} but the FARC also used this time to widely increase its troops (Chernick np; Prieto 1\textsuperscript{st} part, min.9:50) while continuing abductions of elite members and multinational employees as a way of financing its activities. As a result, those feeling threatened by the FARC strengthened their links with the paramilitary looking for protection (Romero in Valencia 150). Both circumstances, the need of protection and the increasing of troops, were used as a justification by the paramilitaries and the drug cartels to start a war against the FARC with the civil population caught in the crossfire. The political party of the FARC, the UP, was third in the elections of 1986 but the paramilitary (representing the Elite) and the Cartels members would not let the UP grow stronger, starting a hunt that lasted several years and that pretty much exterminated all of its members.

The peace negotiations and ceasefire had given hope to the whole nation. It was the first attempt of a negotiated peace after 20 years of conflict and the actions of FARC were interpreted as a betrayal of the nation. In general terms, it seemed more likely that the political will to find peace in a negotiated manner was only on the part of the president, but its ministries and mostly the army were not ready for it yet. This was evident in the lonely work of the Peace Commission created in 1982, and it became obvious the day of the signing of the agreement when the police attacked Carlos Pizarro, head of M19. The group decided to go on with the signing but the violations to the agreement were common either by the Army or by M19. As Antonio Navarro Wolf\textsuperscript{31} notices “during the Government of Betancur ‘peace became a tool for war’” (Gómez et al 54). In this context Pizarro declared, in 1985, the official end of the truce and announced offensive actions.

One of the most remembered actions of M19 was the Siege of the Palace of Justice in November of 1985. This is also one of the cruellest events of this period,

\textsuperscript{30} He was the Ministry of Defence. Landazábal resigned in the middle of the Betancur period, in January of 1984 after expressing his differences with the Negotiations Policy of Betancur.\textsuperscript{31} Former representative of the M19 in the meetings and current Governor of the Department of Nariño
resulting in more than 100 deaths and eleven disappearances. It is not yet very clear what the objective of the Siege was and even though that a truth commission was established and its report was recently published, there are still questions regarding some facts. However it is a general consensus that the Military response of the State was completely out of proportions causing many of the deaths and disappearances. This episode is known as a double siege: the first one by the hands of M19 and the second one by the hands of the Military (Gómez et al).\(^\text{32}\)

Parallel to the issues with the guerrillas, there was also the problem of the Cartels. In the period previous to 1982, the Drug Cartels had already established some links with politics thanks to the marihuana profits. This added to the creation of a group called *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS)\(^\text{33}\) and the change in the international drug market from marihuana to cocaine (particularly the higher demand of the United States and Europe) would help strengthen the finances of the Drug Cartels. By the end of the 1980s the Cartel of Medellín and the Cartel of Cali had a great capacity of influence in every sphere on national territory but particularly in Medellín and Cali for being the host cities of the Ochoa Brothers and Pablo Escobar and Rodríguez-Orejuela Brothers, chiefs of the Cartels respectively. This was the perfect context to increase corruption due to the immense economic and military power of the Cartels. Nothing could be done in the country without their consent and when the Government wanted to implement the extradition agreement signed in 1978 with the United States (Gutierrez 74), the most-wanted drug traffickers created a group called *Los Extraditables* (the extraditables) and started fighting the government with different strategies. In fact, one of the hypotheses about the Siege of the Palace of Justice is that the Cartels associated with M19 to achieve different goals.

With the existence of *Los Extraditables*, the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s were characterized by the continuous bombing of cities such as Bogotá, Cali and Medellín. A new wave of violence reached the country, and for

\(^{32}\) Negotiations with M19 restarted in 1986 and as a result both groups completely demobilized in 1989-90. Most of their members reintegrated through the establishment of a political party and others merged into civilian life.

\(^{33}\) The MAS aimed to prevent the guerrilla to kidnap members of the elite, businessman and multinational employees. The MAS was created after M19 abducted the sister of the Ochoa Brothers.
the first time for the urban citizens of the generation born in 1980, the war was out of the TV and into the streets. Nobody was safe anywhere. In the country-side kidnappings, guerrilla invasions and massacres carried out by the paramilitaries were rampant and in the cities, the bombings and the youth gangs linked to drug cartels and the sicarios\textsuperscript{34} had the whole nation holding its breath in fear. In general the early 1990s were dominated by strong paramilitary groups, two powerful drug cartels and many guerrilla groups - but especially a very strong FARC presence.

Among the many events related to the Cartel’s War against the extraditions, there are some that are particularly remembered for their magnitude or symbolism. In August 1989, Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, the candidate of the Liberal Party for the coming presidential elections was assassinated\textsuperscript{35} by men hired by Pablo Escobar. For many Colombians, Galán was not simply the candidate of the Liberal Party, he represented much more. He is often described as a charismatic person, with a great speech capacity, and with new and refreshing ideas. He meant hope for Colombians to put an end to conflict and fight corruption. The country was not yet over the death of Galán, when a bus-bomb crashed against the building of the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS) in Bogota leaving 70 dead and 600 injured. The bomb was targeted to the Director of DAS as part of the strategy of the Cartel of Medellín to force the Government to abandon the extradition agreement. Only two weeks later another bomb exploded, this time in a plane covering the route from Bogotá to Palmira. None of the passengers survived. All of these actions were authored by Pablo Escobar, head of the Cartel of Medellín.

\textbf{A negotiated Peace and the reconfiguration of the Paramilitary (1993-2002)}

At the time of writing this paper many studies are being done about the true origin of the paramilitary in general and the AUC particularly. Two theories were already mentioned earlier: one is the creation of the decree 3398 of 1965 which allowed civil population to get organized to protect themselves and the other is related to the need of elite, to protect themselves after the failure of the peace agreements in the early 1980s. On the other hand David Adams (70) points out the

\textsuperscript{34} Term used to refer to the assassins paid by the drug cartels.
\textsuperscript{35} The intellectual author was Alberto Santofimio, Ministry of Defence during the period of Turbay.
increasing demand for cocaine in the international drug market which led to an alliance between the Castaño family, as providers of coca-paste, and the Cartel of Medellín. Later, the FARC would abduct the father of the Castaño family. His corpse was found after his ransom had been paid. As a result the Castaño Brothers\textsuperscript{36} joined the MAS seeking justice. One more theory mentions the creation of the \textit{Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá} in 1987 which was commanded by one of the Castaño Brothers (Valencia 151).

By 1993 the Drug Cartels had so much power that they were able to rig the presidential elections by extensively financing the campaign of Ernesto Samper (1994-1998). Samper’s presidency was characterized by almost everyday corruption scandals, thus in an attempt to respond to critics, the government started a direct fight towards the Cartel of Cali which ended with the arrest of its leader, reopened the extradition discussions and passed an extensive punitive economic legislation against drug trafficking (Gutierrez 77). With the death of the Rodriguez-Gacha in 1989 and Pablo Escobar in 1993 and the arrest of the Rodriguez-Orejuela Brothers in 1995 and later their extradition both Cartels were decapitated and the paramilitary groups inherited part of the business. Given the link between the drug cartels and the paramilitary the group found in drug trafficking a financial source for its activities (Valencia 152).

The second half of the decade of 1990-2000 was characterized by the increasing influence of the paramilitaries and the rise of new groups such as the CONVIVIR\textsuperscript{37} which was created by Alvaro Uribe Vélez, while holding the Governance of Antioquia. Soon, “strong ties developed between some CONVIVIR and the vicious right-wing paramilitary groups –paramilitaries apparently joined or created CONVIVIRs and these carried out paramilitary-like actions” (Dugas 1124).

The strengthening of the paramilitary resulted in the creation of the AUC in 1997 (Valencia 150) - or as they described themselves “a contra insurgent organization obliged to exist due to the lack of capacity of the state to protect its

\textsuperscript{36} The Castaño Brothers would later become the leaders of the AUC.

\textsuperscript{37} These groups “were designed, in principle, to be civilian self-defence forces, explicitly authorised by the state to help provide public security in zones where this could not be effectively guaranteed by the state security forces. (…) However, they were soon granted the right to carry small arms, theoretically in order to defend themselves. (…)” (Dugas 1124)
citizens from harass of the guerrilla” (Guáqueta & Arias 466). This “contra insurgent organization” was composed of around 30,000 soldiers from different groups (García-Godos & Lid 492).

From 1992 to 2003 the paramilitary grew exponentially going from 850 to 13,000 members (Valencia 151). Also between 1998 and 2002, paramilitary entities committed more than 819 massacres (4,737 casualties), and were responsible for at least 1,198.195 displacements\(^{38}\) according to the government (Valencia 153). During these four years the paramilitary showed its great capacity to permeate politics, a process which would later be known as “parapolitics”. This was the bloodiest period of the conflict since 1980 and it overlapped with a new attempt of the government, this time with Andrés Pastrana in Office (1998-2002), to find a negotiated peace with the FARC: \textit{Las negociaciones del Caguán}\(^ {39}\).

This new peace dialogue created an area of 42,000 square kilometres, south east of Bogotá, free of military presence where the guerrilla members could move without restrictions. This was known as \textit{la zona de distensión}. It was in this geographical, political and temporal space that the FARC did one of the most symbolic acts by leaving all the table of delegates waiting for them to start the dialogues, an act that was later known and remembered as \textit{la silla vacía}\(^ {40}\). Few months afterwards the negotiations were over without any results. In 2002, members of the FARC abducted the presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and that very same year this group threw a gas cylinder at a church where civilians were searching for protection during a combat with the paramilitary in the municipality of Bojayá (Dugas 1128; CNRR Bojayá).

In a country that had held as a state policy the negotiated exit to the conflict since 1980 and that had just finished its second attempt with this particular guerrilla group, the acts of the FARC were a clear message of its lack of political will to engage in the peace process. Furthermore, the acts were taken by the civil population as an offence, a lack of respect and a mockery towards the Colombian population but particularly towards the government.

\(^{38}\) According to CODHES, an NGO working on Human Rights, the number was 1,667853
\(^{39}\) Negotiations of El Caguán takes its name for the area where the negotiations were held
\(^{40}\) The empty chair
The Democratic Security and the DDR (2002-2010)

The results of the presidential elections in 2002 were a clear response to the events earlier that year. The elected candidate Álvaro Uribe Vélez, a right-wing politician, promised to treat the FARC with an iron fist. It was under his mandate (2002-2010) that this group suffered the hardest strikes. For many the arrival of Uribe to power represented the last resource, an “all-in” act towards a very strong guerrilla. His proposal was different. For the first time since 1982 the government did not propose a negotiated peace. Rather, it implemented the Defence and Democratic Security Policy aimed to strengthen and guarantee the Rule of Law on all national territory through the strengthening of the democratic authority (Ministerio 12). After the failure of Andres Pastrana's three-and-a-half-year effort to negotiate peace in the Caguán, a majority of Colombians from all social sectors were willing to try the iron fist that only Uribe offered among the candidates for president (Dugas 1134). Thus his proposal and election responded to the desperation of the population to gain back its country: he was elected to the presidency […] through the massive support of largely unorganized citizens who placed in him their hopes for ending the violent conflict in Colombia.” (Dugas 1117).

The constant failure of the FARC to fulfil its commitments in regards to the peace dialogues, added to the personal experience of Uribe, shaped a strong military strategy against this group during his presidency. This strategy supported by the Democratic Security Policy, ended the lives of a number of members of the FARC some of whom held high ranks' positions within the group such as Raul Reyes (killed in 2008 during the bombing of a FARC camp in Ecuador), Manuel Marulanda Vélez (alias Tirofijo), and Mono Jojoy. To complete the implementation of the Democratic Security Policy, Uribe took a number of measures which created great discussion among the academic and some segments of the public opinion. During his time in Office the official position of the Government was that Colombia was not going through an internal conflict. A decision based on three main arguments: 1. By

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41 Uribe Vélez was re-elected in 2006, allowing him to govern the country during eight years in total.
42 The FARC killed Uribe’s father and wounded his brother in an apparent kidnapping attempt 1983 (Dugas 1122)
43 During the second semester of 2011 Alfonso Cano was also killed by the Military
acknowledging armed conflict, the FARC could claim belligerent status; 2. Within the historical context of the Region, the concepts of internal conflict and insurgency have been used to justify the fight of armed groups against dictatorships; 3. The links between the FARC and the Drug trafficking, from whom the guerrilla obtained financial support made the FARC a terrorist group. In contrast, and despite the non-recognition of conflict, Uribe governed under a declared State of Internal Unrest (Dugas 1118, 132), established a tax for war (ib 1132-3), and augmented the budget of the Ministry of Defence. In fact by the end of his first term this Ministry, under the head of Juan Manuel Santos, had the same budget as four Ministries together which clearly speaks for the priorities of the government. Furthermore the military strategies used during Uribe's presidency can be questioned for its legitimacy. The bombing of a FARC encampment in Ecuadorian territory in January 2008 without previous knowledge of the Ecuadorian government and the misuse of the ICRC's symbols to set Ingrid Betancourt free later that year were both condemned by the international community. Moreover, the eight years of Uribe as a President count for the highest rates of false positives and human rights violations in Colombia.

The strategy towards the paramilitary was very different. Thus, in 2003 the Government of Uribe initiated a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process with the AUC. This process was highly criticized by some academics but also was called by some specialists the most advanced and developed DDR program in the world to-date (Guáqueta & Arias 506). It was primarily aimed at demobilizing the paramilitary structures of the AUC but it also attracted members of the guerrilla Ejercito Revolucionario Guevarista who demobilized individually. According to MAPP/OEA (1), between 2004 and 2006 31,671 paramilitaries were demobilized, and 18,051 arms were handed in and destroyed. The subsequent Peace and Justice Law or Law 975 of 2005, in charge of regulating the R phase of the DDR, also provided several benefits for the victims, placing them at the core of the law.

When the demobilized chiefs of the AUC started giving declarations in accordance with the Peace and Justice Law regulating the DDR, the country realized that what had been known about the AUC and the paramilitaries was only the tip of

44 ‘False positive’ refers to the murders of civilians in the hands of the Military or the paramilitary and presented as members of the guerrilla groups or the paramilitary itself.
the iceberg:

Simply, it has to be admitted that there has not been, in these tormented
decades, any group with a higher capacity of penetration than the
paramilitary, not even the Cartel of Cali which was in its times the best
organized and the more systematic agency in the achievement of its goals.
(Gutierrez(a) 11)

In fact, due to the academic researches initiated parallel to the DDR it was
possible to prove that what the paramilitary claimed was true: they controlled 35 per
cent of the Colombian National Congress, and one-third of Colombia’s municipalities
(Romero In: García-Godos & Lid 493; López 30, 33). This influence did not end with
the demobilization: “In 2006 almost all the congressmen related to parapolitics were
re-elected keeping the same proportion and representativity within the
governmental coalition” (López 33).

The evidence and the message were frustrating: “not only illegal and
clandestine actors but also public and legal ones have used the violence executed by
others to give place to their own ends” (López 29). The elections for Congress in 2010
were not very different than those in 2006: and they were a clear demonstration of
the influence of paramilitary45. For example, the Congressmen elected were in great
majority part of PIN (Pachico), a political party publicly known for their strong links to
the paramilitary. Later that year the Presidential election created another storm
within public opinion when the cardboards were scanned and uploaded on the
website of the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, DANE along
with the digital results per table and municipality. The signs of fraud was evident
(Gutierrez(a) 12). This meant that, despite the DDR, politicians still had means to
intimidate the population and influence the elections. In this context lies the the
major criticism towards the DDR, the most significant: “Whoever is looking for
serious mistakes on the reinsertion process started in 2002, might find here probably
the most significant one: the total and overwhelming lack of a program to reform the
State.”46 (Gutierrez(a) 10).

45 Public opinion has massively rejected the use of NIAGs /BACRIM for considering it is simple a
different name for the same actor. Even mass media continues to use the term still in 2011. Along this
paper I will use the term paramilitary to refer to both before and after the DDR.
46 A compulsory reading for Spanish language readers in this regard if the book edited by Claudia
Once more, a whole country had put a lot of hope in the peace process. However, there were too many expectations and at a certain point, or rather in certain segments of the Colombian society, these expectations started vanishing with the declarations of the heads of AUC and with the appearance of New Illegal Armed Groups (NIAG)\(^{47}\) even before the demobilization was over\(^{48}\). The emergence of the NIAGs and its modus operandi are a clear sign that the conflict has not ended but has simply passed to a new stage.

The impact of paramilitary in Colombia's public life was at the same time simultaneous and profound. It is clear they have survived the dismount of the United Self-Defence Army of Colombia [AUC] and other parallel structures. A phenomenon of such nature tends to be persistent and difficult to eradicate” (Gutierrez(a) 10)

Besides the emergence of NIAGs and the awful evidence on the links of paramilitary and politics, this DDR had another characteristic. As mentioned earlier, normally a DDR happens when there is (up to certain level) a peace agreement, a ceasefire or parties have been defeated. However in Colombia, one of the strongest parties of the conflict, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) is still active, as well as other guerrilla groups. This, added to the emergence of NIAGs, means that the DDR was conducted still under conflict. According to a Human Rights Watch report issued in August 2005:

The current demobilization process in Colombia cannot be compared to any other demobilization of an armed group after a conflict. In other experiences, successful experiences have normally been immersed in a context of political transition in which the disarmament of combatants was a symbolic and very important step to find an end to the conflict and assure a lasting peace. In Colombia there is not risk that the conflict will trigger again, simply because it has not stopped. (3)

López Hernández titled “y refundaron la patria... De cómo mafiosos y políticos reconfiguraron el Estado colombiano” published in 2010. Unfortunately it has not been translated to any other language; however the academics writing on it have articles in English on this topic. The book however is a good compilation of articles with a very strong analysis both qualitative and quantitative on parapolitics

\(^{47}\) The official term is *Bandas Criminales Emergentes* –BACRIM- (Emerging Criminal Bands). According to the government these are not paramilitaries but criminal groups.

\(^{48}\) In 2006, while working as a researcher assistant at Universidad de Los Andes, I conducted several interviews with IDPs and local government representatives in municipalities heavily affected by armed conflict. Back then the interviewees said that ‘officially’ (and their stresses that word) the paramilitary had demobilized but in reality they were still active. In fact, a colleague and I were directly “warned” about our research by people who identified themselves as members of a “security group”. I first heard the term BACRIM in 2007 while working in a humanitarian aid project in the ex-distension area created during the Pastrana mandate.
In general this period has been said to be one with the largest violations of human rights with a great number of false positives and displacements for which the Military still does not take responsibility, neither does the former Minister of Defence and current Head of State. Despite all of this, the civil population felt safer and started travelling by land again. For some others Colombia had been converted into a museum: if you get out of the public areas and into the exhibition, you will get in trouble. (Montero)

The place of victims

The Law in charge of the regulation of the DDR process, particularly in relation to the reintegration of the demobilized combatants, is Law 975 of 2005, or the Peace and Justice Law. However it also has a strong component of transitional justice. Thus, under the article 51, the government created the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación\(^\text{49}\) (CNRR) with a strong component of Historic Memory. Part of its activities are to conduct research in order to clarify the emergence and development of illegal armed groups and to monitor and evaluate the reparation of the victims as defined under article 5 of the law. Within its particularities, besides giving space for alternative penalties (cap V, law 975 of 2005) this law also located victims at the core of its work in a very particular political and social context and in a way that no other law in the country had done before.

Despite being an innovative law, some of its critics had a conceptual basis given that the definition of 'victim' only admitted those victims of illegal armed groups, leaving aside the families of the false positives. Another criticism was its validity since it was highly questioned whether the CNRR and particularly the Historic Memory Group would manage to accomplish all the tasks assigned in the law within the given time (eight years). Also, the context in which this law was created included a non-responsibility statement on the part of Álvaro Uribe as president:

The president and his cabinet believe that the state should pay out of solidarity, not out of responsibility (...) more important, as the state does not accept responsibility, state agents (the police and the military) are not considered responsible for war crimes committed as duty-bearers (Marteens S156)

\(^{49}\) National Commission for Repair and Reconciliation
By recognizing the armed conflict the new government has also recognized the responsibility of the State in failing to protect the population. Another great advance is that the new Law of Victims (Law 1448 of 2011) does not discriminate between the victims of the guerrilla, paramilitary and the State (Molinksy). Next to this Law, there is also another one that aims to complement one already mentioned by regulating the restitution of lands to victims (Law of Land and Restitution).

Despite the fact that these two laws are fairly detailed in regard of the processes and the provisions for all the victims, criticisms have been made for its ambitions and difficulties in the implementation. These difficulties are mainly related to the threats to the people claiming the land and as well as to the judges, lawyers and other professionals working on the subject. (Molinski; Sánchez)

**Conclusion**

Although this chapter has been much of an historical resume of the conflict since 1980, it also presents a bias towards the role of paramilitary during those decades. This bias is not on purpose. It is simply the result of the lack of information and clarity about the origins and role of the paramilitary in the conflict which has also affected the perceptions and the memory of the target towards this particular actor.

Moreover, this chapter provides a clear idea of the multiple attempts of the Colombian society to tackle the FARC. As evident in the previous pages, the urge to solve the issue of the FARC was not a just a priority of the government but also of the Drug-traffickers who took in its own hands, although for different purposes, the war against the guerrillas. Given that the FARC has successfully transformed one generation after another, it has become the stronger actor on the conflict and has ‘gained’ a central role for being the main player during the past 30 years.

Both, the biases about paramilitary and the effects of the frequent failure of the negotiations with the FARC, will be narrowed down to the voice of the non-victims in chapters three and four.
CHAPTER 3

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE ACTORS AND THE CONFLICT

Acá podemos decir que le cortamos la cabeza, que lo descuartizamos, que le violaron a la señora, que le quitamos el pedazo de tierra y nadie se escandaliza por eso. Pero cuando hablamos de personas de esta sociedad que se beneficiaron, que tuvieron vínculos con las AUC, ahí es el problema más grande de este mundo, ahí sí es el escándalo, ahí sí estamos deshonrando a esas personas.50 (Éver Veloza, alias HH in Lozano & Morris 1.16.01)

This chapter responds to question two of this research. “To what extent has the socio-political context 1980-2010 influenced the perception of conflict by middle to high income Colombian adults between the age of 27 and 34 years?”. The following pages are organized in two sections. The first one deals with the identification of actors and perceptions about them by the target, while the second section provides for the notion on the dynamic of the conflict and the roles of the actors.

Three aspects should be taken into account. First, the reader should keep in mind that no distinction will be made regarding the region of the country, the gender, the socio economic levels nor the political affiliation. While some differences will be mentioned particularly in relation to regions and political affiliation, they are not meant to generalize in this regard.

Second, it should be acknowledged that within the target the concept 'guerrilla' is used by the majority as a synonym for the FARC. In a few cases it is used to refer to all the left-wing illegal armed groups and only in very few cases it is used

50 “Here we can say that we cut off his head, dismembered him, raped his woman, took his land and no one is shocked by that. But when we speak of the people in this society who benefited from it, who had links to the AUC, that's the biggest problem of this world. It is a big scandal and public opinion and media then say that we are dishonouring those people”.
to refer to all the illegal armed groups (including paramilitary). Indistinctively, when asked for clarification on the use of the term all the interviewees recognize that there are several guerrilla groups and that the difference between them and the paramilitary has to do with their origins. They also point out that nowadays they are all acting in the same way, therefore the distinction is only by name. Every time that in this paper the concept ‘guerrilla’ appears it will comply with the view of the majority of the target unless otherwise is mentioned.

Third, despite that paramilitary does not exist as a political reality after 2006, public opinion (including the target) still uses the concept. In fact, they argue that NIAGs is simply a new name for paramilitary. Surprisingly enough, even mass media, including Colombia’s largest newspaper, EL TIEMPO, continue to use the term paramilitary in its headlines as evident in the printed and online edition and the Special Online Edition on elections on Monday 31 of October, 2011. In this sense and within this chapter, no differentiation will be made between the two groups.

The Actors

For this section it should be noticed that the number of actors mentioned corresponds to those identified as main and direct actors of the conflict. This recognition comes from the power that they as a group (FARC, Paramilitary/NIAGs, Military) or as individuals (politicians and in some particular cases members of the aforementioned groups) hold by influencing the political and social life. According to Bachrach & Baratz power is “the aptitude of the actors to set in practice the decisions of their preference, on the one hand and the ‘mobilization of bias’ inherent to institutions, on the other hand” (in Giddens 52). In this sense power is neither just related to decision-making nor a product of the hierarchical structure but has to do rather with the capacity to mobilize influence and the resources available for doing so, as evident in Chapter two particularly during the Cartels’ War. The capacity to mobilize bias changes according to the actors involved in the struggle. Without excluding the fact that sometimes an actor from a lower hierarchical level can have access to a great mobilization of bias even in conflict environments most of the time

51 This section responds to the perceptions of each actor by the targeted group but it does not necessarily correspond to what has been said academically about the given actor.
in the conflict context, this capacity is limited or is not available, particularly at the local level. Nevertheless given the specific segment of the population which this paper deals with (urban middle to high income) its possibilities of social action are wider than the local population since the direct influence of armed actors in their territory (the cities) is weaker.

Regarding the perceptions of the actors, two main trends were identified for some of them. However the target was not balanced enough to make a characterization of these two groups. Nevertheless actors will be presented making a clear difference between the different perspectives (group A and group B). This will only be done when significant differences are found. However it should be acknowledged that particularly regarding the FARC and the politicians, there are small differences among the perceptions but not significant enough as to classify them in two groups.

In an attempt to make the reading easier, I have divided the actors into three groups. Actors identified as direct are the paramilitary/NIAGs, the FARC, the military, and the politicians. This does not mean that either the researcher or the interviewees do not recognize other actors. In fact, several international actors were mentioned; however given the scope and the objective of this research they will only be slightly mentioned under ‘other actors‘ but will not be taken into account for the analysis.

In general, civil population is not considered a main actor and its role in conflict and as a social transforming agent is blurry for the target. For this reason, although it represents the core of this paper, I will leave it in a group of its own.

‘Other actors’ refers to those who are not given a main role but who are still considered to be a part of the conflict, most of them are of international character. The other guerrillas groups are introduced to help illustrate the status of the FARC.

The focus of this chapter as well as of the rest of the document is on the first two groups therefore actors considered ‘other’ will only be mentioned as a reference.
1. Direct actors

- Paramilitary / NIAGs

In general the paramilitary are perceived as a right-wing armed group. Given the low record of information on this group, little is known about its origin and modus operandi by public opinion. Paramilitary is a phenomenon that, in the memories of the target, has its origins in the middle of the 1990’s decade and that aimed to protect the population from the guerrilla. In this sense, it is impossible to unlink paramilitary from the FARC. Whenever the first is mentioned, the second will sooner or later come into the conversation. Paramilitary is considered by all to be a consequence of the guerrillas but particularly a consequence of the FARC. Its links with drug trafficking are widely recognized and, after the demobilization, there is more awareness about its role in politics (parapolitics). Only recently, with the DDR, public opinion has started to learn more about their actions. An obvious result of this is an unclear and confusing social perception being rather heterogeneous and, in some cases, apparently contradictory. Regarding the NIAGs also little research has been done, mostly because it is a ‘new’ phenomenon.

Taking into account this general description, it is possible to identify two subgroups regarding specific views on the paramilitary:

Pro paramilitary (Group A)

For this group, given that paramilitary exists as a direct response to the FARC, their actions are justified. However, they admit it is an illegal armed group forced to exist given the incapacity of the state to protect the citizens as well as the inefficiency of the justice system to prosecute crimes.

One trusts the military and the justice system [to protect citizens and prosecute crimes] but when they show that they can’t defend you, then you have to take justice in your hands. Then, you have paramilitary.52 (Informant 2)

Group A also admits that the methods used by paramilitary are too violent, but they argue this is the only way to protect the civil population against the FARC.

52 “Una cosa es confiar en la fuerza pública y otra es que cuando ya demostró que no pudo defenderlo, tomarla [por cuenta de uno]. Ahí están los paramilitares”
since both groups use similar methods. In fact, they mention that it is exactly their position within illegality which allows the paramilitary to fight the FARC since they are ‘allowed’ to carry out actions that the military cannot pursue. This same perspective also justifies their links with drug trafficking: given that paramilitary uses methods that are forbidden by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (HRL), they cannot expect to be financed by the State, therefore they have to rely on other financing sources to be able to keep up the troops and the armament. Not surprisingly, this subgroup tends to underestimate any violation of international humanitarian law or human rights by paramilitary.

Regarding the relation with the State, this subgroup admits there might be some support on the side of the State either by financing or consciously allowing access to arms or by being flexible with the actions of the group.

Furthermore, for this subgroup, there is a clear line between paramilitary and the feeling of safety. Thus, they strongly believe that paramilitary will not harm civilians unless they have proof that a given person is involved with the guerrilla. In other words, the paramilitary does not represent a threat. As will be explained in the next chapter, the paramilitary role in conflict is protection.

In relation to parapolitics, this subgroup mentions it is the price to pay in order to keep the guerrilla controlled. They also believe that parapolitics is the lesser of the problems the country face.

While we do not tackle this [the FARC] directly we won’t be able to tackle other problems like poverty, misery and socioeconomic differences. And there will be a cycle [in conflict]53. (Informant 2)

We first have to fight the FARC. People talk all the time about the parapolitics and the corruption but all that is the fault of the FARC because they are the ones who do not allow the country to progress. Once we have fixed the affairs with the FARC, we can think on the rest.54 (Group interview 1)

53 “Mientras no ataquemos esto [las FARC] directamente, tampoco vamos a solucionar nada más, Ni la pobreza, la miseria y la diferencia. Va a seguir el mismo circulo”
54 “Primero tenemos que acabar con las FARC. La gente le hecha la culpa a los paramilitares y a la corrupción, pero la culpa es de las FARC porque esos son los que no dejan que el país progrese. Cuando hayamos arreglado lo de las FARC, ahí sí podemos pensar en el resto”
**Against paramilitary (Group B)**

The perspective of this subgroup is slightly different. Despite acknowledging the motives for the origins of paramilitary, they justify neither their emergence and existence nor their modus operandi. Contrary to subgroup A, people falling under this category do not think paramilitary are protecting civil population from the FARC but rather are protecting only the interests of the elite, particularly politicians and families with great economic capital, great influence and thus great capacity to mobilize biases. In this sense, paramilitary are considered to have evolved into the same direction as the FARC.

The ‘paras’ [paramilitary] are a response of the elite towards the guerrilla. The emergence of paramilitary had a lot to do with the guerrilla desire to reach power (...) but they [paramilitary] grew out of control and became as brutal or more so than the guerrilla55 (Informant 1)

They strongly condemn the links with drug trafficking and parapolitics, however they tend to underestimate the importance and impact of these relations (particularly on parapolitics) and see it somehow as normal within the Colombian society. This means that although acknowledging the illness of the parapolitics, its impact is not very clear to the eyes of the target.

Unlike group A, for group B the paramilitary is as dangerous and as untrustworthy as any of the armed groups within the conflict (legal or illegal). Its role within the conflict is only to support the elites in reaching and keeping their interest, particularly related to access to land.

- **The FARC**

The FARC is probably the most controversial and difficult actor to approach within the conflict. There is no doubt that knowledge on the FARC is wider compared with that on other actors and particularly other guerrillas. But also there is wide resistance to talk about this group. People have an attitude towards the FARC of complete boredom and tiredness. Whenever I asked about their views on this group during the interviews I could see in their body language explicit gestures of

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55 “Los ‘paras’ son una respuesta de la gente con poder hacia la guerrilla. El surgimiento de los paramilitares tenía mucho que ver con que la guerrilla tomara poder. (...) se salen de casillas y se vuelven igual o más brutales que la guerrilla”
disapproval. The fact is that due to the long public life of the FARC, the target has also been exposed to it longer, not just to their military actions but also to the long and endless discussions about it through media, academia, social circles and family.

The discourse about the FARC is strongly based on their loss of political and social ideology. This is evident in the constant reference that the target makes to the ideology that shaped its origins versus their current military actions towards the civil population (especially peasants and indigenous peoples) and their political actions towards the Government.

Whether it is called by its name or as 'la guerrilla', the FARC is the group that, by far and without doubts, represents all the worst within the universe of the actors of the conflict. It is also the actor that most of the interviewees blame for the existing conflict being so long and violent. The reasoning is simple: if the FARC had not persisted paramilitary would not exist. This logic places the FARC at the core of the conflict as the institution around which everything turns and merges.

The FARC is also seen as a group whose reasons for fighting were once honourable and just, but that with time has lost all interest in what its original mandate was and has become a terrorist group. The arguments lie on a triple betrayal: one towards the people, by their cruel and violent actions towards the civil population; another towards the State, by mocking the governments during the peace negotiations; and finally towards itself, by disrespecting their mandate and using the 'fight for the people' as a conduit to drug trafficking and terrorism. For all of the above, the FARC is described as a traitor who is interested neither in reaching political power, nor in ending the conflict for they have found in drug-trafficking a great source for their finances.

How are you going to believe them if they say they are fighting for the people but all they do is displace peasants, disappear and kill them?\(^{56}\) (Informant 2)

I would like to know what ideal they are defending. What they have been doing the past 50 years is displacing peasants, assassinating innocent people (...) using kids in the Guerrilla and uprooting indigenous communities\(^{57}\).

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\(^{56}\) “¿Cómo va uno a creerles si dicen que están luchando por el pueblo pero todo lo que hacen es desplazar, desaparecer y matar campesinos?”

\(^{57}\) “yo quisiera saber actualmente cuál es el ideal que defienden. Porque lo que han hecho en los últimos 50 años, es desplazar campesinos, asesinar a personas inocentes (...) Ingresando a niños en la
The guerrilla [the FARC] attacks without motives. For me, they stop making sense when I was a teenager. There is nothing reasonable within that group. The only reason they have is that they like to harm people and get money.\(^{58}\) (Informant 2)

- **The Military**

  As with the paramilitary, views on this group are divided. However the relation with the military is more complicated in the sense that despite representing the state, it also has been responsible for violations to Human Rights. Another characteristic of the military is its high level of corruption. In this regard it is said that motivations (and thus understanding) on the side of the target tend to differ. Nevertheless, probably the biggest difference among the target towards the military is about its role within the conflict which given the circumstances in the past years can take the shape of victim, victimizer, hero, or all of them at the same time.

  **Group A – The Military as Heroes**

  The Military are seen as people who are risking their lives in order to protect people and defend the state from the FARC. Their positive feeling towards the military increased during the period of Uribe due to the efforts and the results against the FARC which was thanks to the higher injection of capital by the Government in the Ministry of Defence. As with the paramilitary, this group considers that the military would never attack civilians to show results. Regarding the false positives one of the interviewees mentions:

  If the military killed them it was because they were guerrilleros. Military would not have killed them otherwise. They must have had a reason to do it. Maybe not all of them were guerrilleros because it is difficult to know. But I am sure that at least 90% were.\(^{59}\) (Group interview 1)

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\(^{58}\) “La guerrilla ataca sin motivo. Desde los 16 o 17 años para mí la guerrilla ya no tenía sentido desde que sea cabo el M19... De ahí para adelante nunca he oído nada razonable de la guerrilla, yo los tengo como que arrasa y arrasan por hacer daño y por obtener dinero.”

\(^{59}\) “Si el ejército los mato fue por algo, o sino no lo habrían hecho. Seguro tenían una razón para hacerlo. De pronto no todos eran guerrilleros porque es difícil de saber, pero por lo menos el 90% sí”
People within this group fully trust the military and feel safer if they are around. This encourages acts of appreciation towards them such as giving them small presents for example cigarettes or candy if they meet them on the road to thank them for their sacrifice and to show their appreciation.

The difficult conditions that soldiers have to face (living and working) for the mere nature of their jobs, grants them with the consideration of ‘heroes’. This idea was strongly promoted during Uribe’s mandate through mass media campaigns in opposition to the false positive scandal. The idea of martyrdom, although not expressed explicitly, comes with the notion of heroic actions, great sacrifices and the implicit suffering for being away from their families and many times for dying. In general, for group A, the whole idea of being a soldier is wrapped in a high sense of altruism. This also links with the perception that lower ranks are more loyal to the Military (as an institution) and through it, to the State. Due to this perception of soldiers, and given their low salaries, corruption is said to be understandable and somehow justified. In this regard, an opposite view relating to higher ranks is sustained. However there is a tendency to deny the existence of corruption within high ranks on behalf of a good image of the State as a provider and protector of citizens.

**Group B – Military as the victim-izers**

This group holds two apparently contradictory views. For them the military are as much victims as they are victimizers. Both of these notions are linked to the nature of their jobs. The idea of ‘victim’ comes from the fact that soldiers are forced to go to war with all the consequences (physical and mental) that it might have, while the idea of ‘victimizer’ responds to the notion of reproducing violence and creating hate by killing others. This last assertion is a direct response to the responsibilities that the Military holds for the false positives. These two views find their ground in the perception that soldiers have been brainwashed and over-trained, causing the distortion of the principles of the individual. As expressed by Castañeda the principles of the Military are based on the respect for authority, hierarchical structures and

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60 This campaign is still valid today and the usage of the word ‘heroes’ is still sometimes used in the presidential speeches to refer to the military.
obedience (60). Moreover, the expectation is to form aggressive men (36) able to face the enemy. All of the above provides a context in which the Military might promote a discourse to enhance any kind of method in order to show results. The links with the paramilitary are easier in the sense that the FARC represents a common enemy and the main duties of the military and paramilitary are to protect civilians.

For this group the distortion of principles is also the reason why corruption is possible: in higher ranks corruption is related to traffic of influences, power relations and strategic networking, while in the lower ranks it is related to low salaries. Since the principles of the Military (respect to authority, hierarchical structures and obedience) are so strong within the members of the institution, it is easier that corruption in higher ranks permeates the soldiers and influences their actions, since they, based on the principles, will do what the superior asks them to. In this sense the members of the institution are considered to be the puppets of politicians and influential families.

Between corruption and the false positives the target has lost all trust in this actor. The view of this group on the Military is well expressed in a graffiti mentioned in the questionnaire: “El ejército es solo para-militar”

- **Politicians**

Views toward the category of 'politicians' are rather homogeneous. This actor as a whole is considered the biggest facilitator of the conflict, if not its intellectual author. The target sees politicians as favouring individual interests rather than the common interest, and corruption is the main source of distrust towards this actor. Particular reference is made to the influence of the Cartel of Cali in the political election of Ernesto Samper. More recently, thanks to the evidence on parapolitics, it has been possible to evidence the levels of corruption during the government of Álvaro Uribe. It was surprising to realize that the interviewees were not disturbed to discover that 35% of congressmen had direct links with paramilitary and that this group (paramilitary) had influenced 96% of the results of the elections during the past 10 years (Lopez 30, 33). In this regard, part of the interviewees already took it for granted, while the other part justified this statement by arguing that if the
paramilitary had not done it, then the FARC would have and that might have been worse. Evidence shows that the influence of the FARC in the same period was less than 4% given that the FARC had limited electoral influence at the local level (López 33). Moreover, the candidates benefiting from the influence of the paramilitary were all candidates preferred by Álvaro Uribe (36).

2. Civil Population

When asking about the civil population, the question most of the time bounced around the subject of colombianness. This means that the perspective is linked to aspects of identity which the individual might or might not feel connection with but that he/she recognizes as key elements of civil population.

Most of the interviewees think civil population has a great potential in conflict transformation but they cannot explain how exactly. As a whole, the Colombian society is perceived as a passive actor mainly because of a “lack of interest” and hope.

Others think that the solution to the conflict must be political and military, leaving no room for the role of civil population. This last group tends to view the State as a provider but they fail to see the whole machinery behind the social structure. One of the main effects of the long standing conflict has been the loss of interest in it and its institutionalization.

What is evident in both perspectives is the great lack of trust in the other, the dullness of the individuals and the passive role given to society as an actor that is able to generate social change. Interviewees argue that there is too much “ignorance” referring both to the lack of reflection on the consequences of the behaviour of the individual over the community, but also to the lack of education and opportunities for many people. These two aspects have been repetitive in the discourse about the conflict and are considered root causes, next to poverty and inequality. However when asking why in similar countries of the region there is no conflict, some remain silent, others blame the incapacity of the State to protect civilians and some others blame drug trafficking.
3. Other actors

Other actors identified are the drug users and drug traffickers, trans/multi-nationals, USA and Russia. However given the scope of the research I will only mention a brief description of each of them with the aim to provide a slight idea to the reader concerning perspectives on other actors in the conflict.

- Other guerrilla groups mentioned are ELN, EPL, and M19. Apart from the M19, which is described as the most reasonable of all the guerrillas to-date, with a solid proposal and a real interest in finding a way to put an end to the huge social and economic inequality, no other guerrillas are recognized as a main actor in the conflict. The demobilization and reintegration of M19 is often used for the targeted group to mark the end of the guerrillas with a real interest in social change and the population.

Although the target cannot point exactly the emergence of the groups they mention, it is generally recognized that it dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, as groups fighting in favour of upgrading the conditions of the poorest and the peasants. Epistemological differences regarding the emergence of each group are not pointed out, thus ignoring the different currents and the exact claims of the different groups. Also no clear connection is made between La Violencia and the ulterior emergence of the guerrillas and paramilitary.

- The quick reference to drug traffickers is to the years of the Drug Cartels. Nowadays there is not one particular person the target can point out as the head of the business. The greatest portion of the business is thought to belong to the guerrilla and secondary to the paramilitary.

- Drug users: The role of these actors is their financing of the illegal groups. According to the target the only way it can be avoided is either by the legalization of cocaine or by stronger penalization for users in Europe and United States. In this sense the target also points out the responsibility of the countries with higher cocaine consumption on controlling the market within its territory.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{61}\) Legalization of drugs has been a harsh topic during many years among the national and international community. The Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos (Periódico El Tiempo a) and the Fiscal Viviane Morales(Periódico El Tiempo b), have in two different occasions pointed out the need to open the debate to refocus the war against drugs given that anti-drugs policies have not proven to be very effective.
• Trans/Multi-nationals are in general identified as financiers of paramilitary. The cases with the bananas companies (CBSNews, Feb 11, 2009; Lozano & Morris) have undermined the reputation of many of the trans/multi-nationals operating in the country, given that they have paid paramilitaries to secure either land or infrastructure. It has also been said that trans/multi-nationals have used this strategy to displace peasants or indigenous peoples from areas where the company had strategic interests.

• United States is often pointed out as a promoter of the conflict through external policies which are thought to benefit companies and elites and force small and independent producers to bankruptcy.

• Russia is a reference for gun trade with the FARC.

The conflict

Much has been said about the Colombian conflict. Not just within the international community and academia but also at the national level the discussions are endless. In the state of art about conflict, post-conflict, reconciliation and the role of civil society in Colombia done by Guerra & Plata it is possible to see the heterogeneity of the approaches taken by the Colombian academia and government to tackle the understanding of this situation. Although the authors recognise the weakness of the article in the analysis of the relations between the different perspectives, it is a good reference for the initial readers on the topic. Given the need to stimulate the thinking on new perspectives of conflict and post-conflict, this chapter aims to present the perception of a group of Colombians who are not related to the topic and who normally are not taken into account when inquiring on the matter.

From the interviewees perspective the conflict has three obvious characteristics: 1) it has been of long duration and its origin is difficult to establish; 2) it is extremely complex due to the number of actors and their changing roles, and this makes it 3) very difficult, almost impossible to put an end to it or find a solution for it. This perception, abundant among the Colombian opinion (CNC, slide 12) is rooted in the permanent changing of the dynamics of the conflict which makes it
difficult for the interviewees to make a coherent summary of the different stages of it since 1960s and particularly since the 1980s. Additionally, it is important to take into account that the memory related to some of the actors such as the paramilitary was practically inexistent until recently. It has been with the publication of information during the transitional justice process and particularly through the declarations given by the ex-commanders of the paramilitary groups, that the people of Colombia in general but particularly the non-victims have started to reconstruct and relearn the recent history of the conflict. Although the process has clarified many suspicions that the population had, the process of thinking about conflict is still very chaotic and has confusing results: asking a Colombian what armed conflict is and what it is about, means that the person asking has to be ready for a long and most likely confusing answer. Concepts such as ‘social and economic inequality’, ‘fight over power’, ‘political and ideological confrontations’ and ‘drug trafficking’, ‘class struggle’, ‘corruption’, ‘fight over resources’, ‘imperialism’, ‘globalization’ and ‘communism’ all come into play in a tangled mess of historic facts, political declarations, names and actors of a period that with the best of luck, will be said to have started in the mid-1960s.

Through these narratives it is possible to identify other aspects of conflict that shape the relation of the target with the territory, the actors and the population itself and create biases in their conceptions of the actors and their actions. In this chapter I will focus on two of those characteristics. The first one is related with the role of the actors and the elites as promoting the conflict. The second aspect has to do with the re-signification of the territory as introduced by Oslander in its “geography of terror”.

1. The role of the actors

As mentioned earlier, the FARC plays a central role in the dynamic of the Colombian conflict by being the group with the greatest capacity of adaptation since its origin. It managed to reconfigure the Colombian social order by giving place to the appearance of paramilitary groups. Due to the pressure made by this group, and the government, the international community, the global changes at the end of the 1980s but mostly due to the loss of social support in country, the FARC has suffered great transformations in the past decades. These transformations and the new global
order after the end of the Cold War forced the FARC to look for new alliances and financial support, modifying as much as their discourse as their practices/activities. The FARC’s long public life, the betrayal mentioned before and the fact of becoming “everybody’s enemy” places this group at the epicentre of the dynamic of the conflict. In the eyes of the interviewees the other actor of conflict often acts as satellites around this group, responding to the new shapes that the guerrilla takes. Furthermore, the memories of the conflict by the target have built a perception of the FARC as the major (and for many, the only) threat. As it would be expected with such a strong actor, the political future of the country, particularly in the past decade, has been the result of the fear towards the FARC: in the voice of informant 2 “Uribe was the only hope. His election was an act of desperation” which complements what Dugas notice about the former president Álvaro Uribe: “Uribe represented the rare politician who had the backbone to confront the leftist guerrillas” (1128). In this sense and maybe unwillingly, the FARC has managed to influence the sociocultural and political context by successfully creating an apparent national unity towards a common enemy. This is evident not only in the national policies of each government since the 1980s to tackle the conflict and particularly the FARC but also (and more recently) by the massive affluence of the Colombian population at all levels protesting against the guerrilla in public demonstrations and social networks.

Not surprisingly the demonstrations against paramilitary have not been as successful and when asking about them it is evident that the emotions towards this group, although negative, do not create such a strong response as towards the FARC. The memories about the paramilitary are almost non-existent: none of the interviewees could name one single specific event for which paramilitary are remembered different to a vague association to the false positives, the drug-trafficking, and links with politicians, while for the FARC the list is endless and to the point. Probably the closest that the target comes to giving details on the paramilitary is their relations with some political parties which links are of general knowledge. On the matter Acemoglu, Robinson y Santos noted that “the presence of the paramilitaries in a municipality is correlated with the rise of non-traditional ‘third parties’ (that is, parties other than the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Socialists), which are widely recognized to be often directly or indirectly associated with the
paramilitaries” (in: López 38).

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, for a part of the target the notion of paramilitary is linked to a “private security group” offering protection (to people and their properties) from the guerrilla. It is often argued by the target that when paramilitary left the area where they had their second residences it was impossible to go back because the guerrilla came in place. This impossibility of going back is related with a virtual threat perceived as real$^{62}$ due to the absence of protection represented in paramilitary: despite there were no direct threats, they are very sure that the FARC would definitely do something towards them if they showed up in areas where the group had presence.

This perception is not simply linked to their origins. The obvious imbalance of media coverage between the FARC and the paramilitary has favoured the latter by providing an uncertain image of paramilitary when compared to the FARC. Despite that the paramilitary was not publicly recognized as allied, it was not either publicly held responsible for the violence, thus providing for a distortion of the facts and the roles that the group plays in the conflict. In the words of Éver Veloza, alias HH, ex paramilitary commander:

I now realize that the cause of war was not only to fight the guerilla. There were also other objectives, other private interests of many people as the Castaño brother’s, politicians, businessmen, military and many other people of this country. These are the only ones who have truly benefited from this war$^{63}$ (in: Lozano & Morris, min 53,18).

The nexus between the paramilitary and the politicians, wealthy families and multinationals had long been denounced by syndicalist movements, academia and human rights' organizations, even before the DDR. However it was only until the declarations during the transitional justice process that the civil population paid

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62 By virtual threat I mean that without ignoring the modus operandi of the FARC, there has not been a direct and explicit threat towards the individuals. A virtual threat is when the possibilities of that affecting the subject are not very likely to happen but it is still perceived as a threat somewhere far away. A real threat on the contrary means that the subject has been directly and explicitly threatened. Thus a warning in the shape of an explosive, a message written or oral, a visit to the property or any other act that implies a specific and direct contact with the threatening agent.

63 “La guerra, ahora me doy cuenta que la única causa no era combatir a la guerrilla. Era uno de los objetivos, pero había otros objetivos, otros intereses particulares de muchas personas tanto los hermanos Castaño, como de políticos, de empresarios, militares, y muchas otras personas de este país que son lo que verdaderamente se han beneficiado de esta guerra.”
more attention to the magnitude and the seriousness of the alliances created in earlier years. Recent investigations have shown that the relations between the Military and paramilitary were not just about the false positives: the migration of members from the first to the former has been a current practice since the 1980's.

With the demobilization of paramilitary between 2003 and 2006, it has become public that hundreds of military and police members of different ranks and under different motivations were active and passive accessories of the paramilitary barbaric acts. The Peace and Justice Unit from the public prosecutor’s office counted, until August this year [2011], up to 500 registers of denouncements against public forces members for possible links with the self-defence groups64. (“De militares a ‘paras’

The false positives and the migration of members between groups are just the tip of the iceberg. Without willing to underestimate the seriousness of those practices it is necessary to recognize the existence of links with grave impacts on the long term due to their invisible character but which affect the mere structure of the Rule of Law65. These links have been revealed in the declarations made by demobilized paramilitary chiefs. According to alias HH, there were many meetings carried out between Carlos Castaño66 and different militaries, businessmen and politicians between 1997 and 1998 (while in other part of the country there were the Caguán negotiations with the Government and the FARC): “The objective of those meetings was that each of the representatives of the paramilitary blocs would present their political partners, and they would discuss the political matters of the country, create alliances and reach agreements to elect candidates67 (Lozano & Morris, min 1.00.15). Additionally as noted by Claudia López:

According to the Director of Public Prosecutions, it was the politicians who helped to create and promote the paramilitary to take the land of the peasants, to profit from a very lucrative economic project as stealing land,

64 “Con la desmovilización de los paramilitares entre 2003 y 2006, ha quedado al descubierto que cientos de militares y policías de diferentes grados y bajo distintas motivaciones fueron cómplices activos y pasivos de la barbarie paramilitar. La Unidad de Justicia y Paz de la Fiscalía registraba en agosto de este año cerca de 500 denuncias contra miembros de la fuerza pública por posibles nexos con las autodefensas.”
65 See foot note 46 for a book reference
66 Paramilitary leader killed in 2004
67 “El objetivo era que cada uno de los representantes de los bloques llevara sus aliados políticos a esas reuniones, a esas cumbres de las autodefensas, donde se tocaban los temas políticos del país, donde se trataba de hacer alianzas o acuerdos para elegir candidatos”
making agroindustrial projects and being co-participates in drug trafficking. With all that territorial, military and economic structure they took over the political power of Colombia. The Justice, the Supreme Court and the Public Prosecutions Office have proved today that one out of three posts in the popular elections (mayors, governors and congress) were co-opted and captured by this project of the political and economic regional elites who created armies and associated with drug-trafficking to have their own armies to protect themselves and take the lands of millions of peasants to profit from very lucrative business.68 (Lozano & Morris, min 58,04)

Even though nowadays the evidence on these matters is massive, the reaction of the interviewees on the subject was different. Some of them do recognize the seriousness of the matter, but others still deny that this ever happened and often justified it by arguing that it was what had to be done to fight the FARC. These persons correspond to group A in the previous chapter who often have a positive vision of the paramilitary. Many of them even recognize that some members of their families and friends have paid the group for protecting them and their properties. The way members of group A describe this practice is revealing: they see it somehow as an investment in safety and security, therefore when verbalizing it they refer to a payment for their protection. However, another part of the group refers to it as being boleteado, a word used to refer to the paramilitary sending a note or a message asking for a fixed monthly fee in order to protect the fincas from the guerrilla. Normally, those who do not agree on the payment have to leave.

According to the interviews, group A members are also more likely to admit and justify corruption in their daily lives. They argue that they are forced to act like that due to the lack of capacity of the state to protect them from the FARC. The same argument leads to corrupt practices such as paying a policeman or a government officer to avoid a fine or to obtain favours. All of these practices are related in the

68 “Hoy sabemos, según lo dijo el Fiscal General de la Nación, que fueron los políticos los que ayudaron a crear y promover grupos paramilitares para despojar de tierras a los campesinos, para hacerse beneficiar desde un proyecto económic muy rentable como robar tierras, hacer proyectos agro industriales y además ser copartícipes del narcotráfico. Y con toda esa estructura territorial, militar y económica se fueron tomando el poder político en Colombia. Hoy la justicia, la Corte Suprema y la Fiscalía han logrado demostrar que por lo menos una de cada tres puestos de elección popular en Colombia, alcaldías gobernaciones y el congreso que es la pirámide máxima, fue cooptada y capturada por este proyecto conjunto de las elites políticas y económicas regionales que crearon ejércitos y que se asociaron con el narcotráfico para tener ejércitos propios para darse seguridad y para despojar a millones de campesinos de sus tierras y hacer negocios muy rentables.”
sense that it is often considered that paying a fine would not mean that the money will be invested in the district but it will rather end up at someone's pocket. Given that corruption in the higher levels of the government is so strong and that it only favours those with enough power, in the terms of Bachrach & Baratz, group A considers that the only way of guaranteeing some level of safety is paying “private security groups”.

This way of thinking is probably one of the most dangerous to the goal of reaching a full and long term demobilization of the paramilitary. As long as a segment of the population continues to think that the only way to protect themselves is to finance paramilitary, the group will continue to exist, furthermore given the fact that many of these people do not only advocate paying for their personal/family security but also for their business. Corruption is highly associated with paramilitary creating a dynamic that continues to feed itself.

2. Geography of terror: rural versus urban

Among the multiple territorial divisions within the great Colombian geography, there is one that is particularly interesting. This is the geography of terror or geography of the conflict. The Colombian territory can be understood in an analogy of a museum, particularly during and after the implementation of Uribe's Democratic Security Policy. This means that there are areas of the Colombian territory where the mise en œuvre of the violence can be understood in terms of an exhibition, whilst other sectors of the society as the cities are part of the corridors where the habitant-tourist is allowed to circulate without any problems. For the target there is the sensation that during the implementation of the Democratic Security Policy the security on the roads was significantly better making it possible to travel again by road. Many of the impassable roads of earlier years became corridors of a museum connecting different rooms however, getting out of the way was still not possible without becoming vulnerable. This reopened forgotten destinations to the urban tourist (and mostly to the cattlemen) but left in stand-by to the local habitants who always lived in the liminality of the democratic security and the
“independent republics”\textsuperscript{69}.

One of the differences among the target is related to the level of acceptance of corruption within the political class and its relation with conflict. It was evident within the target that for the people living in Colombia it is easier (and more logical) to accept the infiltration of paramilitary in the political affairs of the country and the conflict. This is probably due to the recent media display related to the paramilitary findings. On the contrary, for those who are out of Colombia even though they admit the relation between politicians and conflict, it is not very clear. In this sense there is a clear gap between the corridors of the museum (the urban habitants, the roads) and the exhibition (the landscape, the rural habitants), for many there is only a glass between both. Nevertheless, as a museum has a curator, in the conflict there are politicians and military.

Even though the violent confrontation happens at the country's periphery and in places away from the control of the state, it is in the urban settings where the intellectual authors are found. The idea that politicians are the facilitators of conflict has its origins in the policies that promote social inequity. An example of these policies is Law 70 of 1993, which was expected to provide collective rights over territory to the afro-Colombian communities. However, due to economic and strategic interest over the region (the pacific coast) surprisingly Law 70 coincided with the arrival of illegal armed groups and particularly the paramilitary into the region (Oslender). Many of the local populations were displaced and many other where confined due to the cross-fire. Within this context Oslender notes that the deterritorialization does not occur only when a community is forcibly displaced but it also happens “when populations are confined inside spaces of placement”\textsuperscript{70} (n.a.) which force them to re-signify the space. This is what Oslender refers to as the mental deterritorialization which can also be applied to the Colombian populations who, without being a local population in the strict sense of the word, feel trapped within their own cities or regions and sees their movements restricted by the threat of armed groups. In the words of one of the interviewees (Info 2) before the democratic security policy “We were [already] sick of being locked up in our own

\textsuperscript{69} In this text I apply this concept to the areas under paramilitary or guerrilla control.

\textsuperscript{70} "cuando las poblaciones son confinadas dentro de espacios de emplazamiento"
Despite that after the implementation of the Democratic Security it was possible to travel again by road the sensation of being locked up continues in the minds of many. In particular the interviewees wished they could visit some regions of the country which are not yet possible to visit (La Macarena, Putumayo, Chocó, or Urabá).

In the eyes of the target, conflict brings implicitly a binary system between the rural and the urban. In general conflict is conceived as a fight over powers (political, economic, drug trafficking, territory and resources) which has its origin in the country-side and the city but which places of development are the rural landscapes. In the cities, there are the political and economic powers giving origin to conflict; also in the cities are the symbolic spaces which sustain the four bases of the conflict: social inequity, poverty, corruption and economic interests. The first two are the original argument of conflict, gave origin to the FARC and are located in the countryside. The last two are the current motors of conflict, which give continuity to it, and are represented in the political class and the businessmen of the country, which makes the urban settings its main place of representation.

**Conclusion**

There are two general findings from the first section of this chapter: On the one side it was interesting to find that the opinion on the guerrillas, the FARC and politicians are somewhat homogeneous, while the perspectives on Military and Paramilitary are rather divided. Despite that this was not a surprise, it was interesting to find the strong similarities linking the perspectives of both group A's to each other and both group B's. This is a reflection of the strong existing links between paramilitary and military.

On the other hand it was interesting to find that drug-traffickers are not considered to play a major role in the current conflict anymore, however drug-trafficking is considered not only a source of finances for illegal groups but also one of the main (if not the only one) motivation for them to continue fighting.

This chapter provides evidence of the strong biases regarding the perceptions of the target about the actors and the conflict. The notions on the FARC and the
paramilitary are a clear reflection of the context in which the target grew up. These two actors represent opposite forces that continue to polarize the opinions and feelings of the population. This is somehow evident in the existence of two groups within the target, which related differently to each actor according to their experience. However, it must be said that given that this research did not provide for a characterization of the target, notes on the differences within the two groups are not conclusive and more research should be done.
CHAPTER 4

THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON SOCIAL REALATIONS

For the target there is a very strong duality about the impact of the conflict in Colombian society. On one side, the target (urban inhabitants) considers that they are not related to what happens in the countryside and in this sense they feel somehow privileged and fortunate. On the other side, their discourse reveals certain discomfort related to more general aspects of social life but which are said to be the result of the violence.

Through what Scott denominates hidden resistances, and doing an analysis of the discursive categories of the interviewees it is possible to elucidate some general grievances related to the context and, more specifically, to how the individual, as a generic actor, acts within (endogenous) and towards (exogenous) the society. These two aspects find their roots in the feeling that the Colombian society is trapped in a vicious circle of violence and social distrust from which it can escape.

The references related to the context focus in general on the incapacity of the State to cover the basic needs of the population. More specifically the target regrets a sensation of lack of freedom of movement inside the country, by not being able to visit remote places (this is the analogy of the museum done earlier) and the insecurity in the cities which is said to be caused by the many displacements towards the cities, augmenting criminality due to the lack of work and the pressure to cover basic needs. The references to the actions of the individual within and towards society are rather related with sociocultural aspects of the society as the result of long standing and widespread violence.

This chapter is an attempt to elucidate those cultural aspects embedded in the heads of the target. The reader should remember that given that there is no base line and that this is an exploratory research, the next lines are only an attempt to shed some light onto some ideas of cultural features possibly resulting from the

71 I refer to the exogenous part of the action as the perception that the person has about the role and capacity of action of the self into the society. Exogenous, refers to the capacity of the society to produce social change. It is the sum of actions of the individual as a plurality which give society the capacity to become a social actor.
decades of conflict.

Furthermore, without ignoring that the proposal of hidden transcripts made by Scott is based on binary power relations, in this particular paper hidden transcripts are rather related to an environment in which there are a number of practices and attitudes circulating from and towards that context and which sustain a particular logic. This logic supporting the action, also gives room for the continuum of a distorted context in which the individual places himself outside the society inhibiting his capacity of action and representation. Given that these practices and attitudes are part of daily life they become so familiar and obvious that their perception is difficult, becoming hidden transcripts.

In the following lines, a characterization of these practices will be presented in three groups: One related to the perception of values as being distorted thus referring to a crisis of values; another related to the polarization within society and a third related with the specific cultural heritage of drug-trafficking.

**Polarization**

Although by this research it cannot be deduced that polarization is the result of the time of *La Violencia*, it has been highly related to the years of bipartisan violence. The people in the target are the sons and daughters of the generation born at the beginning of *La Violencia*. In conversations outside of this research, older generations have always mentioned polarization as something everyone was forced to adopt becoming both a survival and a resistance strategy. Nowadays despite that the context is not so extreme for the target, the polarization is still evident in the mentality of the people. This was partially evident with the different groups regarding the opinions about the actors in the previous chapter.

The active expressions of this way of thinking are evident in many ways, and are not always discursive. Even though from a conscious point of view categories driving polarization (paramilitary/guerrillero) are not extreme, when deepening on the meanings of the categories it is possible to evidence that in general the target considers the relations with others as partially defined by the perceptions of the other and the self about paramilitary and the guerrilla:

72 Although polarization might be result of distrust I wanted to refer to is separately because it is a very strong aspect and feeling within the society.
The one who is a more critical is said to be guerrillero. People with different ideas are stigmatized. The left in Colombia is very stigmatized by the guerrilla. People do not protest because someone will point them out as guerrilleros. (Informant 6)

Maybe because of the idealization of an ejército del pueblo, of Carlos Pizarro, of Camilo Torres, or of Che Guevara, the feeling towards the current Colombian guerrilla is paradoxical... It's a business to feed war (Questionnaire)

If you make me choose between the self-defence groups and the guerrilla I will go blindly for the self-defence because I understand their logic, but I don't understand that of the guerrilla (Informant 2)

This opposing relation is also present in the interpersonal relations of many of the interviewees through the way they perceive the other, thus re-defining social relations and spaces.

Although not exclusively, social circles tend to be shaped by similar affiliations towards the FARC or the paramilitary. It is common that during conversations about politics or the conflict, if someone is defending a group and the person tries to point out its negative side, this second person will be labelled as being emotionally affiliated with the opposite group.

I have always felt that by saying anything against the paramilitary the other people will look at you as if you were defending the FARC. (Informant 5)

The already famous sentence of George Bush “You're either with us or against us” totally describes how many Colombians feel about their relations towards the paramilitary or the FARC and this sentiment is said to be prevalent in the whole country, as much in the rural areas as it is in the urban areas:

73 “El que es un poco mas critico lo tachan de guerrillero. Se estigmatiza a las personas que tiene otra idea. La izquierda de Colombia esta muy estigmatizada por la guerrilla. La gente no protesta porque [le van a decir] que es de la guerrilla”.
74 “Tal vez por la idealización de un ejército del pueblo, de un Carlos Pizarro, un Camilo Torres o un Che Guevara es paradójico el sentimiento con la guerrilla actual colombiana. Su labor es un negocio para alimentar la guerra y la hegemonia del poder.”
75 “Si me pones a elegir guerrilla o autodefensas escogería las autodefensas de cabeza, porque entiendo su lógica y la lógica de la guerrilla no.”
76 “yo siempre he sentido que decir algo en contra de los paramilitares los demÁs lo ven como si uno fuera un poco defensor de las FARC”
It is very difficult when you cannot decide as a peasant: There you are with your hens and cattle and the paramilitary comes asking for food. Then comes the guerrilla asking for food. And then they tell you that you have helped one or the other. (Informant 4)

Polarization is one of the biggest problems (...) the guerrilla or the paramilitary are very radical forces forcing you to choose a side (Informant 1)

Crisis of values
A cross-cutting issue during the interviews was the idea that there is a great crisis of values within Colombian society. Despite that this is not very often recognized, the narratives of the target reveal a number of in-conformisms that are felt to be the result of the social distrust and the rupture of social tissue.

Due to the context we have had to live in, many things are normal: a killer prays to the virgin before killing! If we grow up in such a society then for us is normal. But here in Europe you realized that we have lost something. That is what you get culturally from the conflict. (Informant 5)

1. Corruption – dishonesty
Corruption is said to be one of the greatest problems in the country. It is often said that while there is corruption, there will be conflict. However many of the interviewees also admitted to carrying on small corrupt practices to obtain benefits. When comparing this behaviour with the previous discourse, the target justifies it by mentioning aspects related to protection and personal and family well-being. One of the most current examples is to bribe a policeman to avoid getting a fine. Although the target acknowledge the negative character of this practice, it is often justified under at least three arguments: 1) fines are too high and salaries too low (which

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77 “A mi me parecía muy difícil la gente que no podía decidir: estabas con tu gallina y tus cuatro vacas y llegaba el paramilitar y pedía para comer, luego llegaba la guerrilla y pedía para comer. Y después le decían “usted ayudó [a uno y otro]”.

78 “Esa mentalidad de polarizar es uno de los grandes problemas que ha ido creciendo mucho en el país. (...) la guerrilla o los paramilitares son fuerzas muy radicales entonces te obligan a que estés aquí o allá”

79 “Para nosotros por la realidad que hemos vivido ya es normal para nosotros ser así: un asesino le reza a la virgen antes de ir a matar!. Si crecemos en una sociedad que actúa así pues para nosotros es normal. Pero aquí te das cuenta que hemos perdido algo. Esto es lo que adquieres culturalmente, como has crecido”.

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makes the policemen more likely to accept the bribe and population more likely to offer them); 2) it is a waste of capital because a) the money will not be invested but stolen by someone in the government, b) the police could probably use the bribe to invest it in their family and c) the person could make better use of those resources; and 3) the socio-cultural tolerance is so high that depending on the person, a bribe can even be expected.

The gap between discourse and practice prevents the target from seeing a clear relation between paramilitary and corruption or corruption and conflict. Narratives about these relations are never direct and the discourse might appear rather contradictory.

2. Social distrust

The way drug trafficking has filtered into the Colombian society has left not just a particular way of approaching certain situations but also some kind of distrust between Colombians themselves, opposite to the relation towards foreign people. By the narrative of the target it is possible to identify certain feelings of responsibility towards foreign people. This feeling finds its origins in the years when abductions were frequent: as informant 4 noticed “something might happen to them because of their innocence, because they [foreigners] do not know how to behave in a country in conflict”. If within the relations with foreign people there is the idea that they need to be 'protected', between the Colombians there is the idea that there is a need to carefully select friends. The basis of this prevention towards the con-nationals is part of the legacy of the drug trafficking years, when society was so heavily permeated by the business that there was a general fear of being linked to it by being friends with people one had just met. If in the towns the fear was the guerrilla or the paramilitary, in the cities it was the drug-traffickers.

With the fall of the drug Cartels, the evidence of the drug business for urban habitants diminished and although social trust has seen some changes, the distrust is still in the air. This distrust was also visible in the advice given when travelling by road. Back in 1980s-2000s it was general knowledge that you should stop if a car did not come from the other direction for more than five minutes; also if one ran into a broken car on the road, it was better to continue along the way and call the police or
ambulance if needed, but never to stop and offer help. Even the slopes on the road were suspicious because in certain roads the guerrilla was known to provoke landslides in order to carry out random kidnappings on the road.

Although nowadays these threats are not felt as real, there is wide distrust on the other. Consequences are that individuals 1) have a hard time thinking of themselves as part of a society and in this sense 2) it is difficult to think about the society as an agent capable of promoting social change. In other words, the consequences of this distrust give room to a sub-estimation of the self and the society where individuals have no clear role in the society and thus have no real power of transformation. Despite acknowledging that acting with distrust undermines social relations, the difficulty in changing this behaviour is rooted in the general belief that doing it differently will be too innocent, placing the individual in a vulnerable position.

The *narco* culture

Probably the strongest legacy of the drug-trafficking years and in which whole the target agreed upon is the *narco* culture. As mentioned by many other scholars, this was visible in multiple spaces of the Colombian society. For the target the most evident aspect of this legacy is the mentality of the *narco*. There are a number of elements that can be identified: One part of the legacy is related to the relation with others, and the other part has to do with the relation with the State.

With drug-trafficking the people learned that things could be obtained fast and easily, everything had a price and in this context, there was no need for planning, thinking in the long term or for building anything that would take too long to be ready.

Due to the high influence of the Cartels in politics during the late 1980s and early 1990s the drug-trafficking people also learnt that the relation with the State was through corruption and that anything could be bought. From the perspective of informant 9 the levels of corruption during the Cartels War resulted in a lack of respect and confidence from the population towards the State which provides for a context where the population feels less responsible for, for example, not paying taxes. This was reaffirmed by other informants who, talking about parapolitics,
mentioned that with that level of corruption there was no point in trusting the
government, politicians and thus the State.

**Conclusion**

The three categories presented above speak for a rupture in the logic of the
‘social tissue’ in which common welfare, is not translates into individual welfare. This
means that the attitudes that have been created and promoted are those resulting
positive only for few but (in many cases) negative and even harmful for the majority
who does not take part on the action.

All of this categories are strongly linked with each other and feeding one,
means that the others will also be fed. Back to the example of a bribe, the arguments
used to justify this action show a clear lack of trust in the State machinery. This is that
the State is seen as an institution easy to manipulate and which can be bought. This
allows people to approach its different institutions in many ways depending on their
specific need of the moment. The inability of the State to protect its citizens and the
proven corruption levels are the main aspects undermining this relations. Both the
citizens as the State have failed in keeping a social contract of ‘rights and duties’. For
the target it is clear that the relation with the state is misconceived but given that
they cannot trust it, they are hesistant to offer anything different until it proves that it
can also protect its citizens and offer a minimum of transparency.
CONCLUSIONS

Along this paper it has been repetitive the idea of polarization. From chapter two onwards, it has been evident how the FARC has successfully adapted itself through time and what has been the response of all the other actors of the conflict. Contrary to the paramilitary, currently the FARC stands completely alone. The need and desire to fight and eradicate this group is so strong that it served as a motive to support and strength the paramilitary. This context has created a misconceived relation towards the state which continues to be justified. Part of the target continues to justifies the paramilitary as the only way to protect themselves despite the AUC has been officially demobilized after 5 years. This situation speaks not only for a rupture on the social tissue, but also for the fear towards the FARC, the distrust on the capacity of the State to protect its citizens, the misconception of certain values and the idea that, when it comes to safety, everything is accepted. This way of thinking has led to promote military actions against anyone in order to face the conflict. This has also led to a normalization and promotion of violence through the support of illegal armed groups.

Although more research should be done on the topic, it is very likely that the role given to the paramilitary as protectors will be one of the greatest challenges that the next government will have to face in a close future. The reader should keep in mind that the paramilitary demobilized in a very uncommon context where the stronger actors of the conflict are still present and active. Therefore the State faces a huge challenge to cope with the absence of the paramilitary as an ally in the fight against the FARC, while it also deals with the reintegration of the ex-combatants, the implementation of the Law of Victims and while the Military is still fighting against the FARC. It also has to act fast and effectively to prove to the population that it can provide a safe environment for all. All of this makes a complicated context in which many people of the target do not have much hope that the State will succeed. One of the main issues is that although with the transitional justice process much has been known about the paramilitary there is still a group of people who have the economic
means and the motivation to continue hiring “private security groups”. In some interviews it was evident that the people supporting paramilitary are convinced of their role of protectors. While this continues to exist it will not be possible to eradicate them. The State needs to prove the population that it can protect its citizens while also rebuilding the trust on the State.

**Methodological and theoretical approach**

Social Sciences and particularly anthropology started some decades ago to reconceptualise the local events through the political changes at the macro level (Nordstrom & Martin 10) and so have done the studies about domination and resistance. It would be interesting however, to open spaces to study how the actions at the local level, when they are systematic in time and space, have strong impacts at the macro levels. Although this approach has been mainly done in politics it could also be useful if applied to the socio-cultural perspective. There are many studies on the Colombian case about the impact at the macro level of politics through the examination of the local political context and its relations with landlords, drug traffickers, politicians and armed. Nevertheless, it could be interesting to conduct this sort of research from an anthropological perspective applied to the studies of violence, conflict and forms of resistance. In other words, to conduct research on the impact of conflict at the macro level of culture the examination of the local socio-cultural contexts.

Traditionally, anthropology has been the discipline that has inquired about the meanings of culture at the micro levels, but it has also inquired for macro trends based on local approaches as done in marketing studies. It would be interesting to adapt this approach to the studies of conflict, violence and resistance and survival.

As Sluka points out “perhaps the major weakness, or even fallacy, in conflict studies by social scientists outside anthropology has been the often glaring omission of any substantive consideration of the subjective, experimental, meaningful, or 'cultural' dimension.” (20) However anthropology has failed in linking the local dimensions of conflict and its cultural transformations with the national level.


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