NEEDLE, THREAD AND MEMORIES OF ARMED CONFLICT

Sewing Initiatives as Reparation and Peacebuilding Tools in Colombia

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Cover Photo:
El Costurero de la Memoria sewing initiative at the Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá, Colombia. Retrieved From: Semana newspaper (4 March, 2017).

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Abbreviations

AUC	Las Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia	(United Self-Defences Forces of Colombia)
BACRIM	Bandas Criminales Emergentes	(Criminal gangs)
CCONG	Confederación Colombiana de ONG	(Colombian Confederation of Non-governmental Organizations)
CM	El Costurero de la Memoria	(The Memory Sewing Initative)
CMH	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica	(Centre for Historical Memory)
CMPR	Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación	(Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation)
CNRR	Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación	(National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation)
GMH	Grupo Memoria Histórica	(Historical Memory Group)
MAFAPO	Madres de Falsos Positivos	(Mothers of False Positives)
MOVICE	El Movimiento de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado	(Movement of Victims of State Crimes)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional	(National Liberation Army)
FARC- EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo	(The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
JEP	La Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz	(Special Jurisdiction for Peace)
ICMP	Comisión internacional para personas desaparecidas	(International Commission for Missing Persons)
INDEPAZ	Instituto de Estudios Para el Desarrollo y la Paz	(Institute of Studies for Development and Peace)

INGO	Organizaciones Internacionales no Fubernamentales	(International Non-governmental Organizations)
RJ	Justicia Restaurativa	(Restorative Justice)
TJ	Justicia Transicional	(Transitional Justice)
TTMCM	Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria	(House of Memory Museum Sewing)

Introduction

My interest in memory-focused sewing initiatives began in December 2019, when I met Jacqueline Castillo Peña of the Mothers of False Positives (MAFAPO) at an event hosted by the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) in The Hague. The ICMP event, "Profiles of the Missing from Colombia: Perspectives and Priorities of Families of the Disappeared'' invited 14 guest speakers from Colombia to discuss the current developments and debates regarding the 2016 Peace Agreement. Many of the speakers used handmade quilts as an emotive narrative tool to communicate personal memories of conflict, including acts of sexual violence, torture and memories of disappearance and loss. It was an emotional experience which left me wanting to examine in more depth the interaction between victim sewing initiatives, the role of memory and Colombia's peacebuilding process.

The historic peace agreement between the Colombian state and the left-wing rebel group known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was signed in 2016 and brought an end to the longest-running internal conflict in the Western hemisphere. The agreement has been praised by the international community as the first of its kind to place victims at the centre of the peacebuilding process. A transitional justice system has been established in order to investigate, sanction and clarify the truth with the purpose of building lasting peace in Colombia. However, the country continues to be extremely polarized and violent: concerns were raised by the University of Leiden if it would be safe enough to travel for my research period in January 2020. Countrywide protests led by both victims and the Colombian public starting in November 2019 were partly motivated by dissatisfaction with the negotiated terms of the peace deal, fuelling uncertainty over the legitimacy and sustainability of peace in present-day Colombia. A power vacuum left by FARC's demobilization has led to a rise in dissident guerrilla activity and many rural and urban communities in Colombia are still at high risk of violence, forced displacement and drug-related crime. It was reported during my research period in February 2020 that an illegal armed group had taken control of internationally recognized Peace Zones in Buenaventura and a national transport strike instigated by the ELN was an unnerving reminder that underlying structures of violence continue to be present in many parts of the country.

The current Colombian context highlights the multiple challenges faced by victim organisations attempting to seek truth, justice and reparation. Implementation of transitional justice measures has been slow: the foundations, infrastructure and institutional bodies are still in the process of being created and thus the promise of victims receiving support and effective reparations is still to be fulfilled. This research on victim assistance

and reparation comes at a crucial moment in Colombia's peacebuilding process. At the time of writing, less than four years have passed since the peace agreement was signed in 2016 and thus there is a gap in empirical research on the current impact of reparations and transitional justice measures for victims in Colombia. This highlights the importance of this thesis as a useful starting point to understand the development of reparation initiatives and provides a basis for further investigations as the peacebuilding process continues.

This research aims to assess the value of memory-focused sewing initiatives as a reparation measure and their relationship to Colombia's wider peacebuilding agenda. To guide this thesis, the following research question is explored: To what extent can memory-focused sewing projects be considered a restorative practice for victims of the Colombian armed conflict and how do such reparation measures support the country's peacebuilding agenda?

In order to investigate this research question, primary research was conducted in Colombia over a two month period from January - March 2020. The basis for the analysis of this thesis came from observations and participation at the following sewing initiatives: a reunion with the MAFAPO (Mothers of False Positives) organization held at the Institute of Studies for Development and Peace (INDEPAZ) in Bogotá; the state-funded *El Costurero de la Memoria*, also known as *El Costurero de la Memoria: Kilómetros de Vida y de Memoria,* a victim-led sewing initiative held at the Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation (CMPR), also in Bogotá; lastly, the memory-focused sewing initiative *El Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) at *Museo Casa de la Memoria* (House of Memory) in Medellín. These observations were combined with semi-structured interviews that in most cases lasted approximately 1 hour. I interviewed a wide range of people in order to familiarise myself with the current diverse political, social and cultural contexts of Colombia, and also to ensure this thesis was relevant and accurately reflected the most salient and current debates around victim-centred approaches to peacebuilding. Interviewees included: ex-FARC member John León; ex-paramilitary Oscar José Ospino; the lawyer and negotiator for the FARC during the Colombian peace process, Diego Martinez; and victims of the armed conflict, Jaqueline Castillo and Orlinda Mesa, who both had relatives disappeared. With the help of the Faculty for Political Economy at the Universidad Externado in Bogotá I was able to gain access to Colombia's transitional justice court, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) in Bogotá and interview Assistant Magistrate Marco Velásquez and many government workers. A qualitative approach was adopted due to the nature of the research.

This thesis paper is divided into three main sections. The first section introduces the key theoretical theories which include Galtung's peacebuilding theory (1969) and McCandless' (2020) conception of vertical and horizontal peacebuilding. Restorative justice is examined using theories of victim empowerment by Braithwaite (1996) and Weber's (2020) 5 key pillars of victim reparation. Discourses on historical memory by Hite et al., (2009) and

Friedman et al., (2019) are also used. The second section examines the historical, social and political context of the Colombian armed conflict and its impact on the Colombian population. The Peace and Justice Law 975/2005 and the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448/2011 are explained as they underscore key developments in transitional justice and reparation measures for victims. The establishment of the National Centre of Historical Memory in 2011 and the importance of historical memory for victims is also presented. Chapter 2 closes with an explanation of Colombia's ongoing quest for peace. Chapter 3 presents the arguments for regarding memory-focused sewing initiatives as a restorative practice and reparation measure and are critically analysed in relation to Colombia's wide-ranging peacebuilding agenda. The analysis is supported by findings from the research period in Colombia, academic literature and relevant online resources from grassroots peacebuilding organizations, documentaries and newspaper articles. This thesis ends with a conclusion of the value of memory-focused sewing initiatives as reparation and peacebuilding tools in Colombia, with proposals for future research.

CHAPTER 1

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF PEACEBUILDING, REPARATIONS AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

First, an academic and practical discussion of the key concepts will be presented. A combination of theories of peacebuilding, memory and restorative justice provide a unique framework to examine the value of memory-focussed sewing projects as a reparation measure and peacebuilding strategy in Colombia.

1.1 A Conceptual Analysis of Peacebuilding

An introductory overview of peacebuilding literature will serve as a basis to understand the different approaches taken to attempt to resolve conflict worldwide in recent years. Johan Galtung is considered by scholars as the founder of Peace Studies and first established the term peacebuilding in his article "Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peace-making and Peacebuilding" (Galtung, 1976). Galtung conceptualised peacebuilding by identifying different types of violence using a 'conflict triangle': direct violence (deliberate harm), structural violence (a result of social structures or institutions) and cultural violence (when cultural norms are used to justify violence) (Galtung, 1969). His theory defines peace as a state free from violence that aims to de-escalate violence. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (1992) reinforces Galtung's approach, arguing that the root causes of conflict are embedded in social and economic inequality and political oppression. He believes peacebuilding strategies can be implemented before, during and after conflict. Therefore peacebuilding ultimately aims to address the structural violence of society, improve human welfare and eradicate marginalization (Strobel, 1996). Peacebuilding is often discussed in relation to literature on post-conflict society which analyses the role and effects of military presence, failed states, foreign intervention, illegal resistance and corruption (Sakalasuriya et al., 2017).

Peacebuilding is also studied from a conflict management perspective which examines the fundamentals of civil war and the contributing factors behind prolonged armed conflict. For instance, Greig (2019) believes that the protracted nature of armed conflict can be attributed to struggles for power; by negotiating with rebels, governments find themselves legitimizing violence, which rebels see as a successful way to make demands. The longer rebels sustain

armed conflict, the more they will be considered a threat to the power of the state, and therefore the more likely the state will have to negotiate. Melin et al., (2009) believe that armed conflict ends when the cost of sustaining the war becomes too much or when the chances of the opponent winning becomes too great. Peace negotiations ensue when either side believes that they will no longer be able to exert control and authority over the other, which is understood as power parity (Kriesberg, 1992). Peace negotiations occur in order to re-legitimize the state as the bearer of authority. Peacebuilding literature therefore could be examined by using power dynamics as a frame of reference.

Galtung's peacebuilding theory (1976) only became well established in policymaking discourse in the years after the Cold War ended in 1991, when Western Block countries promoted and imposed a culture of democratic values, understood as a liberal peacebuilding model (Donias, 2009; Jarstad & Sisk, 2008). Headed by the United Nations, the UN Peace Agenda document (1992) was used by governments as the main point of reference in peacebuilding policy formulation. The creation of institutional infrastructure, neoliberal reforms and economic liberalization shaped peacebuilding efforts (Halpern & Weinstein, 2004). From the standpoint of the international community, political, economic and security policy reforms were considered the three most important components for countries emerging from conflict (Colletta et al, 2000; Muñoz, 2018; Schirch, 2013).

The failure of peace processes and transitional justice measures in countries such as Somalia and Rwanda in 1994 revealed the limitations of international peacebuilding attempts and the need for alternative approaches to peacebuilding, rather than a Westernised one-size-fits-all model (Paffenholz, 2015). This failure has been attributed to the complex nature of enforcing peace using a hierarchical top-down strategy in politically and socially divided countries which led to the emergence of alternative academic research within the Conflict Resolution community that re-conceptualized notions of state building (Ballestas & Gerlach, 2006; Cravo, 2017).

John Paul Lederach's conflict transformation theory and three-tier peacebuilding model identifies the valuable contribution of civil society as crucial actors in training, education and victim assistance in post conflict settings (Lederach, 1997). The scholar believes that empowering local people to support and implement peacebuilding strategies help to strengthen social cohesion and that top-down peacebuilding should play a secondary role to bottom-up approaches. Dialogue and negotiation are also noted as necessary steps in order to pacify and resolve conflict. Lederach's conflict transformation theory has since been used as a framework to examine the value of local ownership and bottom-up peacebuilding strategies (Vogel, 2016; Colletta et al., 2000; Mac Ginty, 2011; Donias, 2009). Scholars such as Muñoz (2018) have applied Lederach's theory to examine the Colombian armed conflict. He argues that rather than being an end state, building peace requires a long-term victim-

centred approach with an emphasis on reparation. Scholars who have highlighted the value of a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding reinforce the idea that peaceful community relationships and peacebuilding must start from a local level and involve civil society in order to overcome social exclusion and change social relations at the core of society (Bloomfield, 2006; Kahn, 2019). The contribution of civil society to peacebuilding is considered by some to be an attempt to decentralise and redistribute the power of the government and thus make a country more democratic (Colletta et al., 2000).

Scholars often refer to horizontal peacebuilding, a practice that emphasizes inclusion, dialogue and social cohesion (Jarstad & Sisk, 2008; Valderrama et al., 2019). Rettberg (2020) defines horizontal peacebuilding as a process that helps to rebuild relationships between different members of society. Peacebuilding efforts must also try and repair the vertical relationship between the government and its citizens; transitional justice systems must demonstrate concrete benefits to society early on in the peacebuilding process, in order to gain trust and legitimacy (Rettberg et al., 2016). McCandless (2020) has expanded this theory, highlighting the importance of developing context specific programmes that take into consideration local norms in order to build lasting peace. In light of this, it is suggested that a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding not only encourages participation of civil society, but also helps to reinforce and advance the peacebuilding agenda. Cooperation of local institutions and support from NGOs are also identified as crucial actors in mediating state-building and peace agreements in post-conflict countries (Paffenholz, 2015; Moshe, 2001; Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Sakalasuriya et al., 2017). In 2006 a permanent institution called the Peacebuilding Commission was created by the General Assembly and the Security Council with the aim of preventing the recurrence of war (Jarstad & Sisk, 2008). Peacebuilding has become a malleable term and can be understood as a gradual transformative process. Within the framework of this thesis, peacebuilding is defined as an interwoven support effort helps to reconstruct social relationships and improve individual attitudes in order to overcome violence (Donias, 2009, Schirch, 2013; Solimano, 2000; Colletta, et al., 2000; Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Francis, 2000).

The limitations and complexities of peacebuilding theories must also be addressed. For example, scholars have acknowledged that the compliance and participation of political elites in transitional justice and peacebuilding measures cannot be guaranteed (Donias, 2009). This has been attributed to divisions between previous and new transitional governments, as well as the will of local and national elites in post conflict societies (Donias, 2009). Moreover, scholars have pointed out that civil society organisations are dependent on the financial aid they receive and therefore need to be legitimised by the state or donors (Donais, 2009). Factors such as ethnicity, religion and political views contribute to significant lack or success of civil society activism. This has raised questions around the motivation behind specific demands made by civil society and the short and long term goals

of international sponsors such as the World Bank or the IMF. Scholars and professionals say more transparency is needed in order to address bias, fragmentation and representation of the disenfranchised should also be considered (Mercer, 2002).

1.2 Transitional Justice: Issues and Approaches

An understanding of transitional justice (TJ) and restorative justice (RJ) discourse will help to better understand how memory-focussed sewing projects function as a reparation measure and contributed to Colombia's peacebuilding process. The concept of reconciliation will also briefly be discussed in order to justify the relevance of the chosen framework.

The paradigm of TJ is frequently explored in legal, criminological and peacebuilding literature (Doak et al., 2012; Bolitho, 2017; Van Ness et al, 2006; Roht-Arriaza et al., 2006; Robins, 2011; Braithwaite, 1996). It is also most commonly discussed in relation to human rights and democracy (Firchow, 2017). Since democratic transitions across Latin America and Eastern Europe from 1970 onwards, TJ measures have been used by governments as part of wider peacebuilding strategies to address the aftermath of armed conflicts, civil wars and dictatorships (Weber, 2020). Before this time, the study of criminal justice principally focused on punishing the perpetrator and the criminal act itself (Hoyle et al., 2002). Historically, a Westernised punitive approach to criminal justice was considered to enhance the legitimacy and rule of a state (Braithwaite, 1996). However, it was also argued that this stance failed to deter or reduce levels of crime (Braithwaite, 1996). TJ measures are designed to meet international human rights standards and therefore are most commonly implemented from the top down through legal and non-legal means (Robins, 2011). Key components of TJ include reparation, truth, justice and guarantees of non-repetition and have been implemented in countries such as South Africa, Chile and Argentina (OHCHR, 2014).

Truth commissions are considered to be a key component of top-down TJ measures and central to peacebuilding discourse (Rowen, 2017; Rettberg et al., 2016; Bloomfield, 2006; Lederach, 1997; Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Alcalá et al., 2016). Truth commissions aim to establish facts about violations of human rights and, in some cases, hold perpetrators accountable for their actions in order to try and end impunity (OHCHR, 2014:17). Most notably, the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa in 1996 has been acknowledged as the start of contemporary studies of TJ and reconciliation (Rettberg et al., 2016). The idea of reconciliation developed from Conflict Transformation analysis in psychology and social psychology (Bloomfield, 2006). Allowing victims' suffering to be universally acknowledged helps to re-establish them as valued members of society with rights, suggesting both the symbolic and material value of TJ (Grandin, 2005).

Reconciliation is based on a language of forgiveness and trust and is considered by academics to be an ongoing, gradual process (Rettberg et al., 2016; Colletta et al., 2000). It has been discussed in relation to wider notions of satisfaction and wellbeing with the aim of bringing together divided communities, relationships and differing points of view (Enright & North, 1998; Rowen, 2017). The term reconciliation has a broad meaning that encompasses many peacebuilding activities and therefore resonates differently in different cultural and social contexts (Rettberg et al., 2016). As a result, reconciliation is a highly disputed process which has led to disappointment, dissatisfaction and fragmentation between policymakers, victims and civil society (Rowen, 2017; Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017). Therefore, scholars have also argued that TJ measures such as truth commissions have failed to address the underlying effects of war, such as the emotional, social and economic needs of victims and encourages impunity (Robins, 2011).

1.2.1 Theories of Reparation and Restorative Justice

Reparation is one of the four key pillars of TJ and seeks to repair injuries caused by wrongs to victims. Reparations encompass 5 key measures: restitution; compensation; rehabilitation; satisfaction; and guarantees of non-repetition, presented by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Social Science discourse developed the term restorative justice (RJ) in the 1970s and refers to practices that aim to facilitate dialogue and active participation of perpetrators and victims in order to address the prolonged physical and emotional impact of crime on victims (Rugge & Corimer, 2013; Sakalasuriya, 2018; Bolitho, 2017; Van Ness et al., 2006; Miller, 2011). In Western countries, government-led RJ measures were initially used as an alternative to punitive legal action for juvenile offenders (Bolitho, 2017). However, it has been estimated that there are more than 100 countries that have adopted RJ measures in criminal justice systems for both victims and offenders (Van Ness, 2005). Research by Johnstone (2011) and Kerner et al., (2002) have both outlined the normative values that define RJ practices, which provide useful insight into the core values at the heart of RJ practices. First, restorative measures should ensure societies can live in peace and seek to bring harmony, security and the wellbeing to victims and wider society. Second, RJ should encourage normative values such as respect which ensures recognition and consideration of others. Third, solidarity is noted as a key value, which requires participation, opportunities for encounter, as well as assistance. Fourth, communities are encouraged to take active responsibility for their actions through dialogue and collaboration.

Previous research has looked at how a victim-centred approach to dealing with criminal acts has helped to re-establish interpersonal relationships through visibility and acknowledgement. The needs of the victims are placed at the centre of RJ measures, emphasizing the symbolic value of RJ (Leal, 2014). For example, assistance to victims has

been carried out in a number of different ways across the world, including state funded development projects or restorative conferences (Dixon, 2016; Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017).

Scholars have also examined the possibility of RJ measures as a tool to promote victim empowerment (Zernova, 2007; Dignan, 2005; Ashworth, 2002; Richards, 2010; Miller & Hefner, 2015; Strang, 2002; Barton, 2000). It has been widely established that a crime can generate sentiments of powerlessness by taking away the dignity or sense of security of a victim (Braithwaite, 1996). By actively engaging victims in justice proceedings, RJ challenges the traditional conception of victims as passive and disempowered (Aertsen et al., 2011). Empowerment and disempowerment is also studied in community psychology and has been linked to spiritual, economic, political and social transformation (Aertsen et al., 2011). In conflict and peacebuilding literature, scholars have repeatedly pointed to the need to engage the local community and victims in order to build sustainable peace (Moshe, 2001; Alcalá et al., 2016). Robins (2011) reinforces this view in his research on post-conflict Nepal, highlighting the necessity of community and family orientated approaches to TJ. Similarly, research by Braithwaite (1996) emphasizes the possibility to restore trust and cohesion in communities using RJ. Literature on peacebuilding and RJ focus on the active and participatory role of the community, victims and civil society.

The dilemmas of a victim-centred approach to RJ and reparations has been examined by scholars (Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017). For example, academics have noted the diverse interpretation of the term reconciliation for different sectors of society. Others have indicated that determining or measuring the effectiveness of reparations in relation to reconciliation is difficult and often inconclusive (Firchow, 2017). Therefore, what constitutes successful peacebuilding could vary greatly between different institutions and participants and should be considered when evaluating the value of restorative peacebuilding initiatives. It must also be taken into account that it cannot be presumed that all reparation and peacebuilding projects are effective in helping victims deal with the effects of conflict or have a restorative element (Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017). For example research has pointed out that victims may feel strong sentiments of anger or resentment in having to take more responsibilities for the outcome or process (Braithwaite, 1996; Richards, 2010). Scholars have also pointed to the moral, ethical and social implications of RJ, arguing that TJ must first meet the economic needs of victims in order to address underlying structural violence, before RJ measures can take place (Laplante, 2008; Miller, 2008; Weber, 2020).

1.3 Historical Memory Discourse

Conceptualizing theories of memory will help address how sewing initiatives interact with the construction of memory and function as a reparation measure for victims. Studies on collective memory have been analysed from physiological, biomedical, Black and Feminist standpoints. Historical memory literature has also been explored in relation to cultural and sociological concepts such as counter-memory and collective memory (Jedlowski, 2001; Misztal, 2003, Vinitzky- Seroussi et al., 2010; Olick et al., 1998; Alcalá et al., 2016; Valderrama et al., 2019).

Academics of Holocaust studies highlight the importance of collective memory as a moral and ethical obligation in order to address past abuses (Stratton, 2005; Hirsch, 1999; Simon et al., 1997; Young, 1993). They argue that first-hand accounts of war help to shape a collective understanding of the past and can be used as a meaningful way to help others identify with victims of war. From a psychosocial perspective, scholars have investigated how individual and collective experiences of war affect victims and the construction of memory (Hinton & Hinton, 2015; Ávila, 2019; Tov-Nachlieli et al., 2014). Weedon (2012), argues that history is a reconstruction of memory made up of common narratives and that memory is something that is shaped and influenced by current living experience and perceptions. Londoño et al., (2019) has developed this theory, believing that memories can be deliberately brought into the present in order to allow victims to reflect subjectively on past events and understand the causes of one's emotions (Londoño et al., 2019: 78). Second, memory can be used to improve and reconstruct one's identity, by building and learning from past experiences. Art, music, dance and performance are cited as having symbolic value that can help in this process of reconstruction through visual means. Creative processes are valued as helpful tools to interpret history and explore individual and collective memories. Contextualising individual memories within a wider historical period can help give victims a sense of belonging by acknowledging their version of events (which have often been silenced or repressed) as a legitimate voice (Gemignani, 2011; Alcalá, 2016). Therefore, remembering collective violence can be symbolic of both survival and loss and also in some cases help to empower and build confidence in victims (Kevers et al., 2016). The link between victims, trauma and testimony have been explored by both memory scholars (Kevers et al., 2016) and studies of restorative justice (Bolitho, 2017), providing a unique framework to analyse the use of memory-focused sewing projects as a restorative practise for victims.

From a Cultural Studies standpoint, the study of memory focuses on the role of marginalised voices and cultures (Antze & Lambek, 1996; Foxen, 2010). In Pierre Nora's research "Sites of Memory," the scholar argues that memory is influenced by present day power struggles (Weedon et al., 2012: 145). Memory can be understood as a process of negotiation in which

social, cultural and political dynamics, together with class, religion and family, influence the construction of collective remembering (Weedon et al, 2012). The legacy and reconstruction of past events can therefore vary depending on the dominant voice in society. This is reinforced by Vinitzky-Seroussi (2010) who argues that state-led cultural institutions play an important role in establishing common or 'mainstream' narratives of historical events. Collective memory can therefore also be symbolic of a nation's identity by establishing an interpretation of the past. Cultural memory is a term that is also used to describe how societies remember their past through oral and non-oral forms of memorialisation, such as through museums and monuments (Hite et al., 2009). For example, in literature on post-conflict societies, scholars have emphasized the importance of historical memory in order to commemorate and acknowledge victims as valued members of society (Robins, 2011: 97).

The limitations of using theories of memory as a conceptual framework must also be addressed. Scholars have pointed out the difficulty in ensuring that testimonies used in truth commissions aptly reflect the experiences of all victims and that it is not always possible to create one official collective account of the past (Alcalá et al., 2016). First, there is no guarantee that all victims will be able to have their voices heard. The dangers and stigmas of victims giving testimony has been emphasized as a possible reason why victims' voices may be missing from official collective accounts of war. Scholars have noted that victim-centred approaches to establishing historical memory run the risk of institutionalising victim's voices, in what has been labelled as "narrative capital" in order to fit the framework of top-down truth seeking projects (Alcalá et al., 2016:11). Therefore it must be taken into consideration the diverse ways in which individuals and collectives experience and react to conflict (Rowen, 2017; Valderrama et al., 2019). Studies have also highlighted that victim trauma is not a linear process, like the concept of history which can be understood chronologically (Kevers, 2016; Valderrama et al., 2019). Therefore, scholars have highlighted the potential dangers of historical memory which attempts to codify victims' trauma in order to give it coherent meaning (Caruth, 1995). Similarly, victims have also been further marginalised if their stories are not included and accounted for and therefore the high likelihood that historical memory will be contradicted and highly contested.

The following theoretical framework was chosen, as it is the best suited to effectively address the main research aim of this investigation, which is to assess the value of memory-focused sewing initiatives as a reparation measure for victims and how such measures support Colombia's wider peacebuilding agenda. This thesis acknowledges that the evaluation of victim participation in peacebuilding schemes is subjective and may not automatically constitute a form of restorative justice (RJ) for victims. Close attention will also be paid to

the wider social, political and cultural factors that contribute to reparation and peacebuilding strategies in Colombia. Although notions of reconciliation are key to peacebuilding discourse, this thesis will instead examine peacebuilding through the broader lens of RJ. Weber's (2020) most recent academic publication on victim reparation and fieldwork research in Colombia provides an up-to-date and relevant theoretical framework which is applied to this thesis in order to assess the value of sewing initiatives and the developments of RJ measures in Colombia. Aertsen et al.'s, (2011) definition of RJ as a tool for empowerment has been chosen in order to debate the relationship between active participation of victims and the possibility of emotional transformation. Braithwaite's (1996) understanding of RJ as a process that requires the active participation of both victims and perpetrators is used to consider victim-state dynamics and the reasons why the state funds such sewing initiatives. Galtung's peacebuilding theory (1976) will be applied, in order to critically assess the value of reparation measures in relation to the factors that have contributed to the protracted and complex nature of the Colombian armed conflict, namely direct, structural and cultural forms of violence. McCandless' (2020) conception of vertical and horizontal peacebuilding and Lederach's conflict transformation theory (1997) is also used to analyse the relationship between state funding, reparation and victim satisfaction with regards to how *El Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) in Medellín and *El Costurero de La Memoria* (CM) in Bogotá interact with Colombia's wider peacebuilding agenda. The concept of memory is a transversal theme throughout this investigation and theories by Friedman et al., (2019), Hite et al., (2009) and Weedon (2012) are also used to examine the relationship between victim reparation measures and the construction of historical memory.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT

This chapter provides an overview of the Colombian armed conflict and starts with a historical overview of the 20th Century violence in Colombia, followed by a summary of the main armed actors and the dynamics of war on the Colombian population, focussing on gross human rights abuses and internal displacement. To contextualise the first developments of victim-centred reparation programmes and transitional justice measures, the Peace and Justice Law 975/2005 and the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448/2011 are also explained. The establishment of the Historical Memory Group and developments in both top-down and bottom-up memorialisation activities are also presented. The chapter closes by describing Colombia's ongoing quest for peace and the creation of the 2016 Peace Accord.

2.1. The FARC and 52 Years of Armed Conflict

An understanding of the social, geographical and historical context of Colombia provides insight into the factors that have contributed to the duration and complexity of the armed conflict. Colombia is made up of 32 departments, divided by large rural regions, mountain ranges, rivers and the Amazon jungle in the south. The most populated area of the country is the Andean region, home to the capital Bogotá, followed by the Caribbean region in the North. Colombia is an ethnically and culturally diverse country, which dates back to the interactions between Colombian indigenous communities, European settlers and African slaves who were brought over during the colonization of the Americas in the 1950s. The lack of infrastructural development and poor transport links between urban and rural zones has led to a history of social, economic and political marginalisation, particularly of indigenous, peasant and Afro-Colombian communities that live in relative isolation (Sánchez et al., 2019).

The start of the 60 year armed conflict in Colombia can be traced back to the 1940s and the period now known as *La Violencia* which left more than 300,000 dead as a result of a political power struggle between the Conservatives and the Liberals from 1946-1962 following the assassination of Socialist political leader Gaitan (Vega Cantor et al., 2015; Rowen, 2017). The conflict in Colombia is rooted in disputes over uneven wealth distribution and the privatisation of land and natural resources (LeGrand et al., 2017; Rettberg, 2020). According

to the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims (2015), *La Violencia* led to the creation of the left wing guerrilla group FARC in 1964 who defended peasants' livelihood against income loss as a result of the expansion of private companies and businesses for agricultural production (LeGrand et al., 2017). Philosopher Sergio Zubiria believes that the lack of social and agrarian reform led to the protracted nature of the conflict (Amador et al., 2015). In 1961 Carlos Lleras Restrepo gave political status to farmers and rural movements that were organised officially through the National Association of Peasants (ANUC), which aimed to promote rural companies and farms. However, this status was later overturned by the administration of Conservative President Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970-1974) in 1972. Since the turn of the 20th century, profound ideological and political differences have formed a deep-rooted culture of violence as the means to resolving conflict (Porch et al., 2008).

The principal actors in Colombia's armed conflict were the Colombian state, left-wing FARC and far-right paramilitaries, known as the United Self-Defences Forces of Colombia (AUC). FARC had a Marxist - Leninist ideology and sought a revolution in order to claim power. The strategic plan of the FARC was to establish themselves through force in rural areas. This was in order to control cocoa-growing regions and resource rich areas for profit, to strengthen their territorial position and fund their campaign against the government and weaken military capacity. At the peak of the armed conflict in Colombia, 18,000 FARC insurgents controlled up to 40% of the Colombian territory (Portero et al., 2018; Morton, 2012). From 1996 - 1998 FARC specifically targeted large cities such as Bogotá, Cali and Medellín, in order to highlight the way in which the government was unable to guarantee the safety of its citizens and encourage rebellion (Greig, 2019). The ideological motivation behind the armed conflict was diluted by the lucrative incentives to profit from the drug trade which became a way for armed groups to fund the war (Rowen, 2017). By the 2000s, 90% of the world's cocaine was produced and exported from Colombia and in 2015 it was recorded that the drug trade in Colombia made an estimated profit between 150 - 500 million dollars Felter & Renwick, 2017). From 2002 - 2010 President Álvaro Uribe Velez took a hard line approach to guerrilla groups and sought support from the US, who gave over 10 billion dollars' worth of military aid and training (Greig, 2019). This was carried out via the policy known as the Democratic Security and Defence (DSD) plan, which increased the capacity of troops and police units in order to try and improve the security structure of the Colombian government in the war against FARC. As a result it is estimated that during Uribe's first term from 2002 - 2006, FARC went from being an army of 16,000, to only 7,000, kidnaps dropped by 80% and murders dropped by 40% (Felter & Renwick, 2017).

2.2 Victims Caught in the Crossfire

During the internal armed conflict there were many breaches of human rights and international law committed by all parties involved. These including enforced disappearance, child recruitment, kidnapping, massacres, extortion, forced displacement, sex crimes, crimes against humanity and the use of anti-personnel mines (Muñoz, 2018). According to Colombia's Victim's register it has been recorded that since 1985 until November 1st 2017 there have been 8,581,339 victims of the armed conflict (Muñoz 2018:191).

Low-income families, rural, peasant, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and have been worst affected by the armed conflict. Internal displacement in Colombia makes up the largest number of victims in the country, with the majority taking refuge in Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. In 2017, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that there are approximately 7.2 million internally displaced persons (IDP's) in Colombia, the majority recorded from African Colombian and Indigenous communities (IDMC, 2017). Buenaventura in the south-west of the country has the highest rate of IDP's, where in 2013 alone, approximately 33,000 people were displaced from their homes and 22,383 between January and November 2014 (Human Rights Watch, 2015a). Displacement has been mainly attributed to the lack of state presence in areas where paramilitary and FARC attempt to control drug trafficking routes and seize land for the cultivation of illicit drugs such as the coca plant and marijuana (ICMP, n.d). Since 2006 splinter groups from demobilized paramilitaries have been created, known as BACRIM, a Spanish acronym for organised crime groups (Felter & Renwick, 2017). The Urabeños in Buenaventura are known for dismembering rival gang members, extorting money from locals and imposing curfews over the city (Human Rights Watch, 2015b). Large numbers of displaced persons have also been recorded from communities living in resource rich areas where large national and international corporations profit from resource extraction and have become a battleground for illegal resource extraction (Rowen, 2017). Moreover, it is believed that aerial chemical fumigation of illegal crops under Plan Colombia, led to significant internal displacement as many families' were no longer able to grow crops on infertile land and were forced to relocate (Felter & Renwick, 2017).

The city of Medellín in Antioquia has the highest number of victims in the country and became the epicentre of organized crime, drug cartel violence, paramilitary and guerrilla activity (Valderrama et al., 2019). IDMC have estimated that 80% of IDPs live under the poverty line, which has been attributed to two main factors. First, it is believed that those who flee their homes from rural areas do not have the appropriate skills or education level to integrate into the competitive workplace market in larger cities. And secondly, because many IDPs who settle illegally do not receive sanitation or housing support from local

municipalities (IDCM, 2017). The difference in the quality of life and living standards between the rural and urban communities in Colombia, has also hindered access to healthcare and basic services (Sánchez et al., 2019). During a personal interview, Johan Tamayo, programme and project coordinator at the Ministry for Education in Medellín, said:

> Commune 8 received no institutional planning or provisions; no roads, no schools, hospitals or health centres or even public space or anything. People arrived because they needed to have a place to sleep, so the neighbourhood was transformed and occupied by its inhabitants (Johan Tamayo, personal communication, Medellín, 24.02.20).[1]

Tamayo gave some insight into the living conditions for displaced victims living in Commune 8 which has received the second largest number of displaced persons after Commune 13. He estimates that 30,000-50,000 of 160,000 residents living in Commune 8 are victims of forced displacement and believes assisting victims in marginalised communities is an essential part of the peacebuilding process in order to prevent the resurgence of violent conflict.

Civilians make up 80% of the victims of the armed conflict. From 1985-2017, 177,000 civilians and 40,000 armed soldiers died (Amador et al., 2015). For example, Granada, Eastern Antioquia was badly affected by the armed conflict due to its strategic location and connections to Bogotá, Medellín and the Pacific Coast (Romero, 2012). The National Centre for Historical Memory (CMH) has recorded that between 1998 and 2000 the armed conflict left at least 460 dead, 299 disappeared and 10,000 were displaced; a population of 18,000 inhabitants was reduced to 5500 (ASOVIDA, 2019). Between 2000 and 2005, the 4th Brigade of the National Army also carried out counter insurgency operations in Granada which led to many human rights abuses and deaths of civilians (CMH, 2016). In 2016, Colombia's Victims' Unit registered approximately 35,782 direct and indirect victims (CMH, 2016). During 52 years of conflict, landmines killed or injured over 10,000 people, 4,000 of whom were civilians. Victims, usually children or rural farm workers have been permanently disfigured or lost limbs as a result of the landmines. Moreover, between 1998 and 2012 it is estimated that there were nearly 2,000 massacres (Amador et al., 2015). One of the most notable is the Massacre of Trujillo in the Valle de Cauca. Between 1988 and 1994, more than 3,042 people were murdered, tortured and disappeared by either paramilitaries or the Cali Cartel with the complicity of the Colombian army (CMH, 2008; Noticias Caracol, 2018).

Historical gender inequality and gender based violence has been perpetuated by the armed conflict, making women and children disproportionately affected by the war (ICMP, n.d.). In many cases, women are left as heads of households to raise a family on little or no income. As many as 1,000 children were illegally recruited by armed groups (UNICEF, 2016) and the

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[1] From this point onwards, interviews conducted during the research period have been translated by the author from Spanish to English.

National Centre for Historical Memory estimate that more than 50% of 15,076 victims of sexual violence were under the age of 18 (Kahn, 2019). Similarly, over 4,210 unidentified bodies of children have been found in mass graves and there are approximately 14,181 missing children in Colombia (ICMP, n.d.).

Enforced disappearances was a terror tactic used by all actors in the armed conflict in order to instil fear in community residence to comply with armed groups and defend territory from suspected enemies. The Institute for Forensic Medicine, SIRDEC, has reported an estimate of 111,588 missing persons (Haugaard & Bouvier, 2016) while the Government Ombudsperson has officially reported 63,800. More recent figures by scholars are estimated to be around 83,998 (Mila, 2018; ICMP, n.d). Thousands of families live in permanent anguish and uncertainty of not knowing where their family members are, if they are alive, or what happened to them. It is estimated that approximately 10,000 systematic murders of Colombian civilians were committed by the military during the DSD policy from 2002 - 2010, known as the False Positive (FP) scandal (Morán et al., 2013). The FP scandal was uncovered in 2008 when bodies of civilians reported missing in Soacha, Bogotá were found in northern Colombia dressed in guerrilla uniforms. Since then, it has been established by forensic investigations and soldier testimonies that men aged 16-37 from marginalised neighbourhoods or rural areas, including drug abusers, homeless and those with disabilities were duped by the prospect of job opportunities and were then murdered by military brigades. Victims were then dressed up in camouflage outfits with rifles and weaponry to appear as if they were insurgent guerrillas before being photographed. This was done in order to fabricate that the Colombian army was making progress to win the war against FARC, in return for financial bonuses which were given for successful military operations under the DSD policy (Morán et al., 2016). In 2009, 17 possible cases were identified, which led to the dismissal of 27 soldiers (Semana, 2009). By 2015, Human Rights Watch reported that 785 low ranking soldiers had been convicted (Brodzinsky, 2015; El Espectador, 2014). The FP scandal has become an emblematic case in Colombia and has shaped many truth seeking and peacebuilding initiatives carried out by victim associations who demand truth, justice and reparation, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

2.3 Initiating Transitional Justice in Colombia: The Peace and Justice Law 975/2005 and the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448/2011

The Peace and Justice Law 975/2005 and the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448/2011 (Victims Law), underpin current debates around blanket amnesties and approaches to victim reparations and peacebuilding discourse in Colombia. Paramilitary groups were first created in the 1980s by wealthy landowners and business men, in order to try to defend and counter FARC insurgencies (Mouly et al., 2016; Amador et al., 2015). From 1993 - 1994 a

government-sponsored program legalized civilian surveillance groups such as CONVIVIR *(Cooperativas Comunitarias de Vigilancia Rural),* who were given military grade weaponry in order to defend and support the military in rural zones of the country (Kline, 2007). However they were later made illegal but by 1996 a paramilitary group known as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) had established socio-political ties to the government (Amador et al., 2015). Over the course of the armed conflict, paramilitaries became deeply involved in political campaign rigging, corruption, extortion, kidnapping, massacres and murders of those suspected to be sympathisers or associated with the FARC (Porch et al., 2008). Paramilitary groups were also used for economic and personal gain to threaten and murder trade union opponents and displace rural peasants to gain land for exploitation (Porch et al., 2008). Professor Sanabria from the University Tadeo Lozano, explains the effect of paramilitaries on communities:

> The paramilitaries had a distinctive character to the FARC. Paramilitaries changed our social codes of conduct and controlled society by stripping and suppressing cultural forms of expression like Bullerengue and Cumbia. They controlled how people acted and even prohibited certain ways of dressing (Carlos Eduardo Sanabria, personal communication, Bogotá, 03.02.20).

Sanabria emphasizes that the armed conflict has inflicted not only physical harm, but also deliberately damaged social and cultural bonds. Paramilitaries, FARC and other armed groups would use violence to impose control and thus many victims lived in silence and did not report crimes through fear of the resurgence of violence (Alcalá et al., 2016).

The Peace and Justice Law was passed by President Uribe in 2005 and led to the creation of the country's first transitional justice framework for the demobilization of the AUC paramilitary group. Under this law, paramilitaries would demobilize and reintegrate into society and alternative punishments of 5-8 year sentences were given to paramilitaries who gave open confessions and complied with the state in court hearings (Rowen, 2017). The aim of demobilization was to strengthen the rule of law of the government, use paramilitary intelligence to defeat FARC and locate and return hostage victims (Porch et al., 2008). Negotiations for demobilization were also the result of military pressure on the government to give paramilitaries an opportunity for an exit strategy for their involvement in the armed conflict. Similarly, U.S. rhetoric on the "War on Terror," demanded that the Colombian state diminish the power of armed groups and strengthen the rule of law (Porch et al., 2008).

However, the Peace and Justice Law also serves to demonstrate as an example of how transitional justice measures have hindered victim's attempts for truth, justice and reparation as a result of impunity and lack of state accountability. Victims have been excluded and marginalised from obtaining reparation; the Peace and Justice Law initially defined victims as those affected after 1985 which excluded those involved in the M19 Palace

of Justice, victims of the United Patriotic Front and victims of drug trafficking, preventing many from accessing support (Rowen, 2017). Under the Peace and Justice Law, victims were only able to access reparations when perpetrators had been convicted (Friedman et al., 2019). Colombian civil society, NGO's and the international community were the most outspoken critics of the Peace and Justice Law as it was believed that gave liberal amnesty to the majority of paramilitaries(Porch et al., 2008: 521). In 2005, the New York Times brandished the law as "Impunity for Mass Murderers, Terrorists and Major Cocaine Traffickers," as many felt that the law would allow paramilitaries to continue drug trafficking and avoid extradition to the U.S. (New York Times, 2005). Similarly, Human Rights Watch called it "a deeply flawed government demobilization process" (Human Rights Watch, 2020). From 2005 - 2009 it was estimated that there was an impunity rate of 95% of homicides (Legrand et al., 2017). By March 2018, it was recorded that 215 sentences had been handed out and of 30,000 demobilized paramilitaries, only 4,000 gave open confessions in order to get reduced sentences (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Scholars believe that unprosecuted crimes and impunity is due to the lack of infrastructure of the judicial system to carry out its duty to sentence perpetrators, as well as insufficient incentive for paramilitaries to confess their crimes (Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017). The dilemma of peace vs justice has permeated into current debates around victim's rights and has shaped many bottom-up peacebuilding initiatives.

The Peace and Justice Law was reinforced by the Victims Law, passed in 2011 by President Santos, in line with the 2005 UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation (Firchow, 2017:318). It was felt by victims and civil society groups that the Peace and Justice Law was "for the perpetrators" and never "for the victims" (Friedman et al., 2019: 314). The Victims' Unit (*Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*), aimed to compensate and support victims via assistance and reparation scheme.[2] The Victims Law redefined the previous definition of victimhood to include those affected by acts committed by the military and the state (Firchow, 2017). Victims were split up into 12 categories of victimization and reparations were given both individually and collectively through immediate humanitarian aid, social service schemes and projects, financial aid and legal support (Firchow, 2017). The law also included agricultural and social transformation projects, as well as exceptions from military service for victims of the conflict (Weber, 2020; Rowen, 2017). By 2015, Colombia's Victims' unit and reparation system had recognised 473,257 victims and made payments to 1,184,418 people (Dixon, 2016: 94).

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[2] For more information, view: *Ley de Victimas y Restitucion de Tierras* Government Document. Available From:
http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/caminosParaLaMemoria/descargables/ley1448.pdf

2.4 The Mobilization of Memory as Victim Reparation and Peacebuilding Tools

The National Centre of Historical Memory (CMH), (known today as the Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation) was established in 2011 in Bogotá and officially opened in 2012, as a response to claims that the Victims Law did not sufficiently repair victims. It was felt that historical disempowerment of socially and economically marginalised members of society such as peasants, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities meant that their voices and experiences of conflict had been neglected. This point was reinforced during an interview with Jorge Pulecio, Colombian Truth Commission advisor who says, "The narrative of the Colombian nation is a Eurocentric and Christian one that has ended up neglecting the diverse nature of the Colombian people" (Jorge Pulecio, personal communication, Bogotá, 27.02.20). He highlights the way in which the credibility of many victims' stories have been downplayed due to their social class. Article 56 of law 975 established the importance of historical memory and collective rights to memory, stating that "Knowledge of the history, development and consequences of the actions of armed groups outside the law should be maintained through adequate procedures, in fulfilment of the duty of the preservation of the historical memory which corresponds to the state" (Isa, 2008: 9). Historical memory is considered by the International Centre for Transitional Justice to be of crucial importance to victims of armed conflict, in order to ensure victims are recognised and to develop collective understanding of the effects of conflict, who is responsible and how national reconciliation can be achieved (LeGrand et al., 2017; Londoño et al., 2019).

The National Centre of Historical Memory aims to repair the harm caused to victims of the conflict through symbolic means by educating and promoting the defence of human rights through temporary museum exhibitions and workshops, in line with the new measures adopted under the Justice and Peace Law 975/05 (Kahn, 2019). The Historical Memory Group (GMH) has been mandated to create various reports including the *Basta Ya!* Report in 2011 that aimed to establish and explain the different memories and narratives of victims of the armed conflict (CNRR, 2013). Researchers, women's associations, academics, professors and civil society contributed to the creation of the final report which was published in 2013 (Alcalá et al., 2016). However, academics who participated in the creation of the *Basta Ya!* Report, such as Alcala et al., (2016) highlighted the difficulty of choosing whose voices would be prioritised and the issue of conflicting narratives. It was found that many victims did not want to participate in truth seeking projects for fear of resurgence violence or retaliation from armed groups such as BACRIM, paramilitaries and drug traffickers. Stigmas around acts of victimization such as sexual assault has meant that many victims have not come forward about their experiences (Kahn, 2019). This was evident in the final report as victims' testimonies were only the focus of two chapters (Alcalá et al., 2016). This highlights the possible limitations of top-down victim-centred approaches to historical memory and restorative practices, despite the inclusion of various civil society groups and researchers.

Casa de la Memoria (House of Memory) in Medellín is another example of a state institution that has taken a victim centred approach to the construction of historical memory. *Casa de la Memoria* was opened in 2013 and was set up by the Victim Attention and Reparation Municipal Unit via funding from the Mayor's office of Medellín (Valderrama et al., 2019). The museum invites citizens to visit and participate in workshops and contribute personal experiences for the creation of exhibitions in order to reconstruct memories of the armed conflict (Valderrama et al., 2019). In line with article 13.1 of the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), the Colombian state is under the obligation to guarantee the right to freedom of expression (Gallego, 2019). Therefore, both the National Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá (formerly known as the National Centre of Historical Memory) and the House of Memory in Medellín have ensured safe spaces for civil society groups such as indigenous and Afro Colombian organizations and victims associations. Access to spaces for communication and dialogue are considered to be an important aspect of the peacebuilding process in order to allow plural experiences and memories to be shared.

Memory projects have been used as a non-official reparation and peacebuilding tools by victim associations and grassroots movements to help victims deal with the effects of war. For example, as a response to violence in Granada in Eastern Antioquia local residents set up the Association of Victims from Granada (ASOVIDA) which made the *Salón de Nunca Más* (Hall of Never Again) in 2009. The project displays victims' testimonies and photographs which has helped the town explore their past and commemorate the death of loved ones or missing relatives (CNRR, 2009).

Creative expressions such as art, photography, textiles and film have been used as both memorialization activities and a way to help local communities deal with the effects and experiences of the armed conflict. Memory-focused sewing initiatives have become a widespread practice across Colombia for victims (Pérez-Bustos, 2016). For example, the Weavers of Mampuján explore their historic ties to the African slave trade, enforced disappearance and displacement (Ávila, 2019). In the year 2000, more than 245 families were displaced by paramilitaries and in 2003 were relocated to a new rural area now known as *Nuevo Mampuján* or *Mampujancito* (CNRR, 2009; Semana, 2018). According to GMH, "Quilting groups have created spaces where victims can express their pain and address the trauma caused by violence through artistic means" (CNRR, 2009: 43).[3] The women of Mampuján have used sewing as a mechanism to transform their silenced voices and have inspired many other victim-centred approaches to peacebuilding through memory-focused sewing initiatives. These include: *El Costurero de Tejedoras por la Memoria de Sonsón*, *Tejedores de Historias, Taller de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación* and *El Costurero de la*

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[3] From this point onwards, original quotes from academic journals and online resources have been translated by the author from Spanish to English.

Universidad Minuto de Dios (Londoño et al., 2019; Sánchez-Aldana et al., 2019; Pérez-Bustos, 2016).

Rutas del Conflicto is another example of a bottom-up memory initiative that explores the events of the armed conflict from the voice of the survivors.[4] The initiative was set up in 2014 in Bogotá and is run by a group of 20 journalists who have created an innovative online multimedia archive of first-hand victims' testimonies of enforced disappearance and community resistance. A database of massacres across Colombia since 1982 has also been compiled. In a personal interview with journalist and project member Juan Gómez, he said:

> The platform has been developed as an information channel to bridge the gap between the little known experiences of rural victims who haven't been able to participate in the national peacebuilding debate, with those in urban parts of Colombia who have access to technologies but know little about the experiences and realities that rural communities have lived through (Juan Gómez, personal communication, Bogotá, 31.01.20).

Gómez explains that *Rutas del Conflicto* relies on the active citizen participation of victims, perpetrators and the wider community and believes that documenting victims' experiences of conflict is an important aspect of the peacebuilding process, in order to understand the root causes of conflict and ensure victims' experiences are known and commemorated.

2.5 Colombia's Ongoing Quest for Peace

Looking at previous peace negotiations between the Colombian government and rebel groups helps to understand how the 2016 peace agreement was a significant milestone for the country, but also the fragility and uncertainty of durable peace in present day Colombia and the risk still posed to victims and those in rural and poor communities. There have been various peace negotiations that have failed over the years. In 1984 FARC negotiated with President Betancur's government, demobilized and merged with the Colombian Communist Party which then became known as the United Patriotic Front (Rowen, 2017). However, from the mid-1980s to the early-1990s, more than 3,000 people were murdered by paramilitaries and other armed groups which led to FARC taking up their arms again (Portero et al., 2018). Similarly, in 1991 peace negotiations took place in Mexico and Venezuela between FARC, the ELN and the government of Colombian President Gaviria. However, a ceasefire was never established and the negotiations fell through when a government official was kidnapped and murdered (Greig, 2019). In 1998, during the administration of President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) negotiations between FARC and the government occurred, named the *El Caguan* peace process. The negotiations were based on 12 main points and 48 sub issues

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[4] For more information, view: *Rutas del Conflicto* Website
https://rutasdelconflicto.com/especiales/acuatenientes/#contenido

(Greig, 2019). However, this negotiation also broke down in 2002 due to lack of trust and failure to agree on the wide and complex set of negotiations, as well as attacks by FARC on military bases and the hijacking of an aeroplane (Portero et al., 2018).

The business sector, religious groups, international community and civil society have all played crucial roles in supporting Colombia's quest for peace. For example in 1997, 10 million Colombians voted in favour of peace negotiations through the Citizen Mandate for Peace (Greig, 2019). Similarly in 1999, 2.5 million Colombians participated in marches which campaigned for the end of the armed conflict (Greig, 2019). In 2009 the Corporation for the Development & Peace of the Valle de Cauca was set up by local businesses and bottom-up organizations such as the Pacific Route of Women and Network of Universities for Peace and Coexistence were created (Greig, 2019). Peace negotiations finally began in 2013, when both the government and FARC signed a document which agreed that a democratic and organized country was necessary in order to build stable and durable peace (Muños, 2018).

The peace process in Colombia can be understood as a political negotiation that aimed to end more than 52 years of armed conflict and transform FARC into a legitimate political party (Muñoz, 2018; Firchow, 2017). The development of the most recent peace accord (2016) between FARC and the government is explained below, as it provides insight into the participation of victims and civil society in the peacebuilding process and measures that will further strengthen the rights of victims for reparation, truth and justice. The accord was named A General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace. It was negotiated by President Santos, former Vice President Humberto de la Calle, and a team of selected government commissioners and representatives from the business sector, military and police, and a delegation of FARC members. Victim involvement in the creation of the 2016 peace agreement included the participation of the LGBTQ+ community, peasants, indigenous groups and Afro Colombians. The United Nations facilitated the creation of victim roundtables in which 24,000 victims participated (Strasser, 2015). Moreover, 5 sessions made up of 12 victims each were also created to try and ensure that their voices and expectations were considered during the decision making process (Portero et al., 2018). Gender based violence women's organisations such as *Corporación Sisma Mujer* participated in the negotiations (Kahn, 2019). 6 concise points were agreed upon which included agrarian reform, inclusive political participation, drug trafficking, a referendum in the form of a plebiscite, rights for victims and demobilization of FARC (Rowen, 2017). The peace agreement also established the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PEDET) a structural and social development programme implemented in 16 territories or 170 municipalities worst affected by the conflict. The agreement stated that FARC had to stop drug trafficking and growing illicit crops in exchange for crop substitution programmes (Greig, 2019). Point 5 of the

agreement specifically outlines and reinforces the rights and guarantees for victims for acknowledgment, truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition.[5]

However, the peace agreement has made Colombia an extremely polarized country, both politically and socially and underpin current tensions in the peacebuilding process. Many felt that the peace agreement had made sentences too lenient for perpetrators and deemed it necessary for FARC members to be incarcerated (Felter & Renwick, 2017). Ex-President Uribe was Colombia's most outspoken opposer, arguing that it was a "framework for impunity for terrorism" (Rowen, 2017: 111). In a poll carried out in 2015, only 29% of Colombians believed the peace process to be credible (Rowen, 2017). The widespread dissatisfaction with the transitional justice measures agreed in the peace process was confirmed when it was rejected by Colombians during the referendum held on October 2, 2016 (Rowen, 2017). The agreement was later adjusted and approved by both Congress and Senate and passed on 26 November 2016 in Cartagena and was highly praised by the international community as a model example of a victim-centred approach to peacebuilding (Portero et al., 2018; Strasser, 2015; The Guardian, 2015).

The framework that was created in the final agreement can be understood as a transitional justice (TJ) mechanism which provided an alternative system for a political transition that put victims at the centre of the peacebuilding process. Three main institutional bodies were created as a result. According to human rights defender, lawyer and assistant creator of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, Diego Martínez believes that these new institutional bodies are, "a model of justice that is designed to investigate, sanction and clarify the truth" (Diego Martínez, personal communication, Bogotá, 05.02.20). He considers the TJ measures are the most appropriate in order to establish the truth for victims and families, help FARC to reintegrate back into society and encourage social cohesion, with the aim of fostering lasting peace, reconciliation and ensuring non repetition.

The first TJ institutional body is the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), an extrajudicial court system especially established to deal with crimes committed by both the state and guerrilla during the armed conflict. Emblematic and the most severe crimes would be prioritised by the JEP and sentences would be handed out for those with most responsibility. Alternative sanctions capped at 5-8 years would be given to those who admitted their crimes and for certain crimes such as kidnapping. According to Paola Acosta, national corporation specialist at the JEP, approximately 914 perpetrators have come forward to give voluntary accounts (Paola Acosta, personal communication, 07.02.20). However, war crimes such as crimes against humanity and genocide required imprisonment, in line with international human

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[5] For more information, view: Point 5 of the 2016 Peace Agreement. Available From:
http://es.presidencia.gov.co/Documents/Punto5.pdf

rights standards and the Rome Statute, which Colombia signed in 1999 (Rowen, 2017). Moreover, a 20 year sentence would be given to those if they did not tell the truth and were found guilty. By January 2020, the JEP had opened 7 cases into the worst crimes committed during the armed conflict: 01, FARC Kidnappings; 02, Prioritization of the regions of Tumaco, Ricaurte and Barbacoas (Nariño) that were heavily affected by the conflict; 03, False Positives cases; 04, Prioritization of the region of Urabá; 05, Prioritization of municipalities in Cauca; 06, victimization of the Patriotic Union (a leftist Colombian political party); and 07, the recruitment and use of minors during the armed conflict (CNMH, 2016b).

The second institutional body is the Commission of the Search of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition of the Past, which was established by Decree 588 and passed on April 5, 2017.[6] Previous commissions had been created in Colombia to explain and investigate cycles of violence. However, according to scholars the victims' interests were not considered in their creation and focused little on the effects of the armed conflict on victims (Alcalá et al, 2016). Thus the Commission for the Search of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition of the Past was the first to put victims at the centre of the investigation. Since the peace agreement was signed, victims have presented their testimonies to the commission which has a three year mandate and will be published in an official document in 2022.

The third institutional body is the Unit for Missing Persons (UPBD)[7] which alongside the truth commission, hold the primary role of searching for the truth and locating the disappeared. The International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) are playing a crucial role in the search for missing persons in Colombia by providing scientific equipment and specialist assistance to the Colombian government. The UPBD has a 20 year mandate and works closely with victim associations and family members in order to try and find missing loved ones. The search for missing persons is currently underway: in December 2019 it was thought that more than 50 bodies of victims known as False Positives were uncovered in the department of Antioquia (El Tiempo, 2019).

The Colombian Confederation of Non-governmental Organizations (CCONG) and social movements have been the driving force behind peacebuilding efforts and policy making in recent years (Aertsen et al., 2011). The CCONG has established 4 central strategies for building peace in Colombia over the next 15 years (CCONG, 2016). Firstly, CCONG have put emphasis on the value of using traditional and cultural practices to explore collective experiences, knowledge and methodologies and develop human capacities in order to help

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[6] For more information, view: The Commission of the Search of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition of the Past 2019 Development Report.
Available From: https://comisiondelaverdad.co/images/InformeGestion_05082019.pdf
[7] For more information, view: The Unit for Missing Persons (UPBD) Website. Available From: https://www.ubpdbusquedadesaparecidos.co/

transform society's behaviour and beliefs as well as encourage peaceful coexistence. Second, they closely monitor the implementation of the peace agreement in order to ensure that citizens have access to information on its progress. The CCONG reinforces that this is a necessity in order to encourage active engagement and trust by citizens. Third, civil society considers that more consideration should be paid to ensure the inclusion of territories in the decision making process. Fourth, they seek to reinforce collective action strategies in order to demand social and cultural rights of Colombian citizens to ensure that public policy encourages and protects the social and political rights of Colombians.

In more recent years it has been established that many victims' basic needs have still not been met by the Victims Law and the current implementation of the peace process.[8] Although the Victims Law and point 5 of the 2016 peace agreement established victims' rights, it has been reported that on a domestic level, the Victims Unit has been overwhelmed and cannot deal with the sheer scale and number of victims eligible for reparation (Gallego, 2019). In 2017 it was estimated that 4.9 million Colombians were eligible for support, but only 10% or 500,000 victims had received compensation (IDMC, 2017). Issues over the implementation of land restitution have also been noted by the international community. According to one study, more than 360,000 Colombians are eligible for the land restitution programme, however, only 112,177 applications had been submitted by April 2018 (Zulver, 2018). In an interview with Cora Berner, associate expert on gender and peacebuilding from the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) institute, Berner explained the challenges for ensuring participation of victims from marginalised communities:

> Most of the transitional justice systems are supposed to have representatives working in regional offices, but sometimes these aren't in place yet so there's people who are in rural areas [who] don't even get the information of their right to reparation and compensation (Cora Berner, personal communication, Bogotá, 04.02.20).

Berner emphasizes that the foundations, infrastructure and institutional bodies needed to implement transitional justice in Colombia are still in the process of being created and thus the discrepancy between what was happening on a national level, and the implementation and progress on a regional and local level. A study carried out by researchers in El Saldo and Don Gabriel in 2017 reported confusion and discrepancies amongst the communities over eligibility requirements and understanding their basic human rights as victims which has left many without governmental support (Firchow, 2017). Research has found that more education on victim rights needs to be carried out and that reparation through compensation is not sufficient to help communities overcome the harm caused by armed conflict.

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[8] For more information, view: *Las Víctimas de la "Ley de Víctimas".* Available From: http://www.indepaz.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Punto-de-Encuentro-55-Las-vi%CC%81ctimas-de-la-ley-de-victimas-.pdf

CHAPTER 3

NEEDLE, THREAD AND MEMORIES OF ARMED CONFLICT: SEWING INITIATIVES AS A VICTIM REPARATION MEASURE

This chapter will examine how memory-focused sewing projects have been used as a peacebuilding tool and a victim reparation measure for victims and aims to understand their restorative value. First, sewing as a restorative practice will be examined by looking at the state-funded *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM) and a sewing initiative held by the MAFAPO, collective, both held in Bogotá. Section 2 observes how *El Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) sewing initiative in Medellín and the CM support Colombia's peacebuilding agenda. In both sections, the construction of collective and historical memory is a transversal theme that underpins both sections.

3.1 El Costurero de la Memoria: A State-funded Sewing Initiative

The sewing project *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM), also known as *El Costurero de la Memoria: Kilómetros de Vida y de Memoria,* is an example of a state-funded reparation initiative for victims of the armed conflict.[9] The CM was first set up in Bogotá in 2007 under *La Mesa de los Chanchiros* initiative, a programme led by victim support groups and human rights organizations including *La Fundación Manuel Cepeda Vargas,* which carried out memory-focused initiatives with victims of the armed conflict (Cuevas, 2016). After the National Centre for Historical Memory (CMH) was opened in Bogotá 2012, *La Mesa de Los Chanchiros* secured funding for its projects as part of the state's obligation to fulfil the Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448/2011 and became a permanent organization at the CMH, known today as the Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation (CMPR) in Bogotá. The initiative is open to victims and members of the local community to meet twice a week to explore memories of the armed conflict by using needles, threads and fabrics. CM has created a community environment which brings together a diverse range of victims, institutions and civil society groups. During an observation of a workshop held by CM, participants included the Mothers of Soacha (MAFAPO), Families of The Palace of Justice, members of MOVICE (Movement of Victims of State Crimes) and victims of forced displacement. Reparation

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measures are defined by Weber (2020) as consisting of five key pillars: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Government funding of the CM project is a symbolic form of compensation for victims and purportedly demonstrates official state commitment to provide redress to victims by ensuring that individual and collective experiences of conflict can be explored, shared and commemorated.

El Costurero de la Memoria (CM) holds a restorative value for victims by illuminating individual truths and helping to legitimize and recuperate silenced voices. Sewing is a familiar, everyday cultural practice for many and functions as an alternative and creative form of expression. Ávila notes, "The importance of considering other ways to express memories that, being inscribed in the body, may not be verbally articulated" (Ávila, 2019:24). The scholar acknowledges how creative tools such as sewing can provide victims with an alternative method to express themselves.

Figure 1. Photo taken during an observation of *El Costurero de la Memoria* sewing initiative at the Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá. (February 2020).

In figure 1, the quilt on the left pictures four large yellow flowers with statements of love and loss written on each petal. Victims appear to be lying on the floor with military figures standing over them. Without verbal explanation, I was able to see that the quilt was a visual testimony of the lives of young male victims who had been murdered by the military, in what

is known as the False Positive (FP) case. The quilts demonstrates how victims interpret and interact with their past in different ways and also that what each participant considers worth recording differs. In a personal interview, Castillo said, "We cannot forget personal stories because we are the only ones who can do it for our loved ones… sewing allows us to construct our own truths" (Jaqueline Castillo, personal communication, Bogotá, 20.01.20). For Castillo, the CM sewing initiative provides a personalised and tangible representation of the memory of her brother, Jaime who disappeared from Bogotá and was later found at a mass burial site in the north of Santander together with other victims from the municipality of Soacha. In an interview, Verónica González, Human rights lawyer and researcher, from *Casa de la Memoria* Museum in Medellín, said, "Memory fulfils three fundamental guarantees for victims; satisfy, repair and helps them to seek non-repetition" (Verónica González, personal communication, Medellín, 25.02.20). In González's view, memory acts as a symbolic form of reparation through collective remembering. In line with Weber's (2020) 5 key pillars of reparation, sewing initiatives are a restorative practice that has helped to humanize and reinstall dignity to families and victims by providing marginalised groups with a space where they can express their pain and explore their experiences

The creative medium of sewing permits victims to narrate their testimonies from their own point of view; in this way *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM) initiative is a RJ measure by establishing both individual and common truths of victims' experiences of conflict. During an observation of a CM workshop*,* I observed a range of needlework themes: one woman stitched a quilt that had the words "hope" and "peace" written across it, whilst another recreated a nostalgic image of the crops she used to grow on her land in Chocó, before she was displaced to Bogotá. The quilts transform personal experiences into visual testimonies. According to Mónica Álvarez Aguirre who works with the Colombian Network of Places of Memory and carries out workshops with the MAFAPO collective:

> Quilts allow victims to understand the relationship between individual, collective and historical circles of memory. It gives victims the ability to establish relationships between their own personal memories with those of others and recognize the way they all knit together" (Mónica Álvarez Aguirre, personal communication, Bogotá, 12.02.20).

Álvarez Aguirre believes memory-focused sewing initiatives can help establish common experiences between victims, by enabling them to contextualise their memories within a broader cultural context. According to Weedon (2012), collective memory helps "individuals identify and give them a sense of history, place and belonging" (Weedon et al, 2012: 143). Positive forms of identification can be seen to reinforce collective truths. In light of this, sewing initiatives such as CM not only help to preserve and document first-hand accounts of conflict but hold a restorative value for victims by helping to visually demonstrate both the hybridity and plurality of memories of the Colombian armed conflict.

El Costurero de la Memoria (CM) helps to restore a sense of security to victims and improve their wellbeing, by sharing their experiences with others and thus assisting victims in their rehabilitation which is a key pillar of reparation measures (Weber, 2020). For example, during an observation at the CM, I was able to see that the initiative encourages teamwork; quilts are often created in a collaborative fashion over a period of months and members assist each other with cutting, while others draw shapes and help choose fabrics. Participants from CM have noted the emotional relief that sewing projects have provided. For example Doris Tejada Castañeda, a participant from the CM stated, "With each stitch I feel the pain, but I also remember the beautiful moments I spent with my son, and that cushions my grief" (Semana, 2017). Castañeda's son, Óscar Alexander was assassinated by the Colombian military in January 2008. Her comments reveal how the reconstruction of memories through sewing projects has a therapeutic nature and functions as a coping mechanism. According to Londoño et al., (2019) "The narrative process of a life story involves an expression of the way in which the person perceives and processes internally their experience and their own perception of their place in the world" (Londoño, 2017: 104). The scholar believes that creative processes can be used to explore previous experiences to help victims understand the causes of their emotions.

The collective process of remembering has created a network of mutual support with others who are seeking redress from harms caused by the armed conflict. Juan Gómez, from *Rutas del Conflicto,* commented, "Memory processes can help victims rebuild their lives through symbolic narration which, from what I have seen, can be therapeutic for victims" (Juan Gómez, personal communication, Bogotá, 31.01.20). Therefore, the restorative value of CM workshops can also be found in the creative process of designing and assembling the quilt in a community setting, rather than solely in the outcome of what is created. Research by Kevers et al., (2016) presents the lasting effects of war-related violence on victims' health, such as anxiety, trauma-related memories, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. According to Bolitho, "Restorative justice is a catalyst for the kind of mental reshuffling needed to accommodate the crime event and its aftermath... into a manageable form that enables the re-establishment of some form of wellbeing" (Bolitho, 2017:234). The scholar indicates the value of memory as a RJ tool which can help address the emotional impact of crime. In line with this point of view, the sewing project here can be understood as a restorative practice that in many cases has helped address the psychological effects of war through assistance, support and solidarity and is a holistic approach to victim reparation.

Figure 2. Community workshop held by El Costurero de la Memoria at the Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá (June 2019).[10]

El Costurero de la Memoria (CM) can be understood as a restorative justice (RJ) measure that has helped to raise awareness amongst intergenerational audiences of the experiences of victims from both rural and urban areas. Members of the CM have used their quilts as a means to explain and narrate their stories to others during visits to schools and universities in Bogotá, as well as during workshops with the local community. The location of the CM inside the CMPR, enables visitors passing through the museum to enter into the workshop where they are encouraged to engage with the work of the CM. Whilst I was at the CM I learnt that victims were in the process of creating sections of the quilt that would be sewn together to create one long enough to cover the Palace of Justice in September 2020. Virgelina explained that public initiatives led by participants of the CM actively seek to publicise personal experiences of the armed conflict in order to encourage respect for human rights, with the aim of establishing durable peace and non-repetition. Research by Friedman et al. (2019) on the role of RJ and reparations in post-conflict Colombia argues that memorials play an important part in RJ measures by encouraging sensibility towards victims' experiences. Friedman et al. (2019) says memorialising initiatives can "lead to mutual understanding about the past among conflicting groups, which will help (re)build positive intergroup relationships and a common national identity" (Friedman, 2019: 308). The

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[10] Retrieved From: The Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation:
http://experiencias.centromemoria.gov.co/costurero-de-la-memoria-kilometros-de-vida-y-de-memoria/

scholar makes links between memorialising initiatives with the notion of citizenship, which can help to reconcile victims and the wider community and make victims feel like a valued member of society. Moreover, Hite et al., believe that "Commemorations can become vital spaces for societal soul-searching, not just about the past, but also about the present and future" (Hite et al., 2009: 379). The scholars believe that collective remembering helps to build peaceful realities in post-conflict settings. In light of this, the CM initiative aim to use their quilts to establish a consensus on the past which is pursued as a symbol of hope for a better future. In line with both Hite et al., (2009) and Friedman et al.'s (2019) beliefs, educational encounters and public displays of quilts are a restorative practice by fostering empathy and compassion as each participant's experience is integrated into a shared history. Sewing projects therefore help in the reconstruction of local, regional and national history and establish that there isn't just one official story or narrative of the past, but a multitude of diverse experiences.

3.2 Sewing as a Tool for Victim Empowerment

Sewing workshops have empowered victims to speak out about their experiences, in line with Braithwaite's (1996) definition of RJ as an empowering process that seeks to restore what has been lost by a victim, such as their confidence and sense of security. Upon arrival in Colombia, I contacted Jaqueline Castillo, representative from MAFAPO (Mothers of False Positives) and an active participant at various victim-centred initiatives across Bogotá. I was invited by Castillo to observe one of MAFAPO's weekly reunions held at the INDEPAZ office in Bogotá. MAFAPO formed in 2008, when the False Positive scandal was uncovered and currently has 14 members. The organisation has been awarded financial support from Colombian NGO's such as INDEPAZ, the Colombian Truth Commission and the international community, which has enabled MAFAPO members to continue their work as a social collective. During the observation I learnt that participants were preparing to present handmade quilts to communities and towns across Colombia in order to encourage others to come forward and speak out about their personal experiences of enforced disappearance. During this particular session, MAFAPO members took it in turns to stand in front of the collective and present handmade quilts that depicted memories of loved ones disappeared and how it made them feel. According to Castillo:

> We are practicing presentations of our quilts so that we can go with confidence to other parts of Colombia and empower others who have not denounced crimes. We are also going to give support to victims in other parts that have not done this process yet (Jaqueline Castillo, personal communication, Bogotá, 20.01.20).

Castillo's comment reveals the value that victims place on the use of memory for mobilization which has enabled victims to speak about their experiences. Similarly, Milena Cardenas, a participant of *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM) whose daughter went missing during the Palace of Justice siege in 1985 commented, "There were victimizing acts, but from there we gained strength and became leaders. We will continue to fight for our victims" (Sepúlveda, 2018). Cardenas' comment reveals how she has regained confidence and developed leadership skills. Collective experiences of loss and pain have become the driving force behind the CM and MAFAPO members' demands for their rights to reparation be better protected. Aertsen et al., (2011) proposes that "Feelings of powerlessness experienced as a consequence of the criminal act must be addressed in order to achieve reparation" (Aertsen et al, 2011: 8). The scholar believes that encouraging victims to move from passive to active subjects can be empowering. Both the CM and the MAFAPO sewing initiatives have enabled victims to channel adversity into a pedagogical process which has helped participants to negotiate victimhood: victims' perception of their situation is challenged and instead they see themselves as active agents of change. Therefore, in line with both Braithwaite (1996) and Aertsen et al's (2011) discourse, memory-focused sewing initiatives are a RJ measure by developing the self-value and self-esteem of victims through which victims' voice and agency can be realised.
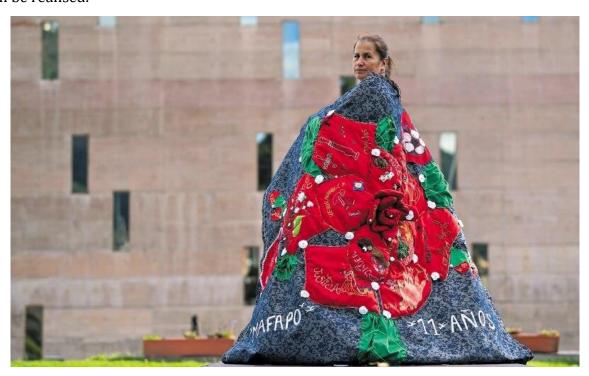

Figure 3. Jaqueline Castillo stands with a quilt made by members of the MAFAPO collective at *El Costurero de la Memoria* in Bogotá (June 2019).[11]

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[11] Retrieved From: El Espectador newspaper: https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/pais/es-como-si-se-tratara-de-una-pesadilla-que-regresa-representante-de-las-madres-de-soacha-articulo-864934/

Memory-focused sewing initiatives have empowered many victims to collectively mobilize to demand their rights truth, justice and reparation. The National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR) have stated, "Spaces where women explore memories can be used to make political claims through which they seek to influence decision-making that affects them, as well as the formation of public policies that are aimed at comprehensive reparation" (CNRR, 2009: 80). In an open letter to the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition in 2017, MAFAPO states that memory projects "not only serve as a way to narrate what has happened to us, but demonstrate that we know our rights" (INDEPAZ, 2017). Creating quilts can be understood as a symbol of resistance. The work of CM and MAFAPO closely follows the Colombian Confederation of Non-governmental Organizations' (CCONG) agenda which views collective action strategies as a crucial component that can help strengthen victims' demands for truth, justice and reparation. Whilst not within the scope of this thesis, the CM and MAFAPO sewing initiatives are used as a subtle form of activism and can be considered part of the evolving worldwide practice of feminist textile activism (Sánchez-Aldana et al., 2019; Minahan et al., 2007).

Public initiatives and mobilization led by the CM and MAFAPO can be understood as a symbolic demand for the state to take action and guarantee victims' rights to non-repetition, defined as one of the 5 key pillars of reparation measures for victims, according to Weber (2020). During my research period I was able to see a recurrent theme in the participants' quilts: alongside commemorations to missing or dead relatives and nostalgic expressions of victims' rural homes, were demands for truth and justice, in particular of victims of state crimes and enforced disappearance. The CM and MAFAPO have carried out various public displays of their quilts that have been used as a means to protest. For example, on International Human Rights day in December 2018 members of the CM hung various quilts from the windows of the Special Jurisdiction of Peace (JEP) in Bogotá, which had the words "Victims want justice" written across them (Sepúlveda, 2018). The quilts recreated lived experiences of victims from Putumayo, Bolivar, Cundinamarca, Santander and Antioquia, with the aim of denouncing state crimes. Journalist Juan Gómez from *Rutas del Conflicto,* commented:

> The disappearance of a loved one is almost an invisible loss. In many cases there isn't even a photo. So what is the one thing that proves you have a missing family member? Memory. Talking about them out loud makes them real again (Juan Gómez, personal communication, Bogotá, 31.01.20).

In Gómez' view, memory initiatives enable victims to assert that what has happened to them is real. Many victims of the armed conflict, (in particular in the case of forced disappearance and state terror), have been re-victimized by the absence and slow implementation of judicial proceedings and official forms of reparation. MAFAPO are an example of a victim

organization that are using quilts as a means to express themselves and are actively seeking to transform the Colombian justice system.

Establishing the truth is an essential aspect of reparation for victims. Many high ranking generals and military personnel have still not acknowledged their crimes during the armed conflict or been prosecuted and therefore victims have been denied official acknowledgement of their suffering. In February 2020, General Mario Montoya, together with other military personnel implicated in the FP scandal, presented open testimonies to 15 JEP judicial officials and 41 victims including those from MAFAPO, MOVICE (Movement of Victims of State Crimes). According to Jorge Pulecio from the Colombian Truth Commission, "To forgive, the majority of people need to know what happened" (Jorge Pulecio, personal communication, Bogotá, 27.02.20). He explains that for many of these families, knowing the truth about what happened to loved ones and where their bodies are, as well as being given guarantees that such crimes will not be repeated, is considered by many to be the most significant and cathartic form of reparation. According to Roht-Arriaza et al., "Truth-telling" followed by neither reparations nor prosecutions seemed to make victims' accounts meaningless... Only by interweaving, sequencing and accommodating multiple pathways to justice could some kind of larger justice in fact emerge" (Roht-Arriaza et al., 2006: 8). The scholars summarise that decisive action must be taken in order to validate victims' testimonies and guarantee that their rights are upheld. In the Colombian context, this highlights the vertical relationship between the state and victims' organizations; quilting groups attempt to pressure the government for concrete policy-making that guarantees the rights of victims. Although the debates around state crimes remain complex and investigations are ongoing, the lack of coherence and culpability by state actors and the slow rate of prosecutions reveals that the fundamental rights of victims are currently not being met and thus the limitations of sewing projects as a RJ measure.

Nevertheless, *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM) and MAFAPO sewing initiatives are utilized by victims in an attempt to try to repair the harm caused to them, without the full acknowledgement from the perpetrator that wrongdoing has been caused. The CM sewing project require victims themselves to actively engage with a state-funded initiative in order to benefit and thus can only be considered an effective RJ measure on a micro level for those that decide to participate. Auxiliary Magistrate Marco Velásquez from the JEP notes, "Reparation is like a triangle, justice contributes the truth, the truth to justice and they both contribute to reparation" (Marco Velásquez, personal communication, Bogotá, 06.02.20). Velásquez believes victim reparation is an interlinked and ongoing process for victims. In light of this, the restorative nature of sewing initiatives is not guaranteed or necessarily immediate, but instead assists victims over a period of time when other transitional justice (TJ) measures are fulfilled. Thus, the CM sewing initiative cannot be considered a stand-alone

RJ measure, but functions to meet more short term and more immediate needs of victims for support.

Research by Braithwaite (1996) highlights the need for RJ to include both victim and offender in the transformative process in order to ensure TJ measures are effective. Although state funding of victim assistance programmes such as the CM indicates the governments' acknowledgement and obligation to fulfil victims' individual and collective rights, to what extent can memory-focused sewing initiatives be considered an effective reparation and peacebuilding measure without long term guarantees that victims will be able to obtain truth and justice? This shows that although the CM intends to dignify victims and create an inclusive account of the past, state funded projects function as only a partial reparation measure and cannot automatically be deemed as an effective way of repairing victims. Thus, it could also be argued that the government is only paying lip service to these ideals and have evaded the issue of responsibility and full acknowledgment. Thus sewing initiatives function to legitimize the government's own peacebuilding agenda, in which victims are seen to be having their rights to reparation met.

3.3 Sewing Initiatives as a Peacebuilding Mechanism

This section seeks to examine how the state-funded sewing projects *Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) in Medellín and *El Costurero de La Memoria* (CM) in Bogotá interact with Colombia's wider peacebuilding agenda.

The *Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) is financed by the mayor of Medellín and is an example of a state-funded peacebuilding initiative that incentivises community participation, based on the skill of sewing, rather than if the participants consider themselves to be victims.[12] Sánchez-Aldana believes that the main objective of sewing initiatives are to "bring together people who wouldn't usually meet up, which helps to strengthen solidarity between the participants" (Sánchez-Aldana et al., 2019: 11). The scholar values sewing as a familiar cultural form and an everyday life skill. During an observation of the TTMCM, participants sat in groups, chatting, drinking coffee and working on individual and collective quilts, as well as knitting blankets and hand making jewellery such as brooches. Orlinda Mesa, Project Mediator at the TTMCM, commented, "The gatherings, stories, jokes, songs… everyone here is different... I feel better spending time with this group, they're my life" (Orlinda Mesa, personal communication, Medellín, 21.02.20). Similarly, according to Olga Lucía, a participant at the TTMCM sewing initiative, "The museum for me is my second home. There I have another family, a way to distract myself,

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[12] For more information, view, *Museo Casa de la Memoria* Website:
https://www.museocasadelamemoria.gov.co/Noticias/costurero-colectivo-de-memoria/

where you learn a lot from the others'' (Una Puntada y Una Llamada, n.d.). The participants' comments reveal the welcoming community environment of TTMCM that has helped to address social exclusion (defined by Galtung (1976) as a form of structural violence), by rebuilding the social fabric through civil participation. Academic research by Strobel (1996) has established the impact of exclusion on individual and communities' ties, namely, its relation to poverty, unemployment and individuals' conception of citizenship and belonging. Both Galtung (1976) and Strobel's (1996) distinctions provide a basis to understand the importance of developing strategies that encourage new social values. The TTMCM promotes the notion of citizenship by creating an inclusive and welcoming space for the whole community that in turn can make participants feel like valued members of society.

Both *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM) and *Taller de Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) sewing initiatives function as vertical and horizontal peacebuilding mechanisms. According to McCandless, "Social cohesion is broadening and deepening, with formal and informal ties and interactions binding society horizontally (across citizens, between groups) and vertically (between citizens/groups and the state)" (McCandless, 2020:3). Using McCandless' understanding of horizontal peacebuilding, the TTMCM is a peacebuilding initiative that provides direct community support and encourages local level social development. Moreover, state funding of victim-led initiatives has institutionalised the TTMCM and the CM as vertical peacebuilding practices. The CM is run by Virgelina Chará, an Afro-Colombian woman who was displaced from the Pacific region of Colombia and the TTMCM by Orlinda Mesa, a victim of False Positives, which places victims as central actors in the reparation and peacebuilding process, which reinforces Lederach's three-tier peacebuilding triangle (1997) that states top-top approaches should play a secondary role to bottom-up approaches. Sewing initiatives have therefore helped to rebuild trust and confidence between victims and the state that concrete action is being provided to support victims. Therefore, memory-focused sewing initiatives help to advance Colombia's peacebuilding agenda on both a macro and micro level.

On the other hand, how effective are sewing initiatives as a peacebuilding strategy when the fundamental risks of everyday violence still exist? In an interview Verónica González, human rights lawyer and researcher, from *Museo Casa de La Memoria* museum in Medellín, said:

> There is still an armed conflict in Colombia, so in addition to seeking reparation, victims are also struggling with new risks of violence on a daily basis. Memory can have a transformative function against these logics of violence that we can see in society (Verónica González, personal communication, Medellín, 25.02.20).

González believes that despite the 2016 peace agreement, illegal armed actors such as FARC dissidents, BACRIM and the ELN continue to pose a threat to both rural and urban

communities and views memory projects as a valuable tool to build peaceful futures. Berents proposed that "If violence disrupts or denies our ways of belonging and becomes woven into everyday being, then finding spaces and ways which run counter to that violence can provide more stable groundings for claims of belonging" (Berents, 2018:133). Thus, memory-focused sewing initiatives can be used as a way for participants to examine the root causes of conflict by reflection on their past, but also to counter and address their everyday, lived experiences of conflict. Projects carried out by *Museo Casa de La Memoria* place importance on practices that encourage non-violent behaviour, which emulates Galtung's triangle of violence theory (1976) and the belief that direct physical violence and harm must be addressed in order for peacebuilding to be effective. In light of this, the TTMCM initiative can be considered a practice that attempts to resist and reduce everyday cycles of violence and prevent the recurrence of future conflicts by creating a new avenue for excluded and marginalized groups to participate.

Memory-focused sewing initiatives can be understood as an effective peacebuilding tool for a niche group of victims: mainly women who have actively chosen to participate and seek support through a creative and pedagogical approach. According to Londoño et al., "Over time, women have appropriated various scenarios from which they were previously excluded... inequality, exclusion and social injustice between genders increased as a result of the conflict" (Londoño et al., 2019: 80). The scholar highlights the way in which sewing initiatives have become a space commanded by women through which they have been able to express and share their experience with others. Thus, sewing initiatives can be considered a micro-level reparation and a peacebuilding measure for predominantly females. As presented in the theoretical section of this thesis, academics have noted that what can be considered successful reparation and peacebuilding can differ greatly between institutions and victims (Alcalá et al., 2016; Firchow, 2017). In order for peacebuilding and reparation measures to be effective, the state must also ensure that marginalised groups are aware of such reparation schemes and that they can be easily accessed. Whilst this research has focused on the benefits of institutionalised state-funded initiatives in the urban settings of Bogotá and Medellín, it must be ensured that sufficient state funding is also given to rural initiatives. Depending on the local dynamics and particular needs of victims, alternative approaches to reparation and peacebuilding should be considered.

Conclusion

This research has identified the value of *El Costurero de La Memoria* (CM) and *El Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) sewing initiatives as symbolic forms of redress that have given visibility to the voice and stories of victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The needlework groups have created a framework that helps to restore dignity to victims as their memories are recognised and commemorated. Public displays of quilts have encouraged social engagement with the diverse memories of the Colombian armed conflict; this has helped to unify rural and urban memories of conflict and has assisted in building new bonds between victims and wider society. Participation and active civic engagement is necessary for restorative peacebuilding projects to be successful, by encouraging people to empathise with others' experiences. The CM and TTMCM are memorialization initiatives that have helped to establish a network of memories where there is not one official narrative of the past, but rather, where multiple perspectives coexist.

Sewing initiatives have been used as a response to victimization by providing an alternative language through which victims can explore repressed and often traumatic memories. The CM, TTMCM and MAFAPO sewing initiatives are collaborative and offer assistance to victims through solidarity and companionship, which many victims feel provides them with emotional relief. This thesis has established that individual and collective remembering is considered a vital part of the healing process for many victims and that it has helped to address psychological damage caused by conflict. Memory-focused sewing initiatives are predominantly a bottom-up reparation initiative for women who actively seek support to address the harms caused by conflict.

The CM, TTMCM and MAFAPO sewing initiatives take a victim-centred approach to restorative justice measures and demonstrate the creative ways through which victims are actively engaging with the peacebuilding process: a sense of hope is felt by many victims for a better future and lasting peace. Sewing initiatives have emboldened victims to collectively mobilise and are used as a symbolic form of resistance. The MAFAPO collective is an example of this, with the purpose of promoting their demands for justice and demanding that more needs to be done to safeguard their rights. Memory-focused sewing initiatives have accorded victims a medium through which to voice their experiences and should be considered an important tool for victim empowerment.

This research has examined the value of memory-focused sewing initiatives within the wider context of Colombia's peacebuilding agenda. Both *El Costurero de la Memoria* (CM)

and *El Tejido del Museo Casa de la Memoria* (TTMCM) aim to promulgate peacebuilding through the familiar cultural practice of sewing. Sewing initiatives create the foundations for peace by restoring community bonds, evident by the positive experiences felt by many at the CM and TTMCM which have encouraged integration and social cohesion. The CM and TTMCM have helped address institutional patterns of violence by providing new opportunities for marginalised members of society to participate in the peacebuilding process. This research therefore highlights the importance of creating spaces where new relationships can be nurtured and can be understood as a core element of peacebuilding efforts.

State-funded initiatives such as the TTMCM and CM demonstrate the importance of allowing bottom-up victim-led approaches, rather than state imposed initiatives to drive the peacebuilding process from the grassroots. Local ownership fosters a more inclusive involvement, which concurs with academic debates that argue the importance of bottom-up approaches to building sustainable peace.

CM and TTMCM also help to fulfil the state's legal obligations to provide redress and show that action is being taken to assist victims. Therefore, sewing initiatives help to rebuild the vertical relationship between the government and victims and also function as building blocks to support the Colombian peacebuilding process. However, whilst conflict continues in many parts of Colombia and without official acknowledgment of wrongdoing from the top down, for example from the military, state-funded victim projects fall short of meeting the long term needs of victims, as there is the possibility of the re-victimisation of participants. This thesis has therefore acknowledged the limited restorative function of sewing initiatives as they can only be deemed as partial reparation measure.

In line with academic research, this thesis reinforces the belief that effective reparation and peacebuilding measures should focus on the reconstruction of interpersonal relationships on a local level, rather than take a national approach, in order to encourage peaceful futures. Particular attention has been paid to the value of memory-focused sewing initiatives as a victim-centred approach to reparation and peacebuilding. Thus the broader consideration of how sewing initiatives can be used as a tool to unite both victim and offender should be taken into account. Whilst not within the scope of this thesis, future research could examine in more detail the role of sewing initiatives as a feminist practice in relation to the evolving worldwide practice of textile activism. A gender-specific approach to future studies could also provide useful insight into the specific needs of victims and effective reparation and peacebuilding mechanisms. Alternatively, the relationship between peacebuilding initiatives and how they benefit, legitimize and advance the government's peacebuilding agenda could also be examined. This thesis makes a case for greater consideration of the value of including creative and collaborative approaches to victim reparation measures to

ensure victims' rights to truth and justice are met. This thesis concludes that memory-focused sewing initiatives are a niche peacebuilding tool and an effective restorative measure that meets victims' immediate needs and expectations for support through solidarity and commemoration and should therefore be considered an important contribution to building lasting peace in Colombia.

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Interviews

Interviewee	Affiliation or Role	Location and Date	Duration
1. Carlo Nasi	Political Science Professor at the University of Los Andes, Bogotá. Expert researcher on the impact of peace agreements between states and guerrilla groups in Latin America and the role of the United Nations in building peace in the region.	University of Los Andes, Bogotá. 24.01.20	35 minutes
2. Laura Mejía	Journalist, specialising in social communication. Volunteer at NGO *Grupo Semillas*.	La Candelaria, Bogotá. 24.01.20	1 hour
3. Oscar José Ospino	Ex-AUC paramilitary (Northern Block).	Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, Bogotá. 28.01.20	5 minutes
4. Juan Diego Prieto	Political Science Professor at the University of Los Andes, Bogotá. Doctor of Philosophy and expert in peacebuilding and transitional justice.	University of Los Andes, Bogotá. 30.01.20	40 minutes
5. Jaqueline Castillo	Woman whose brother was disappeared in 2008. Member of the MAFAPO collective (Mothers of False Positives).	Chapinero, Bogotá. 20.01.20	1 hour
6. Juan Gómez	Public Relations Professor at the University of Rosario, Bogotá. Journalist at *Rutas Del Conflicto.*	El Rosario University, Bogotá. 31.01.20	1 hour
7. Carlos Eduardo Sanabria	Art History Professor at Jorge Tadeo Lozano University in Bogotá. Researcher in dance therapy for communities affected by the armed conflict.	Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, Bogotá. 03.02.20	45 minutes

8. Karol Cañon	Masters student at El Bosque University, Bogotá. Specialization in peacebuilding social projects for victims of the armed conflict.	La Candelaria, Bogotá. 03.02.20	1 hour
9. Cora Berner	Associate expert on peacebuilding at GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation).	GIZ Head Office, Bogotá. 04.02.20	1 hour
10. Santiago Vargas	Legal officer and adviser to Gustavo Salazar at the JEP criminal proceedings peace court.	JEP, Bogotá. 04.02.20	45 minutes
11. Valeria Miranda	Trainee law officer at the JEP.	JEP, Bogotá. 04.02.20	15 minutes
12. María Fernanda Peña	Communication and Development Professor at Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, Bogotá. Social communicator specializing in regional development management.	Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, Bogotá. 05.02.20	45 minutes
13. Diego Martínez	Lawyer and negotiator for the FARC during the Colombian peace process in Havana, 2012 - 2016. Human Rights Defender and director at the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Colombia (CPDH).	Avenida Jímenez, Bogotá. 05.02.20	15 minutes
14. Marco Velásquez	Assistant Magistrate to Chief Judge at the JEP.	JEP, Bogotá. 06.02.20	1 hour
15. Paola Acosta	National cooperation specialist at the JEP.	JEP, Bogotá. 07.02.20	1. 5 hours
16. Eduardo Mejía	Documentary filmmaker and journalist.	Chapinero, Bogotá. 11.02.20	1 hour
17. Mónica Álvarez	Mediator at MAFAPO meetings (Mothers of False Positives).	INDEPAZ Head Office, Bogotá. 12.02.20	1 hour

	Professor of archival and historical memory studies at La Javeriana University, Bogotá.		
18. Orlinda Mesa	Woman whose son (19 years old) was disappeared in 2007. Mediator at the sewing and memory project at *Casa de la Memoria* museum, Medellín.	*Casa de la Memoria* Museum, Medellín. 21.02.20	10 minutes
19. Johan Tamayo	Political Scientist specialising in memory and society studies. Coordinator of social programs and projects for the Ministry of Education at the municipality of Medellín.	Ministry of Education, Medellín. 24.02.20	1 hour
20. Zara García and Verónica González	Verónica González - Human rights lawyer and researcher. Zara García – Head of temporary exhibition content.	*Casa de la Memoria* Museum, Medellín. 25.02.20	1 hour
21. Jorge Pulecio	Advisor at the Colombian Truth Commission. Coordinator at the Amazon University of Peace.	Chapinero, Bogotá. 27.02.20	1.5 hours
22. Jhon Fredy León	Ex-FARC member. Legal Advisor in the FARC-EP Peace Delegation in Havana.	La Candelaria, Bogotá. 27.02.20	1 hour
23. Ana Lucia Moncayo	Lawyer and specialist in human rights and criminal law. Professor at the University of Externado.	El Externado University, Bogotá. 02.02.20	45 minutes

Event/ Observation	Details	Location and Date	Duration
1. Event: *Hablemos Verdad, Colombia 2020.*	Truth seeking and reconciliation conference. Current challenges, successes and reflections of peacebuilding process.	Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, Bogotá. 28.01.20	4 hours (Audio not recorded)
2. Observation: The Mothers of Soacha meeting.	Weekly sewing and pedagogy workshop for the women of Soacha.	INDEPAZ, Bogotá. 20.01.20	1.5 hours (Audio not recorded)
3. Observation & participation: Sewing workshop.	Weekly sewing workshop and a community space for victims of the armed conflict, locals and volunteers.	Centre for Memory Peace and Reconciliation, Bogotá. 19.02.20	3 hours (Audio not recorded)
4. Observation: Sewing initiative.	Weekly sewing workshop for the local community.	*Casa de la Memoria* Museum, Medellín. 21.02.20 25.02.20	1 hour x 2 (Audio not recorded)