



**Mapping a journey of healing towards reconciliation:
The experience of Tamboreras del Cauca - Colombia**

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List of Acronyms

FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo [Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia – People’s Army]
GT	Grounded Theory
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
PAPSIVI	Programa de Atención Psicosocial y Salud Integral a Víctimas [Psychosocial Attention and Integral Health for Victims Program]
STAR	Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience programme
UARIV	Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a Víctimas [Unit for Attention and Integral Reparation for Victims]
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund

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I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Gloria Medina, Fulvia Chungana and Milgen Medina for being an example of resilience, strength and generosity. For your countless efforts for peace and reconciliation in our country and for sharing your inspiring story for generations to come.

My dear Tamboreras, thank you for showing me that with love and patience we will find our place of encounter...

Abstract

This research paper describes and analyses the defining moments in the journey of healing from sexual violence in the context of armed conflict in Colombia. Following the experience of three women of Tamboreras del Cauca Association, it identifies the external and internal resources that facilitated their journey.

Taking reconciliation as the approach and some models as reference, was possible to place this experience as an example of what it takes to restore people's story and relationships after trauma and how this could be a work in progress towards reconciliation in times of post-agreement in Colombia.

Through in-depth interviewing, I could get closer to their stories, and unfold from their narratives, what and how each element has contributed to their transformation, from the individual to the collective space. In particular, the role of aesthetics and metaphors to reach new levels to understand how to address traumatic experiences. From there, bring attention to the creative act and imagination behind reconciliation as a condition, in the long-term, to stable peace.

Relevance to Development Studies

Development is challenging in theory and practice. Having insights from people's experiences is valuable to understand the nuances needed in development studies and to contest general assumptions made in the name of development. Especially in post-agreement scenarios, where the risk of relapse is high, increased knowledge about when and how people are ready to endure the challenges the journey of healing, trust, and reconciliation has, it is critical to understand the real possibilities of change.

From the stories of these three women and the process behind Tamboreras del Cauca, their experience gives us the chance to see how forgiveness and reconciliation are built and looks daily, on those territories where the conflict took such a toll and still does. Only this year, more than 40 social leaders have been killed in Cauca region. However, this kind of initiative and organizational work are the primary basic common goods people can access, in their daily lives, to achieve local ways of living in and beyond conflict. So it is critical to pay attention to how resilient victims sustain their journey amidst violence allowing transform societies.

Keywords

Colombia, Armed Conflict, Trauma, Healing journey, Metaphors, Aesthetics, Reconciliation, Memory

Introduction

1.1 Context

For more than 60 years, Colombia underwent an armed conflict characterized by intense confrontation between multiple actors, including several guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and the national army. Around the 1960s, different guerrilla groups emerged out of peasant revolts with an influence of communist insurgencies, being one of them guerrilla FARC-EP. A group that claimed to be born as a revolutionary movement, with a political-military project against the political regime and the ruling class to stop land grabbing. By the 1980s, private armed groups formed to defend property of big landowners entered the conflict dynamics. And in the 2000s, the production and trafficking of illicit drugs intensified the expansion of all armed groups for territorial control, adding new elements to the complexity of the Colombian conflict (CNMH 2013:110-189)

In October 2012, the dialogues for peace between the government and guerrilla FARC-EP started. To end the armed conflict and build stable and lasting peace, the agenda was focused on six topics: integral rural reform; political participation; end of conflict; illicit drugs; victims; and implementation. This meant focusing “on strengthening the local presence of the state in places where it was absent, promoting active citizen participation, and fostering social integration and reconciliation” (IFTT 2018:6)

Four years later, the Final Peace Agreement was signed on September 26. And after its rejection in the referendum process, it was countersigned on November 24 2016, by the Congress. This negotiation process and the previous proclamation of the Victims’ Law in 2011, which fully recognized the existence of an armed conflict in Colombia and the State as part of the perpetrators (Giraldo 2017), are critical conditions in the process of conflict transformation and building a path towards reconciliation.

Although peace agreements are a good start, they are not followed by immediate transformation of the conflict or the conditions that led to the armed conflict in the first place. There is still the task of implementing what was settled on the agreement. One of the biggest challenges is to translate those formally negotiated relations into daily, local dynamics of coexistence. Where the violence of the past has deeply harmed the way people related to each other, more needs to be done to redefine relationships to be the ground for reconciliation and a bridge for stable peace.

Reconciliation, in particular, harness multiple processes of change to heal the relationships broken as a result of violence, moving from a divided past into a shared future. Part of that task is to address trauma, transform conflict, and restore confidence. These processes will give people the chance to create long-term, sustainable, social, economic, political, and institutional relationships to address their needs.

This kind of transformation involves beginning from healing the self to being able to heal with the others. However, the recent policies that acknowledge trauma related to conflict issues as one of the root causes of humanitarian emergencies are addressed mainly from the mental health field, even as a challenge to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (Dybdahl and Lien 2017).

The link between mental health issues, conflict and development has been on the radar for several years, under the argument that “failure to address mental health and psychosocial disorders in populations that have experienced mass violence and trauma caused by conflict will impede efforts to enhance social capital, promote human development and

reduce poverty" (The World Bank 2003:1) Nonetheless, according to Van der Kolk (2014:97-98), approaches from the mental health field seems to overlook that:

"(1) our capacity to destroy one another is matched by our capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being; (2) language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning; (3) we have the ability to regulate our own physiology, including some of the so-called involuntary functions of the body and brain, through such basic activities as breathing, moving, and touching; and (4) we can change social conditions to create environments in which children and adults can feel safe and where they can thrive."

Even the psychosocial policy field to deal with war trauma, is consider "as a form of cultural imperialism; that is, the imposition of a Western therapeutic model on other societies, which have their own coping strategies" (Pupavac 2002:490). An argument that contests psychosocial interventions to address collective levels of trauma as blueprint models that in the best cases include some local adaptations.

In this field, it is possible to find bottom-up experiences like the STAR program that "invites communities and individuals to a) address the impacts of traumagenic events and b) build resilience, creativity and capacity to address human needs" (Mansfield 2017:265) through educational programs for community leaders. This one, in particular, has developed different approaches for trauma healing where the role of collective processes, contexts, and communal resources are vital elements to promote resilience as a means for reconciliation in communities affected by protracted conflicts. However, these remain to be experiences where it is not easy to analyse the role of personal journeys and how they work with the resources gained, beyond these kinds of programs. At the same time, there is the difficulty in translating all the elements involved in creative initiatives to work at local levels.

In this context, an experience like Tamboreras del Cauca, a collective initiative that shares their healing journey through the use of drums and the performance of a theatre play, created in the context of a psychosocial program, can work as a case to explore. This journey takes into account personal, communal, and cultural devices. It makes use of rituals, and metaphors that could be the scenario to understand victims' journey and the input to a framework shift that addresses trauma experiences from victims' narratives towards collective healing and, eventually, community reconciliation.

The experience of Tamboreras del Cauca is an opportunity to analyse a journey towards transformation and reconciliation from a micro-level perspective, and to understand how it enables a broader view in the healing process beyond institutional arrangements, where at the centre of the experience are symbolic resources.

1.2 Research problem

Trauma healing and reconciliation have become high-level matters in countries coming out from violent conflicts as well as among development practitioners in post-conflict societies. This has lead to an increase in the scholarly literature related to these issues in different fields.

Trauma healing has been mainly understood as a mental health affectation, while reconciliation is seen as a requisite for peacebuilding or post-conflict considerations. However, we know little about the effect healing relations and different reconciliation efforts have in

societies, how long it takes, and who are involved beyond the scope of victims and perpetrators.

Insights from the appropriation of local experiences that can be an example of healing are rare, and there are not many experiences that can count as studies with the academic rigor to contribute to theory building in this area. We do not know how this process looks like, what the journey enables, and challenges at the individual and collective level, or where the points of transition occur.

Whereas it is necessary to continue conducting conceptual and methodological studies to strengthen the ground of understanding the role trauma healing has in the journey towards reconciliation, it is also imperative to lead empirical research to get a closer look at how people experience it.

There is a gap between the conceptualization of these two social phenomena and the operationalization of its practice. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the healing journey is essential to think in ways in which one can foster the reconciliation endeavours far from prescriptive conditions. Working along with the experience of Tamboreras del Cauca, my aim is to create awareness around the possibilities, efforts, and imagination a reconciliation process demands.

1.3 Objectives and research questions

Objectives:

- To illustrate a victims' journey of healing after a traumatic experience in the context of protracted political violence
- To identify and analyse the external and internal resources involved in the healing processes
- To explore the contribution this journey has on the comprehension and possibilities of reconciliation

Main research question:

What are the defining moments in the journey of Tamboreras del Cauca, that can support the work towards trauma healing and reconciliation, in the context of the peace agreement in Colombia?

Sub-questions:

- What are the resources that facilitate this journey of healing?
- How do these individual journeys play a role in collective community healing?
- How does this journey serve as a contribution to Colombia's overall reconciliation efforts?

1.4 Organization of the paper

After this introduction, Chapter 2 addresses the methodological decisions taken to develop this research. Chapter 3 presents the debate about reconciliation, and some models of reference to depict its journey. Chapter 4 explains the complexities of trauma, particularly concerning sexual violence in the context of armed conflict. Chapter 5 unpacks and analyses the defining moments of the healing journey. Finally, in Chapter 6, there are some concluding remarks about the implications of this experience in the process of reconciliation.

2 Methodological decisions

2.1 Constructivist Grounded Theory

Trying to get a closer look at the experience of Tamboreras del Cauca, I chose to use a Grounded Theory (GT) viewpoint, in particular from its Constructivist variant. The main idea is that theory is anchored in data which means an iterative process between data collection and analysis, that moves from the studied realities and its understanding, towards the development of theory (Ruppel and Mey 2015)

It is an inductive method in which theoretical categories are generated from the analysis of qualitative data (Charmaz and Belgrave 2014). This method gives the opportunity of interaction between the data collected from the narratives of the women from Tamboreras del Cauca and the levels of analysis derived from its coding, with relevant theory.

Since the primary source of data was the life trajectory of these women, the goal was to build on analytical categories to discuss with the selected theoretical framework. In GT, this variant is called Constructivist, which “assumes that researchers already possess theoretical and research knowledge concerning their substantive field” (Charmaz and Belgrave 2014:4); therefore, the analytical process involves a discussion between the emergent categories from the data collected and the postulations that initially inform the research.

In this process, coding is primordial as it refers to the conceptualization of the described reality. It is the first step towards creating analytical categories that represent persistent ideas. Consequently, the argument is created from the comparison, contrast, and integration of these categories between the existing theoretical framework and the empirical realities. This step requires close attention, given the fact that it is here where the strength of the argument is held, where the realities are framed to offer a substantial analysis of the trauma they experienced and the path towards its healing.

2.2 Narrative and Interviewing

After experiencing sex violence by FARC-EP guerrilla members and live with the threat attached to their bodies, the only survival resource was silence. It was more than 20 years after these women found voice again to “*tell a little bit of my story without hurting me so much, because when you talk naturally about a sexual violence experience, that still implies opening a wound*” (T02)¹ Intending to learn about their journey of healing I chose to build the argument based on their narratives.

However, research and analysis that involves sexual violence during conflict comes with significant challenges. As pointed out by Boesten and Henry (2018), in-depth qualitative research in this topic highlights the perspectives from the survivors lives and needs, with the risk that complete disclosure can cause pain among survivors and even research fatigue.

Nonetheless, after presenting my research objective, out of the 25 women who belong to the group, each one with a particular journey, three of them decided to share their story with me. They chose to use this research as a platform to share and spread their truth. That

¹ All the quotations product of the fieldwork, were translated from Spanish to English

is why I am using their proper names as they ask me to do it because it contributes to their healing process. In this sense, the narrative of their life story works as a testimony of the armed conflict experience in Cauca, Colombia. This is critical if we take into consideration that testify is a process of saying and recovering the territory of words, as a necessary mediation in a traumatic experience, to appropriate their pain (Das 2008)

I chose a narrative approach because it involves subjectivity and flexibility to capture the complexities of a situation, through specific resources to make sense of what is at hand. Each element of the narrative embodies a life category as a result of the interaction between the self and the course of their lives, involving people, events, memories, motivation, and moral judgments to make meaning.

Adopting this approach involves a process that requires reflection, and that places voice at the centre of the experience. According to García Pastor, “the concept of voice is related to the acknowledgment of the right to express oneself and to be taken into account, (...), without the condition of having to adopt a strange, imposed language or way of representation” (2005:180). This is critical to their process, being able to voice with their words the story, its significance in their lives, and how to construct their realities from it.

Reconstruct their life stories is “a process of in-depth research that requires introspection, preparation, and the understanding of meanings based on phenomenology and hermeneutics” (Suárez-Ortega 2012:191). This means to select the appropriate methodology to consider the elements that mediate in the experience narrated by the main character of the story. I decide to use in-depth qualitative interviewing to collect the data, since it “provides an open-ended, detailed exploration of an aspect of life in which the interviewee has substantial experience and, often, considerable insight” (Charmaz and Belgrave 2014:3)

Taking into account that “in general, the saturation of speech fields occurs with a relatively low number of histories/ accounts (considering that very rich productions are obtained from each informant)” (Suárez-Ortega 2012:192). Having three stories allowed me to get some variety, but most important, enough detail of their experiences from a one-on-one interaction, to make analytic generalization, have conceptual validity, and an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena in context.

The interviews were structured in a way that the responses would allow us to tell a story about their life trajectory with the data at its core. By keeping an informal and conversational format with a few questions to open up the narration, the idea was to see how they constructed a picture of their experience towards healing from what they identified as the beginning until the present time.

The aim was to present the discussion as an unfolding story between the experience and the analytical categories and framework. This was a challenge since I did not want to force any response in their narrative process. That meant to be capable of engaging the interviewees in conversation in a way that could disclose their narrative constructions being aware of the silences, use of language, meaning, and resources to communicate.

The process required successive interviews, three rounds in total with every woman, each one between an hour and an hour and a half. Every round with a clear intention and guiding questions to achieve deeper levels and specificity as the cycle of interviews progressed. The first one was focused on their story, as they wanted to share it with me. The second one had the objective to fill out details about specific events, and actors, and the interaction with them along the journey. The third one, trying to engage in a participative dynamic, was about to discuss some of the findings after a first exploratory process of coding and analysis, to avoid assumptions and compare interpretations.

While the emphasis was on the life story of these three women, in the conversations I was referenced to other actors they considered critical in their process (see table below).

Table 1.1
People Interviewed

Nº	Person	Organization/role	Date of interview	Assigned Code
1	Gloria Medina	Tamboreras del Cauca	August 29, September 04, October 10 2019	T01
2	Fulvia Chungana	Tamboreras del Cauca	September 10, 12 and October 01 2019	T02
3	Milgen Medina	Tamboreras del Cauca	September 11, October 02 and 03 2019	T02
4	Horacio Serrano	Suma Pinta Shamanic & Ceremonial drums Drums teacher	September 06 2019	DT01
5	Laura Sierra	Theatre teacher	September 30 2019	DT02
6	Juan Pablo Franco	Blumont Organization Country Director	October 04 2019	BO01
7	Lisa Rodríguez	Former psychology coordinator	October 17 2019	PC01

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Also, as there is plenty of visual material of their performance, I was able to observe the play as a narrative and another resource of data, to identify and analyse the symbolic elements involved in the representation of their journey, and the performance itself. Finally, the methodology included secondary data of existing academic and grey literature to engage in discussion and build on the main arguments of the research.

There were some limitations. Since I was not able to do the fieldwork in Colombia, the interviews were conducted through calls and video calls. This helped me to kept distance from the heaviness of the topic but restricted the observation process of other none-verbal elements used in the narrative exercise.

2.3 Reflexivity and positionality

Even though I do not share these women's experiences as victims of sexual violence and conflict, I feel this research is not only a contribution to the conflict studies in Colombia. It is a statement on behalf of all those who like me, believe and are working to rebuild the broken relationships and give the opportunity to regain confidence on the possibilities that the agreement brought with all its complexities.

This influences my position as a researcher and the way I approach the knowledge production through the journey of Tamboreras del Cauca, to place their voice, share their testimonies and spread the learnings from this experience in the current context in Colombia. With this, I am engaging in a reflexivity process to "take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation" (Berger 2015:220)

Recognize the position from which I am situated to perform this research, not only places my motivations but helped me to be aware and check how I filter, through the lenses of my own experience, sense of responsibility and hopes, what has been shared with me, in such generous and intimate way.

3 Theoretical literature on Reconciliation

In the field of conflict studies, Reconciliation has gained a central role both as a process and a goal with deep sociological, theological, psychological, and political roots. In essence, reconciliation means the restoration of broken relationships by conflict to form a community again. It is about healing individual and collective traumas, providing closure and enabling change and new relations (Galtung 2001). Borrowed from the religious field, nowadays is considered one of the essential conditions for reaching stable peace.

Among the literature, it's possible to identify general observations about reconciliation. It demands profound changes in attitudes, emotions, and beliefs that can not be rushed or forced; and it has to come from people's will. In most cases is focused on the relationships between victims and perpetrators (Bloomfield 2003). Conversely, during conflict, the sense of distrust increases at a community level too, which takes us to consider reconciliation at a broader scale. One that goes beyond the scope of those who suffer directly and includes the communal relations affected by prejudices, stereotypes, affiliations, and the construction of the other as the enemy.

3.1 Cold and warm approaches

Within the several scholars working with reconciliation, two schools of thought can be distinguished. The first or 'cold' approach prioritizes security, material restitution, ceasefire, formal agreements, and political cooperation, and its reach through official diplomacy and conflict management. The second or 'warm' approach underlines the emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual aspects of the process, and is based on direct healing of the relations (Auerbach 2009; Botcharova 2002; Rosoux 2017).

The cold approach sees reconciliation as a matter of even high politics. Something that is achieved by the rule of law, democracy, human rights, free market, and legitimate institutions after reaching a peace agreement; in other words, through liberal peace. The assumption is that by building functioning institutions, giving material compensation to victims, punishing perpetrators, and creating a sense of accountability, people's suffering will be acknowledged, and from there coexistence would be possible based on renewed confidence.

Following Philpott (2009), this view leaves unattended deeper wounds equally important to restore relationships. Recognizing the range of harms must be incorporated in and between the political negotiation of peace. This could be achieved through restorative justice and truth commission to assure perpetrators will apologize and admit misdeeds, giving victims of all parties the chance to grant forgiveness and leave the pain of the past behind. Nonetheless, Philpott seems to equate reconciliation as justice, where reparation schemes, truth commissions, and trials are the chosen set of healing practices.

There is a complex relationship between justice and reconciliation. Precisely this is the critique conveyed against the 'warm' approach. True reconciliation can not be reached with impunity or amnesty for past crimes because it is perceived as code for forgetting the harm inflicted. Yet, some studies show that pursuit of legal accountability could be a factor of division in the society (Lekha Sriram 2007:587), and questions the power of truth commissions on the reconciliation process, taking as an example the case of the Gacaca courts of Rwanda (Brounéus 2008: 18-21).

The warm approach underlines that there is more about relationships than what is formally negotiated. Reconciliation is only possible from below when transformed people can change and build new structures to fortify their relationships (Botcharova 2002) This does not mean reconciliation will result in impunity but is not concerned with immediate issues of injustices as quick solutions. Instead, the idea is bridging on what can be understood as external (from the institutions) and internal (people) resources towards reconciliation. The idea, as pointed out by Lederach, “is not about forgive and forget but to remember and change” (2005:152)

In practice, when people face the challenge of implementing the negotiated interactions, they find themselves before relationships based on antagonisms and distrust. No matter the new conditions, there is no possibility to move forward without dealing with the traumatic experiences of the past. From this perspective, reconciliation requires more than the rule of law, to concentrate on the deepest personal and social spheres, where radical healing is needed to restore body, soul, and psyche.

That is the spirit of reconciliation (Rosoux 2017), the development of mutual trust resulted from a slow, arduous process of profound change of beliefs and emotions to first restore people’s self and then move towards the others. Accordingly, context, agency and time are decisive factors in determining the course of constant negotiations on the way to reconciliation. Where, who and when are critical variables to understand the extend on which reconciliation is possible, and at what stage of the transformation is.

3.2 Middle ground

Each of these perspectives focuses on a specific piece of the puzzle. On this matter, Lederach’s approach can provide a middle ground. For him, reconciliation is a meeting point instead of a two-sided process, that “envisions protracted conflict as a system and focuses its attention on relationships within that system” (1998:26). This means looking at reconciliation as a whole where the relationships are at the centre.

To explain the parts and the whole of this system, Lederach uses a metaphor based on the interactions between four energies: Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace. The social space where they meet is the place where reconciliation comes together. Each elements has a specific role and at the same time are interdependent:

“Truth is the longing for acknowledgment of wrong and the validation of painful loss and experiences, but it is coupled with *Mercy*, which articulates the need for acceptance, letting go, and a new beginning. *Justice* represents the search for individual and group rights, for social restructuring, and for restitution, but it is linked with *Peace*, which underscores the need for interdependence, well-being, and security” (1998:29).

Reconciliation promotes an encounter between the acknowledge and expression of the harm, bringing light and uncovering what happened; the acceptance and compassion of the wrongdoing in favour of the new beginning; the action and accountability to repair the damage and make things right; and the harmony and well-being to create a secure time and place.

When working with reconciliation, Lederach warns us to be careful not to address it as a contradictory relation between the energies, since there is no point of choosing one or the other. But let them work together to create that social space to encounter hopes and fears and restore the relationships that would hold a shared, connected future.

3.3 Models

There is certain risk in taking reconciliation as a sequence or a process with preconditions. Healing the wounds, historical accounting, reparation, justice, forgiveness, empathy, apology, and truth can be seen as the only elements to support reconciliation. But this would mean that it can be achieved by following a formula.

Part of the practice of reconciliation has moved to proposed models of reference. To explore the art and soul of the transformations behind the journey of reconciliation. While Lederach's paradigm can not be taken as a model, nonetheless points out four interconnected elements that enable its development. Here are three models that offer an illustration of what it takes to transcend cycles of violence and restore relationships.

Reconciliation Pyramid

This model is an ideal type created by Yehudith Auerbach (2009) to analyse reconciliation processes. Although she develops this tool under the frame of identity conflicts, it is an example to explore possible stages required on the route to achieve reconciliation. Seven steps organized in ascending difficulty that people have to climb on the way to reconciliation (see figure 3.1). There is no possibility to move forward until the phase is complete, and even if there is no fixed order, all of them are required to reach the top, where there is the possibility to build a joint narrative.

Figure 3.1
Reconciliation Pyramid



Source: Auerbach (2009:303)

She uses the pyramid metaphor to analyse how far a process is from the top or how symmetrical are the positions from each side on each rung. The starting point is getting acquaintance with the clashing narratives of the ones involved. From there, without necessarily accepting it, acknowledge the other's narrative. This move will allow for empathy to be developed and expressed toward the other's plight. Empathized with the enemy can lead to recognize our role in their narrative and assume at least partial responsibility. This step may be followed by restitution or reparation for the wrongdoing, which may also include the request for forgiveness and public apologizing. This process supposed to prepare both sides to reach a point where it is possible to have an integrated narrative based on mutual acceptance of the past and a joint vision of the future.

While reconciliation is conceived as a long process to generate significant change in the heart and mind of all those whose relations got broken, the outline of these steps is a

resource to identify and assess the potential to surpass all the obstacles they may encounter on the way. The effort behind the Pyramid is to highlight the role the empathy, apology, and forgiveness can provide to support the arrangements made at the negotiation table, to transform their narratives from resentment to trust.

Seven Steps

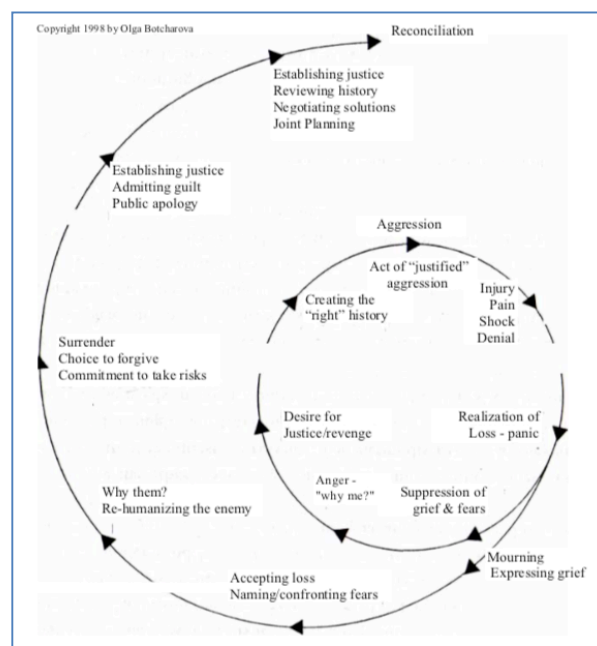
Olga Botcharova (2002) developed this model while working in regions in a severe conflict like the former Yugoslavia. Out of the training and assistance in workshops with the ethnic and religious leaders of the communities, she conceived the model as a path to promote reconciliation, facilitate forgiveness and conflict transformation addressing personal trauma, and breaking the cycle of violence.

From the perspective of Track two diplomacy, the unofficial diplomacy, she proposes an approach that includes social, psychological, and spiritual interactions in the process of peacebuilding. It is by recognizing the suffering, healing, and transforming of people, that there is an opportunity to transform the relationships and stop the cycle of victimhood to begin again.

When victims do not get the chance to address their suffering, it can be followed by a progression of escalating violence. Along the process of pain and denial, the suppression of grief, loss, and fear as a survival reaction can turn in anger. Then, victims develop the idea that the only way to heal and get justice is by justified aggression. When this happens, the cycle is completed, and the victim is now the aggressor.

Although this does not happen in every case, Botcharova developed a model to defy the logic of conflict escalation. From the psychological and spiritual aspects required to achieve forgiveness, she proposed the Seven Steps towards Forgiveness model, which depicts the stages of transformation from victimhood and suffering, to healing, forgiveness and future reconciliation (See figure 3.2)

Figure 3.2
Seven Steps towards forgiveness



Source: Botcharova (2002:298)

Each step allows victims to continue on a healing path, accepting lost, confronting fears, and even discovering a way to re-humanize the enemy. At this point, victims can choose to forgive. By releasing the pain of the past, victims find internal peace and conclude their healing process with forgiveness. This is the only way to allow the parties in conflict to continue their path towards reconciliation.

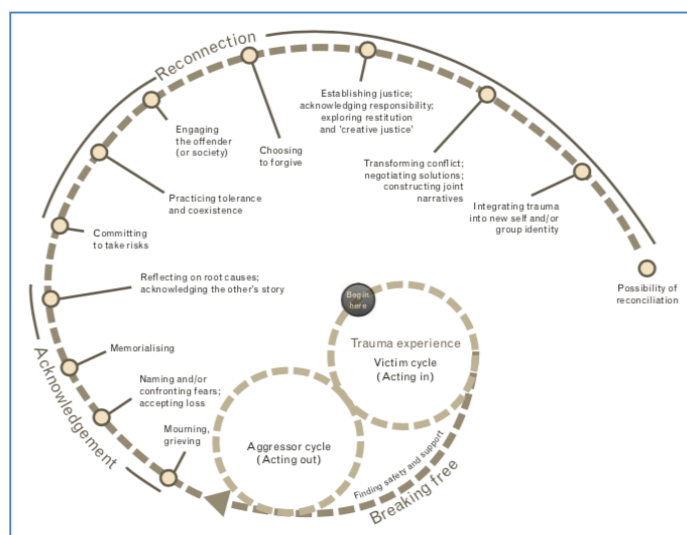
Along with forgiveness, the other fundamental condition of reconciliation is justice. Related with the acknowledgement of the past, the recognizing of responsibilities, and the acceptance of the wrongdoing. When this stage is achieved, the parties can begin to negotiate joint solutions. This is only possible because the once-broken relationship between victims and aggressors is reintegrated. What she describes is an evolving process that is central to facilitate dialogue among sides, move forward to reconciliation, and build sustainable peace.

Snail model

STAR is a framework, and a program resulted from the needs of religious leaders and caregivers identified to help the communities who had been impacted in the aftermath of 9/11. The aim was to understand the impacts of trauma and provide tools to community leaders to support their communities beyond the medical model. With a focused on promoting trauma awareness and resilience, making meaning, building secure and sustainable communities and transforming conflict; the STAR team developed the 'Snail Model', formally known as the Trauma Healing Journey: Breaking Cycles of Violence (Mansfield 2017)

Based on Botcharova's model and through an exercise of trial and error supported on different training process they made, the 'Snail model' is an illustration of the opportunity to spiral out from the traumatic experience and the cycle of violence, towards the possibility of reconciliation. It includes three stops along the journey: breaking free; acknowledgement; and reconnection (see figure 3.3). The first one is about psychological grounding to support the decision of acting in or out the cycle of victimhood. The second one has to do with recognizing the root causes and the other's story and facing emotions. Finally, the third moment is concern with connecting with ourselves and the others to restore the relationships.

Figure 3.3
Snail Model



Source: Mansfield (2017:266)

Under the assumption that unhealed trauma encourages patterns of violence. The model integrates a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework to address the impact of trauma on the mind, body, spirit, and relationships to enable the process of healing and resilience along a journey that eventually can open the way forward to reconciliation. Each one of the stops has an entry point that represents the possibility for building on resilience (Yoder 2005)

Their work is supported by theory and practice and has an emphasis on healing individuals, communities, and societies. In the model, the idea is to depict a simplified version of all the elements that are involved in the journey without any specific or progressive order, integrating people's resources to cope rather than medical response mechanisms, to address the causes and consequences of violence. In the end, reconciliation would be the result of this journey and the transformation on multiple dimensions (emotional, physical, spiritual) of the attitudes and beliefs between former enemies.

3.4 Reconciliation in Colombia

In the current context of post-agreement in Colombia is necessary to analyse how reconciliation is being understood. From the work of Angelica Aparicio (2019) is possible to identify three discourses of what is reconciliation. By questioning who should reconcile with whom, at what time, and how? She distinguishes different elements for each actor, Government, FARC-EP, and Civil Society.

For instance, the Government sees reconciliation as a process done between victims and perpetrators that is possible by strengthening the rule of law and recovering trust in institutions and among citizens. In other words, a notion following the liberal peace paradigm close to the cold approach presented before. FARC-EP considers reconciliation as a national, political project focus on balancing the relations between the ruling class and the whole society, which includes them as historical victims of the political regime. Finally, for the Civil Society is something that can be related to justice, tolerance, or coexistence, and is linked with the notion of Transitional justice (Aparicio 2019:33-38).

This last perception is framed in a catholic tradition related to forgiveness, understood as a possibility to free from the inflicted harm by pardoning the perpetrator. Though forgiveness is a critical condition, it must not be equated to reconciliation. Instead, this could be related to the notion of 'Reconciliation events'. A concept worked by Brounéus based on the investigation of Long and Brecke to describe events associated with reconciliation that can not be entitled as reconciliation (2008:14).

There is no recipe for success, no single correct way to devise reconciliation. As every conflict is different, so is reconciliation. Maybe it is more like a creative process that requires the kind of imagination to capture all the paradoxes behind the challenge of violent conflict. While liberal peace may produce the solutions regarding the issues of confrontation in conflict, reconciliation tackles with all the relationships among those who will have to make those solutions work.

Where there is no common perspective about reconciliation like in the Colombian case, the journey towards reconciliation would depend on How more than What. There can be multiple options to get there, which requires building flexible, adaptive responses to find a common narrative that gives meaning to new relationships and pays attention to the way brokenness and healing wander, to join them in their path. This means understanding reconciliation as a pragmatic process of building relationships and confidence, not in a totalizing way but according to people's needs, rooted in their experiences because victims are

the ones that embody the journey and best know what is taking them to that place of encounter.

4 Broken story, the beginning of the journey

To illustrate the healing journey is necessary to put in context where it exactly began and how these women place it on their narratives. In the '80s, Colombia went through several economic transformations that multiplied already existing social conflicts, increasing the opportunities for expansion of different armed actors (CNMH 2013). In particular, in Cauca region, located at the south-west of the country, conflicts associated with land tenure were crucial factors in the social, political and economic power relations inherited from the XIX century between traditional aristocracies, indigenous, afro-colombian and peasant communities (PNUD 2015) and the presence of insurgency groups.

Under this context, FARC-EP found relatively easy conditions to settle their politic and military project. By the '90s, they had established in the five provinces that constitute Cauca region with Bloque Occidental and specifically, the 8th front in the Central province (MOE, n.d.). In this setting, a territory in permanent dispute, Fulvia Chungana and the sisters Gloria and Milgen Medina were victims of sexual violence in 1990 in El Tambo, Cauca. This is how their journey starts, with a harmful event:

Fulvia Chungana

My partner got a job in Santana, close to La Romelia, Cauca. I was almost four months pregnant. I left my oldest child with my parents and went with my partner. For us, it was normal the guerrilla was around. They did their meetings; even organized the opening of the health post. Those men did not mess with anyone; I used to believe. One day, I was preparing lunch when three guerrilleros passed. I did not pay much attention until one of them asked me for boiled water; I did not have any but offered some coffee. He followed me into the kitchen, grabbed me from behind, and throw me to the floor. He said I should remain silent, or he would shoot me. He led at my face with his rifle, tore my clothes, and while outside I hear some singing, I begged him to stop. He pointed his gun while unbuttoning his pants. I told him I was pregnant, but he continued. Somebody called him from outside the house. He stood up, stared at me, and said to me that if I said something, he would kill my partner and my uncle, that was the police inspector of La Romelia.

Gloria Medina

My mom had a store, they broke in, robbed the store, knocked down the kitchen door, it was terrible. It was not just one man. It was like 11 or 12, and we were only the three of us. That was shocking and painful. My father and brother were out of town. When they came back, we told what happened. My brother kept asking if something had happened to us and why the kitchen floor was wet. I said I do not know; I am not sure. But the truth is we did not leave the kitchen until we bathe ourselves, there, in the middle of the night. After that, my father alerted the neighbours, but most of the men were in a nearby town working on a road. Since the city is far away, the guerrilla used to do whatever they wanted to; if they wanted to go in the middle of the town, they would do it. And then, it was the same with the army. It was a town where the ones that had the weapons control it.

Milgen Medina

I was with my two sisters in the house. I was 17. At that time, we did not know who were they. Just some men in boots, armed, with a terrible smell. They threatened us, they said: if you say anything, something is going to happen to your family. That day was awful, that was the beginning, and five days later they killed my brother, it was terrible, the world came upon us.

These three stories are just an example of the harms inflicted as a consequence of conflict dynamics. Even though each experience was lived differently, acknowledge the similarities in time, context, social conditions, place, and perpetrators created a space of encounter for solidarity and empathy. Essential to enable telling the story, even fragmented, and place narration as a critical feature in acceptance and healing.

Going through these narrations facilitated identifying the resources that added value each step of the way. Their story starts with the traumatic experience and moves back and forward, from where they are now to what it took to put them there. This not only underlines the weight the event had on their lives but also helps to put in context the relation amongst sexual violence and the particularity of devices later on needed to heal. Similarly, following their journey, as they talked about it, serves to understand how they make sense of their reality, what were the interactions and negotiations to heal, and the key moments of their transition, as they will be presented here.

4.1 Sexual violence during conflict

Different armed actors have used sexual violence as a widespread practice in the context of armed conflict. Exercised not only as an opportunistic manner or collateral damage but with clear goals to achieve territorial control. Its extended use, as a strategic weapon, inserted on gender norms to attack communities, can be tracked down from Guatemala to Sudan or Kosovo (Stark 2012) This kind of violence builds on existing gender relations and cultural values mostly against women, where patriarchal hierarchies interact as a tool of control and terror (Farwell 2004:394)

Sexual violence is not an exclusive result of armed conflict, is also a form of violence supported on structural gender arrangements in every society. It depicts power relations that enhance hierarchal positions mainly between men and women. To understand its logic is necessary to acknowledge the set of cultural aspects that have legitimized the use of female bodies since colonial times as a domination structure. These cultural aspects, embroider on each society, that normalize violence are what Johan Galtung refers to as 'Cultural Violence', "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence (...) that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (1990:291).

Upon these aspects, conflict dynamics support the use of sexual violence "reinforcing the gender binary order and multiplying discourses of legitimacy that promote their existence as something natural and inevitable in women lives" (CNMH 2017:204) [Author's translation]². Sexual violence in conflict scenarios is mirrored in the traditional patriarchal structures that especially increases women's vulnerability, associated with cultural aspects like gender stereotypes about women and men's sexualities, and social tolerance to sexual violence, associated with feelings of guilt and shame on victims.

In Colombia, sexual violence "has had an indistinctly strategic character, since all armed actors used it as a practice of appropriation of bodies and populations, that has contributed to reaffirm their authority in the territories" (Op.cit. p.49) [Author's translation]. Even if, in some cases, could correspond to opportunistic attacks rather than a direct stra-

² Quotes translated by the author from Spanish to English.

tegic act, it still worked as a form to validate territorial domain and social control over the communities.

While most of the cases of sexual violence are related to paramilitary groups, between the '80s and early '90s, one of the tactics used by FARC-EP guerrilla to the establishment of control, was sexual violence (Op.cit p.112). As one of them shares: *We did not know who they were, but then they started to make people go to these meetings to present themselves, and they said they were from the 8th front of FARC. That moment was when we knew they were the same people (T03)*

This reinforces the idea that to suppress and silence communities, sexual violence worked as a weapon to imposed the ideas of order and authority from each armed group. Making use of bodies as a key site of violence, that is held on cultural aspects of uneven gender structures between men and women and asymmetric relations between armed actors and population, renders sexual violence as a tool to the moral and psychological defeat of women and communities. This is why voicing the experience will have such an important role, because it can be seen as a mechanism to defiance victimhood.

4.2 Physiology of trauma

Sexual violence can be understood as a traumatic event that leaves an imprint in the mind, brain, and body with permanent consequences. Particularly, “after trauma the world is experienced with a different nervous system that has an altered perception of risk and safety” (Van der Kolk 2014:181), reorganizing our responses.

Our brain works with three central regions: the cerebral cortex, the rational brain; the limbic system, the emotional brain; and the brain stem, the instinctual brain. When trauma disrupts, they stop working together, and the information goes directly to the brain stem, connected to the amygdala, activating fear (Van der Kolk 2014; Yoder 2005). It is possible to track those immediate responses in their narratives:

I fought, I bit, I scratched. I said if you are doing something, do it to me. That nothing happens to my girls, my little sisters Lourdey and Milgen (T01)

I had two choices in the middle of my fear, let me or for him to kill me. He raped me, it was horrible (T02)

These different reactions can be associated with the responses to threats: fight, flight, and freeze. According to Porges's theory:

“(…) if no one comes to our aid, or we're in immediate danger, the organism reverts to a more primitive way to survive: fight or flight. We fight off our attacker, or we run to a safe place. However, if this fails—we can't get away, we're held “down or trapped—the organism tries to preserve itself by shutting down and expending as little energy as possible. We are then in a state of freeze or collapse” (In Van der Kolk 2014:182-183)

What comes next is the attempt to keep things under control dissociating from the event to avoid overwhelming feelings, especially if there is no option to talk about the experience or create a way to release the trauma energy trap in the nervous system. The defensive mode will be activated to carry on:

I used to think that we should have turned really small and hide in a place where they could not find us. But those days were awful; we could not sleep and think that we had to keep going like if nothing happened, because we have to stay there and work in the house helping with the chores (T03)

However, those efforts to maintain control over unbearable emotions can result in numbing actions to enable that possibility: *I limited myself to wash, iron, and cook. But I never hugged my son. I lost the best years of his life because I was full of sadness and pain (T01)*

Equally important to the physiological reaction to trauma, is to understand it along with the social and cultural structures where these emotions are produced. This perspective will enable us to explore trauma as a constitutive part of their journey that can constrain the process towards reconciliation with self and others.

4.3 Broken story and silence

There are many definitions when referring to trauma, ranging from the individual to the collective realm. Most of them related to emotional or physical harm caused by the reaction to a threatening situation or an event in life that renders people out of control and overwhelmed. This disruption destroys all sense of connection, leaving individuals trapped with the residual energy discharged to act before the threat (Levine 1997; Herman 1997; Mansfield 2017)

When we are unable to release all these emotions, we become victims of trauma. That particular moment and how things happened will shape our identities and relationships, creating an interruption in our story. That, in this case, is set by an experience of sexual violence in the context of protracted conflict.

Sexual violence leaves a mark for life. And the damage is not just for me but for my family too. It isolates us, break us. Everything, it breaks our bodies, it breaks our souls and kills all reasons to live. There was a moment when I even thought of buying some poison to give to me and my sisters (T01)

In the narrative process of telling one's story, these kinds of disruptions need to be recognized and fixed. "People need to 'restory'. A playful word that harbours both to *re-store* and *story* in the same meaning "that is, begin the process of providing space for the story to take its place" (Lederach 2005:140) But, what happens when telling is not an option and silence is more than a reaction and becomes a matter of survival?

We three made a pact after that, not to say anything. They told us, if you open your mouth, we kill your family. And without us saying anything, our brother appears dead. So, after a moment like that, so delicate, so serious, so terrifying, they kill one brother. There is no chance even to say something happened to me, to us (T03)

The violence inflicted on their bodies was a threat to establish territorial control. Supported by the imaginaries related to war masculinities and women victimized bodies. In a society where gender-based violence remains a private matter, victims are not supposed to talk, not only to avoid the risk of more things to happen but to not experience the guilt, shame and stigma associated with this type of violence (CNMH 2018)

From their narrative can be traced the multiple effects that remain silent had:

1. On the ordinary life and the capacity to undertake different tasks and being present in the moment. *I live with a lot of hate, resentment, and anger. That came with sickness, and my life was gone in the monotony of trying to keep that to myself. (T01)*
2. On one's perception of responsibility and feelings of guilt and shame related to the cultural aspects that legitimized violence and blame victims. *I was afraid and ashamed. I used to think it was my fault, maybe because I wore shorts that day they felt they have an opportunity with me, I carried with that stigma everyday (T02)*
3. On one's sense of justice, that increase feelings of anger and retaliation. *I had this big burden; I could only think about revenge and doing them the kind of wrong they did to me. (T02)*

All these responses are related to the Cycle of Violence, where the trauma experience can lead the victim to become an aggressor to fulfil the absence of safety and support. On the 'Snail Model' (presented in chapter 3), this would be the moment to spiral out from the

traumatic event and break free from the cycle of violence. Though all victims do not turn into aggressors, it is critical to map out the diverse elements that help to reach the point of reconnection on the journey that enabled them to move forward.

In their case, the silence was a forced choice made to leave that experience behind. Not only related to a sense of brokenness in their stories that can not be expressed but also with an event they considered people were not ready to hear without blaming them. It was an unspeakable and inaudible experience they tried to and had to put aside to keep functioning. After that experience, silence was a curse that shaped their identities for too long, trapped in what it would be the first small cycle in the 'Snail model'.

5 Defining moments of the healing journey

To be able to identify and analyse the resources involved in their healing path is necessary to pay close attention to those moments they recalled as defining in their process. From a theoretical perspective, it is not easy to understand the effects different external efforts have to enable internal transformations. Each moment is an opportunity to explore the dynamic interactions involved and the way they responded to them.

5.1 Finding their voice

We knew about all the things the guerrilla had done in El Tambo, but we did not talk about it. We thought we are going to be judge and pointed, but we need to organize ourselves. One alone is in danger, but if 20 or 30 goes together, we can do it. This is the time because during the process there were no cases, everything stopped (T02)

This means that while the peace negotiations were happening, some territorial dynamics changed, translating in a sense of security. Some of the measurements taken to reduce the uncertainty of intentions and demonstrate commitment with peace during the process, such as ceasefires, proved to be fundamental for allowing them to feel the confidence to tell their truth.

Thanks to the peace process we can see some guarantee for the victims, so we said this is the time to talk, this is the moment to denounce, so this will not go unpunished, or at least for it not to happen again (T01)

The Statement

With the mechanism to declare created by the Victims' Law³ and the sense of security lived in the regions, product of the unilateral ceasefire during the negotiations; it was time for the next defining moment on their journey. It was time to speak. In this sense, the combination of these two elements can be understood as external conditions that facilitated the beginning of the internal journey. By having the opportunity to declare their harm, they were opening the door to face their grievances.

It all started with the statement they made before public entities and ombudsman on collective campaigns to declare, arranged by the organization Corporación Mujer Sigue Mis Pasos⁴. One of the first ones in participating in these campaigns was Fulvia, back in 2014. A friend who belongs to the organization reached her, shared her own story and motivated her to participate. To facilitate the process, the organization brings the public entities to the territories and closer to the victims to take on the statement and register them on the system in a safe environment.

When Fulvia declared, the process was still new, and she could not avoid feeling at risk. But, as argued by Van der Kolk (2014:498) "we may think we can control our grief, our terror, or our shame by remaining silent, but naming offers the possibility of a different

³ Or Law 1448, proclaimed on 2011 to establish measurements for the attention, assistance and integral reparation of the victims of internal armed conflict in Colombia.

⁴ An organization to help women in the process of publicly speaking and denounce, to get access to justice and seek for reparation under de Victims' Law in the case of those who were harm in the context of armed conflict (CMSMP n.d.)

kind of control” and after that, she began to help the organization with the process of accompanying other victims.

In 2015 was the turn for Gloria, and Milgen. They heard about Fulvia’s experience and intending to access psychosocial attention, decided to break their pact of silence after 25 years and make the statement:

That day was really hard because the three of us go back to what had happened and is like at that moment you take a huge stone out off your back, and you think I did it! I did it! And then all those moments were back again. But after that we have had a lot of opportunities, from that they contacted us with IRD (now Blumont Organization) and UARIV (T03)

Making the official statement is a critical part in the process to restore the dignity, reputation and rights of victims, that is why is part of the satisfaction measurements of the Victims’ Law (Ministerio del Interior 2012:143) Is like if language opened a possibility and in the telling something unlocked to start healing. On their words: *Since I decided to talk, I began to feel a change in my life, on everything. Because I used to be aggressive, even with my family. After I declared, my life changed little by little. I learnt to smile again (T02)*

With the fear and shame still present, telling the story was their first step. And, even if it took them to relive that moment, facing all those overwhelming feelings that were trapped for so long, with the statement not only came the opportunity to speak but also to be recognized as victims. A transition in their identities that signified a new course in their journey.

From the burden of silence to the heaviness of victimhood, they needed to deal with their pain. Being acknowledged as victims made them visible in the system, and granted the possibility to get access to the many programs offered by the state, in particular to the ones frame as psychosocial interventions, which corresponds with Lederach’s Truth side on the four energies.

5.2 Psychosocial interventions

Psychosocial interventions are presupposed to be one of the core elements to break the cycle of violence and contribute to the establishment of sustainable peace. This perspective, acknowledges the fact that “unhealed psychosocial impacts of past violence need to be addressed to support the effective design and functioning of structures, institutions, and activities being established as part of any peacebuilding process” (Tankink n.d.)

The recognition of the need for healing trauma initiatives is framed on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) field, that “aims to link the psychological and social impacts of conflict and mass violence on the mental health and psychosocial well-being of the survivors, and the potential threat of this impact on peace, human rights and development” (Wanja Gitau and Rhodes 2016:37). Their work shows the role that psychosocial interventions have to address the emotions and relationships affected as a result of conflict dynamics. At the same time, highlights the limitations to understand what interventions should include and how to identify and involve creative initiatives, based in context-specific experiences.

Since violence is a significant threat in different levels, psychosocial interventions are seen as an integral part of the services individuals and communities have to heal relational and emotional needs. Taking into account this consideration, another resource generated under the Victims’ Law to address psychosocial issues was the creation of a program to re-

establish the physical and psychosocial conditions of victims, as one of the rehabilitation measurements for integral reparation.

PAPSIVI

I need a person who has the ability of active listening to tell my story. That listens without pressure because not all the time I am going to be ready to talk. If that person does not generate confidence is hard to say anything because it is only three sessions, and that is it. That happened with the PAPSIVI from the UARIV (T01)

The program she refers to is the Program for Psychosocial Attention and Integral Health (PAPSIVI), which seeks to: “facilitate the representation of emotional suffering, as well as the integration of the experience of violence in the life history of the victims; contribute to the reconstruction of bonds, social fabric and sociocultural cohesion of the victims; strengthen the resources and strategies of the victims to cope” (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social 2016:6) [Author’s translation]

So far, the three women have received this attention. Even one of them has had access to the program in more than one occasion but felt that:

It was rather short. It was collective, with other women and it lasted like 25 days. We gather together, talked about what had happened in the past, and how to start processing. It lasted 25 days, and I did it twice (T02)

For another one, the experience was not appropriate at all

At some point, it was a collective moment, but it was not accord for such a severe violation, was not the most ideal. They even send us a male psychologist, very professional, but I think that if a male caused my harm, it is very difficult for me to open up and share things with a man (T01)

The fact that the program is in charge of the Ministry of Health poses in context the type of approach used to address this kind of trauma. Even if it makes a distinction between psychiatric and psychosocial affectations to organize the interventions in a pertinent way, its implementation is considered insufficient by the victims.

There was a moment where the UARIV send us a psychologist to the house because that was a violation that not only affects in the moment and to you but your relations. But those sessions were limited, too short (T03)

Although they are grateful to receive the program, it was not until they got access to the psychosocial intervention offered by Blumont Organization called ‘Closing Gaps’ that they truly felt reparation has started. For them, this is the most highly valued intervention they have received so far since as we will see, under the conditions offered by this program, they were able to appropriate all the tools given to start a new life project.

Closing Gaps

The program started in 2008 to close the emergency gaps suffered by displaced people in Colombia as a result of armed conflict. It is run by Blumont, a non-profit organization from the United States of America financed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. Their primary focus is to support the Colombian government and communities to improve attention and assistance to victims of forced displacement.

As recounted by Juan Pablo Franco, in 2012 the program was restructured to add an emphasis in community rehabilitation after armed conflict, which was aligned to the Victim’s Law and the Colombian public policy for psychosocial rehabilitation. They work from three action lines: emergency psychosocial attention for emotional stabilization; emotional recovery; and community rehabilitation to rebuild social fabric in the communities

affected during armed conflict; using their community-based psychosocial methodologies in a strategy named Groups of mutual psychosocial support, based on:

A psychosocial approach that emphasized psychosocial harm as a result of conflict violence, in both individual and collective levels. Does not have a mental health approach but more behavioural. It recognizes that the reactions of victims of armed conflict are normal in an abnormal situation and that affected their emotions (BO01)

Each group is developed through twelve collective encounters divided into two stages. The first one covers nine meetings where the group builds confidence among each other, starts recognizing psychosocial harm and the emotions related to it, and their strategies to cope. The aiming is to generate empathy and awareness of their resources, to achieve emotional recovery, and being able to take that experience in the process of rehabilitation for their communities. The second stage takes the final three encounters to work on a closing activity for their emotional recovery and a memory initiative to share their process.

With them, was a process that lasted more than a year because it was like rubbing on a wound. It was about opening a wound that I thought it was almost close. But then it starts to bleed again, and they help you to heal it and heal it until finally is like a scar. It is still there, but it does not hurt anymore (T02)

From the beginning, this program felt different, and even if sometimes resulted painful, it was critical in their process of healing. Being able to face all their feelings and grieved their pain was fundamental to develop emotional awareness, needed to start moving on. At the same time, the encounters made possible to find emotional safety in the experience of the other, which helped them to avoid feelings of shame and guilt, and encourage the confrontation of the deepest pain.

My story is not only mine; maybe the story from the others is even harder than mine. But the fact to know that we share a story and that we can heal together in that company was excited. We could tell our story; we knew each others story and pain. And from that, we started helping each other, identify how to process that moment when you start talking about that you are a victim. And then, they began to help us, and it was something beautiful (T02)

Sharing their stories served as an initial bond of empathy that help them to release stress, heal the detachment caused by the trauma experience and rebuild trust. Allowing themselves to grieve the emotional charge help them let it go. With this transformation, they were in the position to share, not only with their safe group but beyond their private space.

The Closing Gap program took them through different processes, that can be related with some of the moments of the acknowledgement stop on the 'Snail model', such as: "mourning and grieving, telling the story, renegotiate the traumatic energy, naming fears and expressing shame as well as honour" (Yoder 2005:137) to achieve emotional recovery.

We will see next in detail the two elements of the program that they identified as the ones that help them the most and can be referred as to the 'Aha moments' on their process: Building a drum and perform in a theatre play.

5.3 Memory Initiative

We had to do something representative of all our work. Like a tapestry, or a book, anything. But I told them that I did not want a book because we don't even read them. I wanted something for us to communicate that as victims, we have rights, and we need to be heard, but not just in our close environment but everywhere. And a tapestry or a book was a thing that maybe would stay at the historic memory house, but not go beyond there (T01)

This statement is critical since not only talks about their needs to find a mechanism to increase the resonance of their story, truth and journey. But to the general activities used for symbolic memory and reparation processes, and the victim's appreciation towards their actual meaning and impact.

Part of the methodology approach on which is based the Closing Gaps program is to have a portfolio of techniques to support the psychosocial work for the closure of the emotional recovery process, and the memory initiative project as part of the strategies to build symbolic memory. As described by Juan Pablo Franco

We are continually looking for different techniques that have been widely used, especially in Latin America, in another type of violent contexts like the ones in Southern Cone with the use of schools of theatre like theatre of the oppressed. So, I guess is more like out of curiosity, because we want to have as many opportunities to offer and depends on what people choose according to their harm.

When he says that the selected technique is something that happens out of curiosity, is because they suggest to the group several options to choose. This has to do with an understanding of the techniques as adaptive tools, not corresponding to a specific theory but to a meaning the group feel close to their experience, and that gives them the possibility to also share with their communities.

On that occasion, Lisa Rodríguez, the psychosocial coordinator proposed a new technique to try in the portfolio, building drums. As part of the policy of the program to deal with second hand trauma, every three months, the psychosocial team takes a break to receive emotional care. She participated in a workshop to build ancestral drums and from her own experience, decided to encourage its use as part of the methodology with the groups.

I saw his methodology, and after doing the workshop, I began to explore how to do the same with these women. Because we already used several group therapy techniques, but something was missing. Something that connected those experiences so difficult to talk about. I saw that drums caused a specific effect as a healing tool that could be useful to address the sexual violence topic. To connect as women, not only from voice but from singing, sound and vibration (PC01).

This could be what Lederach calls the “serendipitous appearance of the moral imagination” (2005:19). The moral imagination is the capacity to recognize distinct possibilities to explore unknown paths that can lead to profound social change. That capacity is developed by following the unexpected, by the quality of serendipity. An accidental sagacity that increases our abilities to discover new ways to respond to the real world needs, moving across unplanned quests (Lederach 2005:113-129)

It was a completely new thing for the team, so they had to develop all the parameters around the drums to give them the meaning they needed according to their methodology. The same thing happened with the proposal for the memory initiative, since they chose to do a theatre play, they had to ask both teachers to make a proposal in which the use of drums and theatre supported, and be aligned with the recovery process to give meaning to their journey and be used as a vehicle to guide the rehabilitation process.

Building Drums and re-Building lives

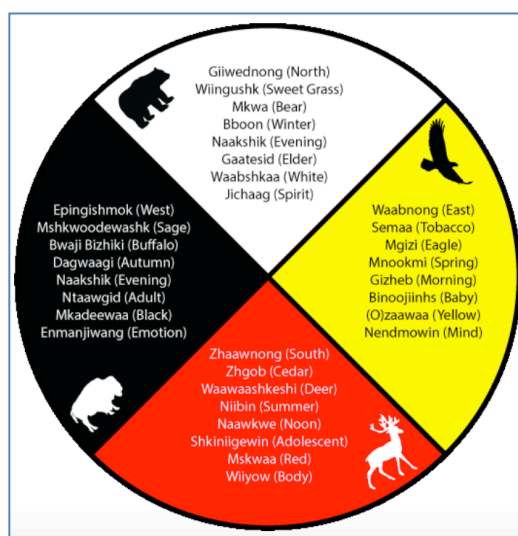
In 2000 Horacio Serrano travelled to Canada to learn from the Sioux Lakota tradition how to build ancestral drums. In this community, drums are used by the shamans, the healer of the soul, to connected with the spirits. In general, drums “constitute magic-religious implements by virtue of which the shaman is able to undertake the ecstatic journey” (Eliade 1964:171). They are transcending symbols that have the specific function to enable movement between time and space, to reach levels where the awareness of the self is achieved.

The effect sounds produced by drums can also be traced to the brain. The beat tends to stimulate waves in the brain and relax the limbic system. As studied by Winkelman (1986:178) “these findings suggest that cortex is easily set into oscillation at the alpha frequency, and that a wide variety of percussion produce or enhance this state of dominance of slow wave frequencies” related to physiological patterns of introspection and trance. Horacio work with those stimuli in different healing circles where the drums have a central role.

To the project made for Blumont program, he not only suggested a sound sensitization but to build the drums. That process is related to the Medicine Wheel, a universal symbol that represents the circle of life and its journey as one goes through each quadrant to reach the centre, the place of balance:

“East is associated in this discussion with the sun dawn and symbolically refers to spring, light, beginnings, fire, and enlightenment (illumination) which brings transformation. South is associated with water and symbolically refers to summer. West is here associated with earth and symbolizes the value of introspection and insight. The west could relate to grounded experience where introspection and insight arise out of our being bound to the earth. North is associated with air and winter.” (Calliou 1995:52-53)

Figure 5.1
The medicine wheel



Source: Nelson 2016:156

Following the Wheel, the idea was to emulate their journey and reach the point of equilibrium to close that cycle. While they were building the drums, they were going step by step through each one of the quadrants, establishing a relation between each element and their emotional recovery. The goal was:

Working from their harm and look the way to thank for what happened as learning. It was not about to forget, or turn the page. It was about turn things around, walking the cycle becomes medicine in you. It was about transforming the experience in learning (DT01)

As describe by Horacio Serrano, in a workshop that lasted two days, they gestated their drums in one sitting to being able to finish it, following the Wheel. Along the process,

metaphors have a fundamental role in explaining each element concerning their experience⁵. They had the purpose of giving meaning to what they were doing, using symbols related to the process of building the drum and taking them to a level where could create a mirror effect of what they went through in their lives.

They start at the east, where the sun rises, they posed an intention and asked for *permission* to initiate the path. Then they go south, where you need to be *attentive*. In here they need to be very careful because this is when they are knitting the skin in the wooden ring. They have to use the same continuous thread until the end and be aware not to miss any of the holes and avoid tangles. The idea is reaching an introspective level, where the attention goes, from outside with the drum, to their inner selves.

On the west side, they work with *patience* and the north, is about *temperance*. As the skin hardens, they start to feel tired and hurt. But they could not stop because they have to begin tempering the skin, which requires a lot of strength on their behalf. This also proves resistance and patience,

We had to temper the thread, little by little to close the skin on the ring and been able to make it sound. We also related that with temperance, love and patience, because to build a drum, you have to be seated from 8 am to 11 pm. The next day you are tired, your fingers have blisters, for many women, their fingers bleed. So, I think that is a resemblance of our daily life (T02)

He uses those moments of physical discomfort and stress to make a transition between their feelings at the moment and their experience. Opening the space for them to share, tell and remember, and intertwined that emotion with the different moments along the process with the drums.

I tell them, the thread is also that, our lives. Sometimes it tangles, so you have to work with patience and care to see what is happening with that thread, to see what is happening to us (DT01)

For him, going beyond those feelings shows them the capabilities within themselves to overcome self-doubt, insecurity, uncertainty, and even low self-esteem

At the end, when they see their instrument completed is fulfilling to see such beautiful work, they say: I did not think I was capable of doing that. Even when they face an obstacle, they said: my hands are not going to be able. But they managed to do it, to go beyond that and they do it (DT01)

Figure 5.2
Step by step of the drum



Source: Horacio Serrano personal archive

⁵ I will go further on this subject in a following section

Once the drums are dry and ready, you have reach transformation and is time to present your *gratitude* for the journey. After that, starts the sound sensitization. The purpose is working on rhythm, pulsation and holding a beat to induce a minor level of trance to release anger and frustration. When they play the drum for the first time the sound is more like noise, the goal is to transform it in harmony. To transit gradually from the feeling of anger to a softer, steady beat.

As explained by Horacio, inducing trance is how he can stimuli the healing process on a deeper level:

We start teaching them some rhythms, and after 10 minutes of holding the beat, I begin with something from music-therapy to start inducing little, really subtle trances. And you get to see when they are ready because they close their eyes and move to the beating. In that point, I work with a thing called the medicine chant. Is like a mantra short and repetitive, and the purpose is to heal in that level of trance.

Trances are understood as a momentary alteration on the state of consciousness. However, on Shamanic traditions, those states are “characterized by lucid but narrowed awareness of physical surroundings, expanded inner imagery, modified somatosensory processing, altered sense of self, and an experience of spiritual travel to obtain information necessary for solving a particular individual or social problem” (Flor-Henry et al 2017:5) Therefore, having a function of self-exploration that facilitates connections resulting in open levels of growth and healing (Becker 1994; Castillo 2008)

Whether they were aware of these effects or not, truth is they believe the process with the drums was a defining moment in their journey, an ‘Aha moment’. For them, that was when they feel a change, with the sounding embrace of the drums, they started to feel healed. In their words:

That moment of pain, were our hands bleed was like that terrible moment we went through in our lives. That drum is the representation of my life. Here are my moments of anguish and pain, but also emergence, joy, and healing while playing. And, Oh my god! I never thought that was going to work like that. I cried and cried and healed. It was such a healing sensation, and the drums are the culmination of that healing (T01)

Figure 5.3
Gloria Medina



Source: Gloria Medina personal archive

Is the best! It is freedom and tranquillity, its an embrace. The drum was fundamental in that process; it has a special place in each one of us. The way we grab it, we take care of it. Hearing its sound is like really? I did it? Is wonderful! Is my healing drum! (T02)

Figure 5.4
Fulvia Chungana



Source: Fulvia Chungana personal archive

At the moment they gave us the materials I thought: well, we are going to do a drum but, what are we going to do with it? But when it started sounding, I said: what a beautiful thing! It is amazing to hear those drums. For me, it was special because it touched my heart; it touched my soul. The drum is life because it is vibration and is like giving fuel to your motor (T03)

Figure 5.5
Milgen Medina



Source: Milgen Medina personal archive

For Horacio, the added value of this experience was the whole building process and the possibility to work in a ritualistic way with all the symbols involved in it. In this sense, we can argue that the entire process worked as a ‘rite of passage’. According to Van Gennep (2008), human life is a succession of moments like birth, puberty, marriage, death, etc., and each one of those moments is associated with a ceremonial sequence or rite of passage that accompanies the transition from one stage into another one. From a broken story to a heal self, supported on the construction of the drums, this can be seen as a rite of passage on their journey.

Acting out the journey

Tambores que claman, Cuerpos que expresan hilos de vida⁶ is the play resulted from a process that lasted about two weeks, with the support of Laura Sierra, an actress and scenic artist that joined the team to produce the theatre play. From her professional skills, she set up a proposal divided into three moments: body sensitization; testimony; and aesthetics. The first moment was directly connected with their experience with sexual violence. This is related to Van der Kolk argument (2014:710)

“to find our voice, we have to be in our bodies—able to breathe fully and able to access our inner sensations. This is the opposite of dissociation, of being “out of body” and making yourself disappear. (...). Acting is an experience of using your body to take your place in life.”

The focus was for them to recognize their bodies as the territory of the experience, where the harm was felt, and set it free through meditation, expression and movement workshops to regain confidence in their bodies and been able to transform it in a means of communication.

The second moment was about their stories, what had happened and what and how they wanted to share it. With the support of the psychology team, they created safe spaces to tell their stories, now involving their journey with the drums. On those occasions where containment was needed, they applied a technique that Horacio taught them called the embrace of the drum. Whenever someone felt overwhelm the other ones would surround her and start playing the drums to cover it with the vibrations.

We sat on a circle, each one of us told their story. Again, there were tears, but these were also of gratitude because we are more empowered, and now we can embrace ourselves, and we know that crying also heals. On those spaces, we created the play when we tell now, before and after in our stories (T02)

Their testimonies were the primary input to produce the play. However, they did not want to tell them as monologues so, for the third moment, they proposed an aesthetics to enable sharing their message without addressing it so straightforwardly. They decided to do it using other elements rather than words, such as images, movement and sound, in a collective creation where they felt sure their truth was being told.

There is a difference in the aesthetic proposal, there is a vast mark leave by sexual violence that is difficult to recognize, to accept, and that leaves a print in the body. That has a deep impact on aesthetics. For instance, there is a red fabric to symbolize their pain, the blood (DT02)

This is important if we recalled the role voice has on their journey. However, being on a stage implies a different form to convey a message when you are facing an audience. Thus, the function of the aesthetics selection was based on a figurative approach. A repre-

⁶ In English: Clamorous drums, bodies that express threads of life

sentation of reality through symbolic means that could speak about their journey as a whole.

Laura also proposed working from a theatre theory called Collective Creation, where the actors are not only involved in the performance but the creation process. The whole group participated in every decision behind the production, which at the same time, strengthened the bonds between them.

The performance was also done following elements from ritual theatre. Is like a ceremony, where is emphasized each transition involving symbols and regular objects turn into sacred element on the play. To achieve that, they incorporated the drums and the healing songs they had learnt and added some dance movements.

To sing the story means to do it from the beginning, more or less until the present. Maybe when someone listens to the song, they identify with it. I feel its better to sing the story, in that way it resonates more and shows the possibility to turn it into arts (T02)

The result is a play divided into five acts following their journey: chaos, transition, internal medicine, birth and lineage. As a ritual, it also follows the Medicine Wheel and opens asking for permission. Each act is accompanied by one song⁷ to mark the transitions and the constant beat to hold the group.

Chaos is represented by birth because birth is the beginning of every life. But in this case, it also refers to the birth of one of the women. She was born as a result of rape. So this birth, marks two starts, their lives in this world and their lives after they experienced sexual violence. They tangled up in red fabric to characterize their experience of sexual violence, armed conflict, displacement, fear and pain.

Act two, Transition, is an allegory to the drums itself and the Medicine Wheel. The journey across the four elements of the cycle to transform themselves. On act three, Internal Medicine, they portray the healing process from within, from their own power.

Birth, or act four, starts with the women in white, forming a curtain in front of the stage. On the back, the women in black are on a circle helping each other remove their black dresses. This change illustrates the healing; they are free from the blackness and pain; they are at peace with the help of their sisters.

Fifth act, lineage, all dressed in white play the drums and present themselves by proper name to the audience. Renewed, they have cleaned their past, and they can growth from the present.

⁷ See Appendix 1

Figure 5.6
At the stage



Source: Fulvia Chungana personal archive

The play had a pilot in a public space from where they collected things to improve. To the closure of the program, the play was performed in the main theatre of the city. From that moment on, it turned into a communication device.

That was what we wanted, something that resonates, that continues, that does not end there. With the play, we can reach many people, we can share the sound of the drums, and with each scene, we can share our story. And that gives you strength. And after that, you feel you are healed. After that, I was able to stand up and share my feelings (T03)

From this, we can identify two critical functions of the play in this process. One, the play works as their memory and heritage; and two, the play in itself is a healing ritual. In the reparation process, to know the truth about what happened from the victim's perspective is a priority in their healing process. On the one hand, with the play, they not only were able to speak their truth but to put themselves at the centre of the experience. Regaining control of their story by facing the event, getting to being listened, and even claiming not to be forgotten.

On the other, address social issues like sexual violence through theatre can be related with Carolina García's approach that refers to a hybrid field of representation, as a complementary epistemic and methodological way of analysis of scenic representations, to understand contemporary socio-political realities. This approach of theatre, "contributes to understanding social phenomena such as wars or other violent events; and at the same time, shows how the civil society expresses itself, accomplish their grieving processes or go back to its memories to redo, reinterpret and represent these processes" (2012:264) [Author's translation]

In hybrid theatre, one of the possibilities of transformation has to do with theatre as a social transgressor, where it is possible to reach a state of exposure, vulnerability, and confrontation. It is on this level where this play works its way. A living act that sets the conditions to allow the re-enactment of a particular reality, and its way of transformation. By creating the memory of the journey, it functions as the mechanism to communicate their experience. The traumatic experience goes on and on, to acknowledge that indeed happened, and that it is possible to heal.

Going through the five acts of the play is more than the summary of their journeys. We are witnessing the healing ritual in itself. Every time they performed, they experience all over again the process, which gives to the play the possibility to be a symbolical mechanism of reparation. It is the representation and reinterpretation of that journey on the stage, the one that generates the conditions for the healing action.

Following Lisa Schirch, ritual has three characteristics that help in the propose of peacebuilding, "[f]irst, ritual occurs in a unique social space, set aside from normal life. Second, ritual communicates through symbols, senses, and heightened emotions rather than relying heavily on the use of words. (...) Third, ritual both marks and assists in the process of change" (2014:2). This approach gathers the elements of the play and place them in a dynamic that enables the transformation needed, through non-verbally, performative acts.

Each element has a role in enabling the liminal space that will allow them to go deeper and reach levels where the transformation can happen. The constant beat of the drums is central in creating the mood but is also the representation of their power. They move in a sacred dimension where the play acts like a ritual that makes sense in its repetition.

From the inside, they are completely exposed, vulnerable, and ready to raise as the embodiment of their resistance and dignity. From the outside, this is a powerful memory exercise that is continuously addressing the need to know the truth and fight against forgetfulness.

5.4 Arts and Metaphors

Creating is art because they no longer see you with pity, but actually, they say: you do that with your experience? How did you do it? And you can say: the thing is that this heals, this sets you free, helps you to improve your life from within. So, it is magical how it works (T02)

The constructions of the drums, the sound and body sensitization, telling their stories and turn them into songs and movement can be consider healing acts. Each element conceals a creative process to transcend the challenges resulted from the armed conflict. Music, dance and theatre are forms of art used to convey throughout symbolic references. Those references can have restorative qualities that offer an opportunity in the process of healing, by creating a space for self-expression and the negotiation of identities needed to increase the chances of reconciliation.

Aesthetics is another form of language that helps to communicate without words. In a situation where you lost yourself and telling what happened is almost impossible, can help to break the silence. Although are seen as 'alternative' in the mainstream culture, different scholars had pointed out its role to support rehabilitation processes to express non-verbally, reclaim the body, establish safety, exploring identity, and restore and strength relationships, both in the individual and collective level (Epskamp 1999; Gertel Kraybill 2015; Hanebrink and Smith 2013; Johnson et al 2009; Lederach 2005; Shank and Schrich 2008; Van der Kolk 2014)

The possibilities behind aesthetics reside on the use of figurative means. This has close relationship with metaphors. Metaphors link sensitive, affective meaning with more conceptual aspects of our experiences. While creating distance through the figurative action, transforms a particular experience within symbolic comparisons. For instance, while they are building the drum, the teacher presents it as a gestational process where they are giving birth to the drum, and where the thread represents the umbilical cord that connects them.

The teacher said: think that this is like another child that you are going to give birth and with the remains of the last strand he made us a bracelet, and he said that was like the umbilical cord of our child. So we have to take care of it, love it (T03)

Metaphors create an image pushing the edges between real and possible. According to Kirmayer, this “involves mapping a personal problem onto a collective mythic world through emotionally charged symbols. The emotion evoked by the symbols then insures that manipulating the symbols within that mythic world will lead to corresponding transformations” (2004:36). All those forms of representation enabled the possibilities to reach deeper levels of understanding by using a language that could establish a relationship with their experience. As explain by Horacio:

We used the heart metaphor. There, we make a process to think about the things that had broken our hearts and caused pain. And we say, today we are here to temper our hearts, this loose skin is like if we have our heart out there and we need to start mending it, thread by thread temper it and leaving it ready to beat.

The narrative structure of the symbols and elements used in the construction of the drums, and the ritual performed in the play, were enriched with the use of metaphors to allow the journey of healing. This is the creative act. The capability of imagination at the core of arts, to unlocked social change and generate the movement to transformed those relationships, break as a result of protracted conflict. It is the openness to recognize the possibility of change that lays on the unpredicted creativity of arts, where things are created and reshaped and can transmute as a response to violence (Lederach 2005)

By giving them the chance to try creative forms to approach their trauma experience, the memory initiative turned out to be more than a recollection of their process. It was the definitive moment to live the present without any burden from the past. Though they feel healed, the journey does not end there. All this process facilitated not only the acknowledgement to name their harm, confront their fears and transform them, but to recognize the unexpected possibilities to reconnect with their lives now.

5.5 Group identity

When we can't meet, I start missing them. Now we feel that need because on the singing and acting we laugh, we listen to each other, we help (T01)

Another result from the program was that they become a collective. Throughout that shared experience, they developed a sense of cohesion that lead them to consider establishing as a group of resilient women. With the support of the Red de Mujeres Víctimas y Profesionales⁸ they involved in communitarian projects to support other women victims of sexual violence. Through their story and the play, they have reached different scenarios which gave them the idea to focus their work on providing information and accompany women on the process to claim for their rights and get access to psychosocial attention.

In 2017 they participated on a project funded by UNDEF and implemented by Corporación Opción Legal, a Colombian non-profit organization, to empower women who survived armed conflict in Cauca and Caquetá. The project had three goals: acquire legal identity and establishing their lines of work; widen the diffusion of their experience and articulate with other groups; and organizational strengthening to get funds and formulate projects. As a result, they are now Tamboreras del Cauca Association.

⁸ In English: Victims and Professional Women Network

They consider themselves the result of all these projects and programs from which they have benefited. To become an association is the culmination of a process they describe as empowering. The experience with the drums and the play made them replace their fear and pain with a sense of dignity, power and autonomy, and also gave them a new sense of responsibility. Is what Yoder calls the traumawise, as she explains: “the traumatized say, “Never again.” And they do whatever it takes to keep themselves and their group safe. The traumawise say, “Never again—to me, to us, or to anyone else.” And they work to make the world a safe place for everyone.” (2005:107)

When you are on stage and present yourself as a victim of sexual violence, you show yourself as an empowered victim, as a political actor. So people look at us beyond the pain and tears. They see we are working for our communities because sexual violence brings pain and we are an example to show that after something like that life goes on (T02)

The power they feel is not only related to their personal experience. As an association, the idea is creating the conditions to make the unspeakable easier to be expressed, and the inaudible easier to be attended. That new scenario is meant to be a concrete platform to support each other and other women that can be going through similar situations. Making visible the stories for those who are not ready to talk yet, as living proves of what happened as a consequence of the conflict, and the possibilities of healing.

Now we commit to multiplying our experience and maybe, guide other women. We face a lot of obstacles in our way. When you are in that kind of pain you are confused, and when you try to ask for help, the institutions send you from one place to another, so you get discouraged from doing something to claim your rights. So that's what we stipulated in our statutes as an association, to guide women and improve our quality of life (T01)

In their narratives, it is possible to identify they feel as agents of change in control of their destiny. This means they see agency as the responsibility to act on behalf of yourself and especially of others. Since they know and feel what is to be silent, there is an urgency to transform their experience in an opportunity to raise awareness, and a certain responsibility to guarantee actions are being taken to prevent it happens to anyone else.

This is also the reflection of their journey and their new identity. It all started with the trauma experience that turned them into a silent self. They became victims and also a case of sexual violence. Now, they see themselves as agents of their own life. They regained their voice and bodies and found themselves with the idea of new possibilities supported in their individual value and collective strength. As they claim:

We consider ourselves victims. But empowered victims, if we lose that condition, we are taking responsibility to the guerrilla and the state. Also, because you survived an accident or a disease, but sexual violence is something that remains in you. After all of this we feel repaired, let's say we are victims, but we are political actors as well (T02)

At this stage of their journey, they present themselves as a group of resilient women from the armed conflict. With this new identity, they had accepted the past, are engaged with the present and open to the future. Here, there are three key elements in terms of their identity:

1. They maybe are a different kind of victim now, but remain as victims, because it is something they can not forget to happen. Even if it does not hurt anymore, is something engraved in their bodies⁹, so they carry their victimhood as a testimony.

⁹ In most of their cases, their affective relationship changed or does not exist

2. They are victims of sexual violence in the context of armed conflict. This brings awareness to recognize the role of sexual violence as a tool of territorial domain amid conflict. And is part of the memory and reparation process.
3. They are resilient because they power through that entire journey healed, integrating trauma as an element in their identity.

We now are building something from the root, from all are processes. Now it is about how to share what we learnt. I had to face a hard time, and now I feel proud of myself. That is when you reflect on what was this process about. Now I know I can do it and even if needed, I feel ready to support cases that required psychosocial accompaniment (T03)

This feeling reflects the cycle of healing has come full circle. They can be considered as community healers, providing emotional relieve in some way in their close environment, multiplying their learnings. This means they were able to internalize each one of the external elements they encounter along the journey, translated them to make them their own to helps themselves anytime they need and with the potential to help others.

On their path

Along with the communitarian work, now they find themselves talking about acceptance and forgiveness. They recognize that the first ones to be forgiven are themselves. Free of the guilt and shame associated with what happened, and the pain for the time lost and the broken relationships around them, now they feel in the capability to empathize with their own story.

I understood that what happened was not my fault. That forgiveness starts with me, because you always think, maybe if I would have dressed differently or if I would have stayed at home, but I did not ask for this. If I forgive myself, I can put in the other's shoes and consider a change, because I can not change the past, but I can change the present, and I want a better life for all of us. That is my reason to work (T01)

Only at that moment, they can be kind with themselves again. This is important because forgiveness opens a possibility to get us closer in the path towards reconciliation. When they can consider the broader picture, away from their trauma, they can begin to reflect on root causes and the context of their experience. On that process, they recognize the role they have in the promotion of peace and may discover the need to understand from where the other is position, to find common grounds for reconciliation.

People criticized us; they wonder why we were supporting the FARC not going to jail after they killed my brothers and my father. And I told them, look, I am not thinking about them. I am thinking on my son, my great children, in your own family. We are going to make everything in our power to stop this because I do not want people to get hurt anymore. I do not care if I do not know them, but I do not think it is fair for anybody to live something like this. We have a chance in our hands to change this situation, let's do it (T01)

Forgiveness is not equal to giving up the search for justice but is the possibility to stop the cycle of violence from starting again and from moving along the path towards reconciliation. This is where they are right now in their journey, in a place where reconciliation, being at peace with the other is possible. They not only consider themselves healed but also engaged with re-establishing community relationships, negotiating solutions and exploring their way with their example to create trust, memory and justice.

All the things we received makes us think different. So we need to share that knowledge so people can also see that reconciliation is possible and that the only thing that matter is to be good with each other, that is our input to this situation. Starting small, showing by example, first with the ones in my house, then with the neighbours and from then on, multiplying (T03)

This is not a finished journey but certainly is an experience that illustrates the complexities, needs, conditions, and actions involved. Certain external conditions facilitated the process but were the internalization of all the learnings they received, thanks to those conditions, what made possible adding elements to their healing process. And even took them to start thinking of the possibilities of reconciliation beyond the self.

Conclusions

I chose the experience of Tamboreras del Cauca for this research because I wanted to understand how one can recover from that kind of trauma, and still managed to transform that experience to become community healers and facilitate the transformation of their relationships in everyday life. Especially in the post-agreement contexts, where hopes are high, but concrete actions are low, there is a need to unpack the logic behind constructive, gradual social change. Following that intention, this research aimed to get a closer look at victims' personal journey to understand what were the defining moments of transformation and explore their contribution towards trauma healing and reconciliation.

Based on the stories and narratives of Gloria Medina, Fulvia Chungana and Milgen Medina, it was possible to illustrate their particular journey of healing, a process of more than 20 years. Several elements were involved, but what they identify as the defining moments gives an image of what it took for them, as a whole, to consider their experience a healing journey.

By comparison, this process could be tracked down using some of the models of reconciliation as reference. Some of the moments have a close relationship with the entry points described by them. However, the journey Tamboreras del Cauca have made and how each element added up to achieve social change and contribute to a long-term process of conflict transformation, is personal. Even if they three coincided in a specific moment to make part of that encounter, the decisions and motivations behind every moment were utterly different.

From the way they narrate their process of emotional recovery, is only possible to get a look from a collective perspective. They illustrate the healed present, but the interactions of their individual journey are not that evident. This could be related to the collective sense, and empathetic feeling developed while sharing experiences, and the group identity resulted from the sisterhood, which is also how they are recognized right now. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify and analyse the interaction between all the resources provided and the ways they internalize them.

Their experience is an example of the bridging between the 'cold and warm' approaches. Elements like the peace agreement and the Victims' Law, that belong to the rule of law or the official diplomacy, translated in a sense of security and the opportunity to declare and break the silence, which also represented being recognized as victims. Receive psychosocial intervention was essential to acknowledge and address trauma. But the particular approach and methodologies used to understand the affectations that sexual violence imprints on their brain and bodies was fundamental to create a deep connection with the process.

Leave room for ritual and imagination to heal broken hearts and applied figurative resources such as arts and metaphors were vital not only to the healing process but to their overall transformation. In particular, the type of stimuli provoked by the drums facilitated to release the trauma energy locked in their selves. And the play completed the process giving testimony of the affectations of the conflict and building memory and means to share their transformation.

The process could have ended there. In other communities where the program has reached out, the response has been entirely different. For them, the intervention helped to restore the sense of self by acknowledging their capabilities and strengths on an individual level supported in a collective dynamic, that later on made them identify with a role as agents of change and develop a sense of social responsibility with their communities.

But, not all the women that received the attention decided to be part of the association. This helps us to highlight that this kind of initiatives are not prescriptive and do not work in the same way for each community or each individual. The point is to be open and flexible to allow imagination takes its place and play with possibilities to address trauma from the place of harm, to understand people's needs and from there, build the trust required to reconnect.

This research illustrates a particular experience of healing, in which several combined incentives generated meaningful responses in these women's personal journey. One of them is the possibility to translate their process on inputs to restory relationships and pursue community healing as well. That along portrays the central role they have to support reconciliation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Songs

Opening act	
<p>Tamborcito, tamborcito</p> <p>Tamborcito, tamborcito, ayúdame a cantar (x2) Para que salga mi voz (x4) Y llegue a donde tenga que llegar Al corazón de mi hermano Al corazón de mi hermana Al corazón de este aire Al corazón, al corazón.</p>	<p>Little drum, little drum</p> <p>Little drum, little drum Help me to sing (x2) For my voice to come out (x4) And get to where it had to get To my brother's heart To my sister's heart To the heart of this air To the hear, to the heart</p>
Chaos	
<p>Vientre Sagrado</p> <p>Vientre Sagrado, centro de poder Tu que guardas las memorias, de todo el ayer Limpio mi pasado, vuelvo a renacer Floritura hermosa, Abrete al placer</p>	<p>Sacred Womb</p> <p>Sacred womb, centre of power The one that holds the memories from yesterday. Clean my past, I am born again Beautiful flower, open to pleasure</p>
Transition	
<p>Somos un círculo</p> <p>Círculo, somos un círculo Dentro de un círculo Sin principio, sin final El agua a mí me calma, El aire me da vuelo, El fuego me da impulso, La tierra sanación. Y la rueda del amor me da poder Y la rueda del amor la paz</p>	<p>We are a ring</p> <p>Ring, we are a ring Without beginning, without end Water calms me, Air gives me flight. Fire gives me impulse, Earth heals me. And the ring of loves gives me power And the ring of love gives me peace</p>

Internal Medicine	
<p>Medicina interna</p> <p>Todo cura, todo sana, todo tiene medicina adentro. Llevo agua Llevo aire Llevo fuego Llevo tierra Llevo, llevo medicina adentro. Llevo, llevo el universo adentro.</p>	<p>Internal medicine</p> <p>Everything heals, Everything has medicine inside I have water I have air I have fire I have earth I have, I have medicine inside. I have, I have the universe inside.</p>

Birth	
<p>Mujer serpiente</p> <p>Mujer serpiente cambia de piel, Mujer serpiente cambia de piel, Cambia cambia cambia de piel, Luna, luna, luna brillante, Brilla, brilla, luna brillante. Madre te siento bajo mis pies, Siento el latido de tu corazón Heya, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey Heya, hey, hey, hey, he-ye</p>	<p>Serpent woman</p> <p>Serpent woman change of skin, Serpent woman change of skin, Change, change, change of skin, Moon, moon, bright moon, Shine, shine, bright moon. Mother I feel you under my feet, I felt your heart beat Heya, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey Heya, hey, hey, hey, he-ye</p>

Lineage	
<p>Semilla</p> <p>Estar en el presente encontrarás estar en el corazón y verás (x2) Este amor que fluye bien adentro aquí hay una semilla (x2) Ha sido sembrada en ti y el amor es el agua que la alimenta La semilla a sido sembrada en ti y el amor es el agua que la alimenta Con amor eternamente crecerá mi madre lo hace así (x2) Con amor eternamente crecerá mi padre lo hace así Con amor eternamente crecerá la fuerza me hace así</p>	<p>Seed</p> <p>Being in the present you will find Being in the heart and you will see (x2) This love that flows inside Here there is a seed (x2) I been planted in you And the love is the water that feeds it The seed has been planted in you And the love is the water that feeds it With love will eternally grow My mother does it this way (x2) With love will eternally grow My father does it this way (x2) With love will eternally grow The strength makes me like this (x2)</p>

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