

**Public opinion discourses on reconciliation in the context of the 2016 final peace agreement
with FARC-EP in Colombia**

By

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Abstract

After half a century of armed confrontation with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP by its Spanish acronym), Colombia is implementing a peace agreement reached in 2016. Unfortunately, the conflict and the peace negotiation process left a highly divided country, resulting in an intense polarization around peace and the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement. To shed light on what reconciliation means for Colombians and the related concerns, I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Johan Galtung's Conflict Analysis Theory to analyze the main discourses serving to frame and shape public understanding of reconciliation. To this end, I tracked figurative representations found in public opinion editorials and such like from 2017 to 2021. I discovered that there has been insufficient discussion around reconciliation in public opinion, with a downward trend throughout the years. However, when Colombian public opinion addresses the topic of reconciliation, it is mainly to support instead of attack reconciliation processes. In public opinion, reconciliation is portrayed not only as a complex process and an end goal but also as a choice engaging unity, dialogue to agree on minimums, and acknowledgment of victims' suffering. Furthermore, the most controversial issues in pursuing reconciliation are the search for truth, the implementation of transitional justice, the politicization of peace, and the former combatants' political participation. To address discursive dissonance that endangers reconciliation, I propose shifting narratives around transitional justice and the dichotomy around friends and enemies of peace, among other peace-positive discourses that might be helpful to support reconciliation and peace processes in Colombia.

Keywords: Reconciliation; peace agreement; FARC-EP; Colombia; discourse analysis; public opinion.

Acknowledgements

These days, as I approach the end of this unique master's degree, I am proud to be part of the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) academic program. For someone who has lived in a country in a situation of permanent armed conflict, this master's degree was enlightening about the critical study of conflicts from a diverse and multidisciplinary approach. After two and a half years, I can say with joy that I do not regret joining PACS, and more than acknowledgements, I want to say thanks. My most profound and genuine gratitude to the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg for such an enriching experience, especially to my dedicated and committed professors. I felt valued, cared for, and supported through this journey.

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Chapter 1. My Research

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce my research problem, questions, and objectives. Likewise, given that reconciliation and public opinion are the two core elements of my research, I elaborate on these conceptual definitions for my research purposes. Subsequently, I present the theoretical and methodological framework I used for my research, including a description of the nature and scope of the media and public opinion pieces studied. Finally, I explain the relevance of my research and its interpretative limitations.

Research Problem and Questions

An armed conflict can be resolved but not necessarily transformed by signing a peace agreement. With the peace agreements reached in 2016, the Colombian government and FARC-EP as the two primary parties in conflict were able to end their armed confrontation. However, after any peace process the material and social consequences of the preceding armed confrontations still need to be addressed. Lederach (1997) notes that “peacebuilding must be rooted in and responsive to the experiential and subjective realities shaping people's perspectives and needs” (p. 24). Thus, achieving the conditions required to enter a post-conflict phase involves long-term efforts to transform how people perceive, trust, and relate to each other.

Achieving a sustainable and lasting peace as foreseen by the 2016 final peace agreement remains the main challenge for a divided society such as Colombia's. Jeong (2005) states that “the goals of peacebuilding will ultimately be achieved by reconstruction and reconciliation that are geared not only toward changing behavior and perceptions but also toward social and institutional structures that can be mobilized to prevent future conflict” (p. 13). Reconstruction is

attached to the recovery of social and economic structures required to enhance a peaceful coexistence; however, reconciliation is an issue requiring multiple individual and group relational efforts “to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present” (Lederach, 1997, p. 35). In other words, reconciliation is a core component of what it means to achieve a sustainable peace.

Colombia has a long history of resolving conflicts, and yet reconciliation remains an ongoing challenge. From 1982 to 2016 the country went through seven peace processes (Aya, 2017), with an outcome of six peace agreements reached¹. There is significant local experience in conflict resolution, as well as in frail conflict transformation, but reconciliation has never been at the core of previous peace agreements. In contrast, the 2016 final peace agreement envisions different objectives associated with reconciliation. For example, the creation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), Special Unit for the Searching for Persons Deemed as Missing, and the Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Recurrence Commission generated revitalized spaces for truth-telling, justice, and mercy between victims and perpetrators. Unfortunately, the agreement still lacks the support needed for its successful implementation.

Society's engagement in the reconciliation processes poses a challenge to achieving peace in Colombia. According to Bloomfield (2003), “Individual victims and perpetrators are at the heart of all reconciliation activities. However, both categories embrace many more persons and groups than those directly involved in acts of political, ethnic or religious violence” (p. 22). Unfortunately, in Colombia, populations residing in big metropolitan areas seem to be less supportive of the peace agreement, even though they have been less affected by the conflict, and

¹ April 19 Movement (M-19), 1990; the Popular Liberation Army (EPL by its Spanish acronym), 1991; the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT by its Spanish acronym) 1991; Social Renovation Movement (CRS by its Spanish acronym) 1993; Self-defence forces of Colombia (AUC by its Spanish acronym), 2005; and FARC-EP, 2016.

this kind of polarization has remained a major contentious issue in the past five years. As of December 31, 2021, there were 9,231,426 registered victims of the armed conflict, representing 18% of the over 51 million Colombian citizens. Thus, multiple dimensions of reconciliation beyond the sole relation between the victims and perpetrators are essential to the implementation of peacebuilding related interventions.

Media can be helpful in inclining a society toward a peaceful coexistence. In Colombia, print media have played a significant role in the shaping and evolution of public opinion (Giraldo & Montealegre, 2013). According to the National Department of Statistics, 25% of the Colombian population reads newspapers everyday (Colombian Federation of Journalists, 2017); moreover, there is a growing potential for digital media to shape public opinion, according to Reuters Institute (2021) “online sources stand out as people's main source of information (87%), outperforming traditional media like TV (58%) and print (24%)” (p. 94). In this sense, exploring discourses present in print and digital media, which can give expression to public opinion, is an opportunity to better appreciate the public's understanding of reconciliation and its challenges.

Finally, there may be a place for public opinion in the seeking for reconciliation. Public opinion discourses are powerful tools for keeping people apart or together, and alternative representations, articulations, or depictions of reconciliation can be useful in creating the conditions required for achieving a sustainable peace. Bearing in mind that reconciliation is a primary process when it comes to the reconstruction of a shared national life, my thesis will analyze and put to question the main discourses framing and shaping public understanding of reconciliation processes between Colombians and FARC-EP.

Following my research problem, I ask what are the main discourses serving to frame and shape public understanding of reconciliation between the Colombian society and FARC-EP

guerilla group in the wake of the country's 2016 final peace agreement? What do tensions as well as overlaps between these discourses reveal about: (1) what reconciliation with FARC-EP could mean in and for Colombians?; (2) what concerns Colombians most about reconciliation and the negotiated peace?; and (3) what can be done to address reconciliation related concerns in support of the sustainability of peace in Colombia?

Research Objectives

My overall objective is to identify, contrast, and analyze the various reconciliation discourses both expressing and shaping the Colombian population's opinion on the 2016 final peace agreement. This analysis will contribute to a better understanding of the lack of support and/or apathy of half of Colombians when it comes to making peace with the former FARC-EP combatants. Such knowledge may also be helpful in the design of new strategies to facilitate the engagement of the whole of Colombian society in the reconciliation process happening in the country.

My specific goals are to:

- Describe the context of the conflict and reconciliation progress after five years of implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement.
- Identify the discourses about reconciliation shaping public opinion in Colombia from 2017 to 2021, exploring meanings given to it, the challenges associated with the prevalent discourses, and main concerns about reconciliation.
- Propose recommendations to address reconciliation related concerns, including the generation of peace-positive discourses to be reinforced by politicians, civils society representatives and media in furtherance of sustainable peace.

Key Concepts

Reconciliation

The term reconciliation has been widely used to reference different actions, ends pursued, and processes. In defining a framework for building lasting peace, much of the available theory refers to reconciliation as a central element of that peace (Jeong, 2005; Lederach, 1997; Galtung, 1998; Schockman et al., 2019). However, there is no standard definition of reconciliation and the pathway to reach it is unknown. People's understanding of conflict is grounded in the specific contexts in which the conflict occurs, as is their understanding of reconciliation. Consequently, there is no single or generalized concept to explain what reconciliation is. Rettberg and Ugarriza (2016) identified four common approaches to the concept, which view “reconciliation” respectively as rhetorical language, a peace synonym, a goal, and a process. In the context of this inquiry, these four approaches will be explored.

Viewing reconciliation as a goal and as a process are interconnected perspectives. For Lederach (1997), reconciliation is a process and a social place, “it is built on and oriented toward the relational aspects of a conflict” (Lederach, 1997, p. 30). On his view reconciliation “represents a space, a place or location of encounter, where parties to a conflict meet” (Lederach, 1997, p. 30), a social space encompassing four components: truth, mercy, justice, and peace (Lederach, 1997). These four mechanisms work together to advance reconciliation (Bloomfield, 2003). Reference to reconciliation as a site of social interaction where truth, mercy, justice, and peace take place is in the end, an envisioned goal. Hence, reconciliation may be understood both as a goal and a process (Malley-Morrison et al., 2013).

The 2016 final peace agreement does not define what reconciliation is, but most references envisage reconciliation as a goal. For example, it is noted that “one of the objectives

of realizing victims' rights is reconciliation” (Final peace agreement, 2016, p. 133), which is to be achieved through the construction of historical memory about the conflict. This historicization, and the realization of victims' right to truth, provide one key foundation for Colombian reconciliation and peacebuilding. Reconciliation is also referred to in relation to milestones to be accomplished through political participation of former combatants, and as a prerequisite for their social and economic reintegration.

Reconciliation processes operate on multiple levels, from interpersonal relationships to national attempts to restore political and social equilibrium. It is widely known that there is an interpersonal level of reconciliation focussed on the relationship between victims and perpetrators, on how to reconcile over the past, seeking forgiveness, healing, and building a common understanding of a shared future (Malley-Morrison et al., 2013; Bloomfield, 2003). However, reconciliation also needs to take place at a national level with the development of inclusive policies addressing underlying and pressing drivers of conflict and disunity, and building conditions for peace. It also needs to take place at the sociopolitical level, since reconciliation needs to involve social, political, religious, and ideological groups, among others (Schockman et al., 2019; Malley-Morrison et al., 2013). My research acknowledges that the whole of society needs to be mobilized toward building reconciliation and the need to build strategies furthering this goal.

Public Opinion Discourses

Following Walter Lippmann in *El Publico es Fantasma* [Public is ghost] (2011), Cuéllar and Turiño (2021) note that media function as windows through which citizens access a reality they do not experience directly. Media transmit representations of reality used by individuals to

form their opinion on public issues; in other words, public opinion (Cuéllar & Turiño, 2021). Now, there are opinion leaders who build these interpretive frameworks. Opinion leaders popularize interpretive frameworks on specific issues that justify defending or attacking them, what is exalted and what is hidden. These interpretations are the framings through which citizens form their opinion (Giraldo & Montealegre, 2013).

Public opinion is a reflection of frames. Giraldo and Montealegre (2013) argue that “La opinión pública no es solo un reflejo de la información publicada en medios, sino de los encuadramientos que popularizan las élites a través de discusiones formales, informales y los medios de comunicación” [Public opinion is not only a reflection of the information published in the media, but also of the frameworks popularized by the elites through formal and informal discussions and the media] (Giraldo & Montealegre, 2013, p. 118). In seeking a contribution to national reconciliation efforts, this research will explore what reconciliation could mean in and for the Colombian context and what are some of the significant concerns by analyzing the public opinion discourses serving to shape the public understanding of the meaning of reconciliation.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourses can transform reality when addressing social problems. Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA “focuses on what is wrong with a society (...) and how ‘wrongs’ may be ‘righted’ or mitigated from a particular standpoint” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 7). As a methodology it offers tools for criticizing society in its current state. By seeking ways to change ideas about what is right or good in a given society, CDA produces interpretations and/or representations of what is wrong, and what can be done to change the status quo. Through CDA, one can infer the

specifics of an existing social or political reality through the work of understanding and comparing discourses. Similarly, this type of analysis permits discourse to be used as a tool to generate knowledge on how to respond to a social problem properly.

First, it is necessary to specify what a discourse entails. Generations of discourse-related theories rely on a myriad of conceptions about the extent to which society is formed and transformed through discourses (Gengnagel, 2016). More superficial approaches limit the study of discourse to the grammatical level, others examine the use of language in discourses as a reflection of specific social norms or ideologies. That said, this particular research is underpinned by a more comprehensive conception of discourse, one that is used mainly within the CDA approach which views discourse fundamentally as a system. As Candlin, Crichton, & Moore (2017) rightly note:

(...) Such broad systems of discourse form a kind of self-contained system of communication with a shared language or jargon with particular ways in which people learn what they need to know to become members, with a particular ideological position, and with quite specific forms of interpersonal relationships among members of the groups. (Scollon 2001, quoted by Candlin, Crichton, & Moore, 2017, p 5).

Discourse then is minimally a social practice, it is not merely a linguistic artifact. The value of studying discourses lies in identifying the associations between texts and people's experiences, a linkage “with particular social practices that these persons engage in, not only on their own account, but as a realization of the identification with, and membership of, particular institutional, organizational or professional groups” (Candlin, Crichton, & Moore, 2017, p. 6). When one refers to discourse as a social practice, one means that it comprises an action(s) that is socially and historically situated, a practice that is socially shaped but also shaping social reality

(Fairclough, 2013). My research will explore the existing discourses on reconciliation between the Colombian society and FARC-EP, the associations and assumptions underlying those discourses, and potential tensions in interlocutors' thoughts on this matter.

Discourse is a social practice because it results from shared articulatory practices. For Laclau and Mouffe (2014), articulation establishes a relationship between different elements, modifying their identity by setting new meanings and constituting new entities. An element is an object not articulated, while an entity is an element that is discursively articulated and therefore reflects a position within the discursive structure. Since discourse is a system of entities, therefore, a discursive structure is an articulatory practice. Articulation is not a purely linguistic phenomenon, it requires an approach to the social relations structuring a discursive formation, and those social relations result from different subjects, practices, and institutions (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014).

Discourse represents the social world. Since representations vary, different discourses may simultaneously represent the same social facts. Representations may shift depending on several factors, all of them linked to alterations in the individual's relationship with the world, with other people, and with their own identity (e.g.). CDA recalls the partial influence of discourses in shaping people's thoughts by requiring consideration of these elements since there are other non-discursive elements contributing to shaping how people act in the real world. Laclau and Mouffe (2014) reject the distinction between discourse and non-discourse elements, arguing that any object, even if its existence is external to thought, is considered an object based on a discursive condition. Hence, it makes more sense to refer to linguistic and non-linguistic elements that build the structured system of positions that we call discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014).

Discourses are constantly evolving. For Laclau and Mouffe (2014), no entity can be fully constituted. All discourses correspond to partial fixations of meanings that can change over time due to interaction with new elements or between them through articulation practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). Fairclough (2003) refers to “the relationship between different discourses,” highlighting the interactional level attributed to discourses that are expected to relate to each other and evolve. Acknowledgment of a discourse's relationship and interactional elements enables a better understanding of its living features, which are essential to understanding the relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary properties of CDA described below.

To begin with, CDA is a relational approach since it relies on the consideration of social relations. CDA seeks to explore to what extent social relations are formed or transformed by and through discourses. It is worth drawing attention again to Fairclough's (2003) definition of discourse, which emphasizes the existence of different discourses and claims that these arise as a result of different perspectives on the world which in turn result from the relations people have to the world, depending on their respective “positions” (i.e. individual and social identities). The proposed research is expected to identify several key discourses on reconciliation in Colombia, and to conduct a thorough analysis of the relational aspects of these discourses in order to assess their potential impacts on audiences.

Secondly, discourse analysis encompasses the dialectical analysis of relations between discursive and non-discursive elements. For adherents of CDA, it is impossible to analyze discourse without analyzing its dialectical relation with other objects or factors that comprise social reality. According to Fairclough (2013), “dialectical relations are relations between objects which are different one to another but [...] are not fully separate in the sense that one excludes the other” (p. 4). In other words, to study discourses on reconciliation, it is necessary to shed

light on other contextual elements in which these discourses are produced or reproduced, the non- linguistic elements that constitute the discourse pointed out by Laclau and Mouffe (2014). Discourses are part of reality, and reality is a complex socially constructed scenario integrating other multiple variables (Fairclough, 2013; Candlin, Crichton, & Moore, 2017).

Transdisciplinarity is the third property of CDA that Fairclough (2013) points out. CDA searches for a comprehensive analysis of social reality by drawing on the insights and knowledges of different disciplines. Accordingly, this thesis project on reconciliation will develop transdisciplinarily by including sociological and political analytical considerations. Again, the study of discourse is not a linguistic or textual study per se. Rather it entails an overall integration of disciplines and attention to non-discursive elements in order to provide a more complete picture of reality. This picture is vital if we are to become successful at addressing social wrongs, in this case the challenges associated with heightening reconciliation between Colombian society and FARC-EP.

Study of Metaphors

Discourses are representations of reality that can be presented either “non-metaphorically” or metaphorically. Fairclough (2003) argues that “tracing the precise nature and distribution of grammatical metaphors can be seen as one productive way into researching effectivity of texts within a particular social order, and in processes of social change” (p. 144). A grammatical metaphor is a realization² occurring when two different codes of language such as

² From the purely linguistic approach developed by Michell Halliday in the early 80s, a grammatical metaphor may be understood an alternative lexicogrammatical realization, which occurs when two lexicogrammatical representations are semantically equivalent (Ravelli, 2003).

words or sentences (e.g.) have equivalent meaning in a given context. Attention to metaphor is pointed out by Fairclough (2003) as a more practical approach to doing research on discourse.

Discussions related to the definition of metaphor revolve around two relevant theoretical frameworks. On one hand, grammatical studies address issues related to the contextual analysis of metaphors to identify the specific meanings associated with a word or a set of words that function in a specific setting, subject to contextual facts such as culture or ideology (e.g.) (Ravelli, 2003). However, a grammatical study does not attribute to metaphors any impact on actual social practice. In contrast, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conducted an analysis that precisely shows day-to-day metaphors shaping social reality despite our awareness of their existence and resistance to their impact.

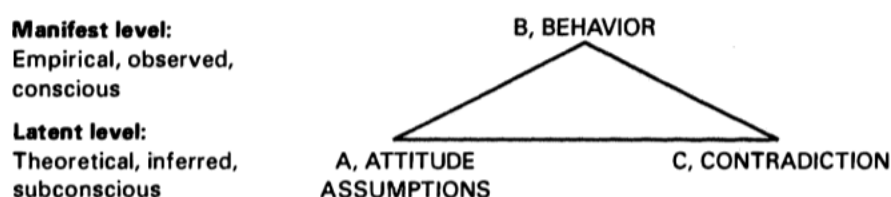
This research moves beyond metaphors considered grammatically to attend critically to the way metaphors function to represent concepts. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that the conceptual system that human beings use to think and act is deeply metaphorical. On their view, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of other” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 19). Since human thoughts make use of metaphors, they entail elements of the subjective experience of individuals. Accordingly, metaphors can illuminate and shape the way people think and act on a specific issue since they are attached to the conceptual system people use when reasoning (Thibodeau, & Boroditsky, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Cameron, 2011). This approach to “conceptual” metaphors is compatible with CDA as it engages with discourse as a practice.

Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle Model

Analyzing thoughts through consideration of the metaphors used to express them accords with one of the core elements of Johan Galtung's approach to conflict analysis. Galtung (1996) has developed an influential model comprised of a conflict triangle that can be used for conflict analysis. The model conceptualizes conflict as the sum of attitudes/assumptions + behaviour + contradictions, the three sides comprising the triangle. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conflict triangle



Note. From “Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization”, by Galtung, J., 1996. p. 72

Following Galtung (1996), conflict may be seen running cyclically as an inevitable part of life. However, how conflicts are managed depends on several factors. For example, behaviours about a conflict (corner B of the triangle) could be *destructive* when violent physical and/or verbal acts occur, and *constructive* when accompanied by actions like mediation, dialogue, or any nonviolent action. These behaviours refer to what can be observed at the manifest level of a conflict. Thus Galtung (1996) proposes to analyze the issues that underlie the observed behaviour at a latent level of the conflict, one that is normally comprised by assumptions and contradictions. A and C corners of the triangle are defined as follows:

Let us refer to what is hidden as assumptions (cognitions), and as attitudes (emotions), wrapped together by the letter A. And then there is the content of the conflict, (...) which we assume to be a contradiction, C. The contradiction has to involve something wanted.

Let us call it a goal, and its attainment a goal-state. (Galtung, 1996, p. 71).

Galtung (1996) uses this conflict triangle model to assist in analysis of the most common types of conflict intervention. Following Galtung, *peacekeeping* should be seen as the conflict intervention prescribed to address the behaviours causing direct violence (corner B); *peacemaking* shall be implemented to handle assumptions and attitudes (Corner A); and *peacebuilding* refers to the proper intervention when dealing with the contradictions fueling the structural violence (Corner C).

Concerning *peacemaking*, Galtung (1996) states that “attitudes have to become more positive, and assumptions more conducive to peaceful coexistence” (p.112). In other words, a *peacemaking* intervention should be intended to transform attitudes and assumptions about a conflict. That said, reconciliation

is a more complex concept than closure. In terms of the conflict triangle it touches not only the B(ehavior)-corner, but also the A(ttitude)-corner, and not only the perpetrator-victim relation but across the board to the State/public. But this is the way the terms are used here. We might also say that reconciliation is essentially A-oriented and that closure is B-oriented and the ultimate test that reconciliation is working. (Galtung, 1998, p. 114)

In summary, this thesis is grounded in recognition of discourses' power to transform reality, and the usefulness of metaphors to track specific discourses. Galtung (1998) argues that reconciliation is essentially A-oriented, therefore, attitudes and assumptions will be covered in the analysis. Furthermore, since metaphors shape the way people think and act, different

metaphors can impact people's reasoning differently, leading to contracting thinking and actions (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Furthermore, “within the flow of discourse, metaphors appear and can be used to track discourse activity and to guide the researcher's understanding of changes in thinking and attitudes” (Cameron, 2011, p. 54). In other words, through the critical study of metaphors, it is possible to analyze how discourse constantly evolves.

Metaphors and other Figurative Language Representations of Discourse

In a proposal to address discursive analysis applied to politics, Laclau (2014) analyzes the scope and limits of metaphor. Metaphor is one of many existing literary tropes³. Laclau (2014) states that metaphor cannot be successful without the presence of a second literary trope, which is metonymy. Metonymy is the substitution of one term for another based on similarity, while metaphors are the substitution of one term for another completely different one. However, there is a relationship of coexistence between the two. Each metaphor has a metonymic origin. Laclau (2014) notes that articulation between metaphor and metonymy occurs through similarity (the ability to substitute words) and contiguity (the ability to combine words). Metaphor corresponds to substitution, and metonymy to combination, which is nothing more than the two poles of the same continuous (Laclau, 2014).

Laclau (2014) argues that these tensions between metaphor and metonymy continue to operate in structuring political spaces. Politics can be analyzed as a tropological articulation of heterogeneous elements; in other words, it is possible to do political analysis through the differential positions found in rhetorical interventions. The more stable a social order is, the more

³ A trope is “meaning derivation processes whereby the hearer reinterprets the conceptual structure of an utterance or action” (Fuertes-Olivera, 2010, p. 215).

differential positions are found. On the contrary, when the level of confrontation is higher, the more a society is divided into two unique differential positions, “us” and “them” (Laclau, 2014). Literary tropes are essentially figurative language representations of concepts. As well as metonymy and metaphor, other literary tropes such as synecdoche⁴, irony⁵, analogy⁶, and hyperbole⁷ play a function as figurative use of language. Bearing this in mind, I will consider different figurative language representations for my research thesis about discourses on reconciliation.

Methodology

My research design is qualitative. I draw upon available data, in other words, secondary materials produced for other research purposes or without any research purpose (Singleton & Straits, 2017). I explore opinion articles and editorial pieces from three national and three regional media. I identify and classify metaphors and other figurative language representations used by different authors, and I interpret their significance to those discourses related to reconciliation with FARC-EP. The project has unfolded in four phases comprising a document review, qualitative primary data gathering, data processing, and analysis⁸.

⁴ “A word or phrase in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole of it, for example ‘a pair of hands’ for ‘a worker’, or the whole of something is used to refer to a part, for example ‘the law’ for ‘a police officer’” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

⁵ “Irony is a style of writing in which there is a noticeable, often humorous, difference between what is said and the intended meaning” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

⁶ “A comparison between things that have similar features, often used to help explain a principle or idea” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

⁷ “A way of speaking or writing that makes someone or something sound bigger, better, more, etc. than they are” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

⁸ It is worth noting that the methodology I employed for qualitative primary data gathering and processing has been developed and previously used in several other scholarly works. For example, Singleton and Straits (2017) refer to a study by Katharina Lindner (2004) on women's gendered stereotypes in advertisements published in *Time* and *Vogue* magazines. In addition, Huamán (2021) studied economic metaphors in the Peruvian written press, specifically, opinion articles released in a weekly newspaper. Furthermore, Sandoval, R., (2017) used the

Document Review

The review I have undertaken covers literature produced and published from 2012 to 2021. Following Singleton and Straits' (2017) guidelines on approaches to social research, the documental review includes: public documents and official records produced referring to the Colombian armed conflict, the peace process, and the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement. Documental review has been used to build a general background on the history of the conflict, the 2016 final peace agreement, reconciliation context, official statistics, and specialized reports.

Primary Data Gathering

My research collects, organizes, and classifies information published in national and regional media. For the national media, the relevant criteria for selecting the media sources includes the audience reached and the existence of an opinion articles or editorials section. For the regional media, the guiding criteria are conflict-affectation, regional/local newspaper, and the existence of an opinion article or editorial section.

Sampled National Media. For national media, I have adopted a particular focus on digital media for three main reasons: first, print media is in decline while digital media readership is increasing; second, even if some media run both in print and digital versions, these versions are not identical, since the online edition includes additional content; and lastly, the digital media allowed me to analyze some of the readers' comments, at least for the national media sampling. All these reasons are explained in further detail below.

identification of metaphors through published opinion articles and the analysis of both metaphors and readers' comments when researching corruption-related speeches in Colombia, also based on precedent research work.

For years, print media have declined in importance while digital media has gained audience as a news source. According to the *General Media Study* (EGM by its Spanish acronym), “the print sector is Colombia's least preferred media source. It sat in fourth place in 2009, behind television, radio, and magazines. In 2010 it was surpassed by Internet” (Colombian Federation of Journalist, 2017, para. 1). From 2010 to 2019, print media has lost 28% of readers while in contrast, digital news sources' audience increased 252% (Espinosa, 2019). During 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to putting online news sources in a better position as people's news source than printed media (Reuters Institute, 2021).

According to *Digital News Report 2021*, *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *Noticias Caracol Online*, *Las 2 Orillas*, and *Semana* are Colombia's most visited digital media sources. *El Tiempo*, *Semana*, *El Espectador*, and *Las 2 Orillas* checked all the selection criteria to be included within the sample; in contrast, *Noticias Caracol Online* does not offer an opinion section. However, since my original intention was to limit the scope of my research to three national media, I selected *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, and *Semana* as the sampled national media just by relevance criterion. These media have a historical presence in the national media environment and run both in printed and online distribution channels, compared to *Las 2 Orillas*, a media established in 2013 running just in digital media.

Sampled Regional Media. Regional and local media might have different approaches compared to national media. Hence, three regional media were sampled to gain insights on local reconciliation representations in the most conflict-affected areas. *El Liberal* newspaper from Popayan, Cauca; *La Opinión* from Cucuta, Norte de Santander; and *El Colombiano* from Medellin, Colombia. *El Liberal* and *El Colombiano* run both in digital and printed versions, *La*

Opinion only exists in hard copies. The primary objective focuses on assessing discourses found in conflict-affected zones.

Cauca, Norte de Santander, and Antioquia have been historically affected by the conflict among guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and the army. Cauca has a population of 1,528,076 inhabitants. It is one of the most diverse departments in the country, with a 42% indigenous and Afro-descendant population. Regarding conflict affectations, Cauca is affected by 17,000 hectares of coca, illegal mining, and armed groups in 39 of the 42 municipalities comprising the department (Gobernación del Cauca, 2020). Similarly, Norte de Santander has 1,620,318 inhabitants, peasant, and indigenous communities inhabit the sub-region El Catatumbo, a territory under dispute between National Liberation Army (ELN by its Spanish acronym), Popular Liberation Army (EPL by its Spanish acronym) and FARC-EP dissidents since 2017. In Norte de Santander, there are 33,598 hectares of coca, plus oil and uranium deposits (Gobernación Norte de Santander, 2020). Finally, Antioquia has a population of 6,677,930. El Bajo Cauca and Urabá are the two sub-regions most conflict-affected, with the presence of different illegal armed groups, illicit crops, and illegal mining (Gobernación de Antioquia, 2020).

Sampled Opinion Pieces. Opinion articles and editorials provided enough discourses and figurative language representations to sustain my research method. As pointed out by Cervera (2014), opinion articles are not expository texts but argumentative essays. Through argument, the author expresses an opinion and argues, intending to persuade the reader using appellative or deictic forms of the language, aimed at a diverse audience interested in topical issues. Considering the subjective character of this kind of publication, it was more likely that I would find metaphorical developments in these pieces (Sandoval, R., 2017). After the review

process, 274 public opinion articles using figurative language were included in the analysis, 49% from national media and 51% from regional media, consolidating a balanced and diverse sample.

Table 1

2017-2021 Opinion articles⁹ sample

<i>Year/Media</i>	<i>National Media</i>			<i>Regional Media</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>El Tiempo</i>	<i>El Espectador</i>	<i>Semana</i>	<i>El Nuevo Liberal</i>	<i>La Opinión</i>	<i>El Colombiano</i>	
2017	22	26	6	14	16	21	105
2018	7	9	2	11	11	9	49
2019	7	3	1	5	9	17	42
2020	10	6	3	3	5	7	34
2021	16	14	1	2	5	6	44
Total	62	58	13	35	46	60	274

Note. This table shows the final sampled opinion articles following the research keyword “Reconciliation FARC”.

The opinion articles contained in the sources I have studied provide a good sampling of diverse research data. First, there is diversity in the ideological positions of the media. *El Tiempo* is a conservative newspaper; *El Espectador* is a liberal newspaper; and *Semana* magazine used to be liberal but changed to a conservative editorial stance in 2020. Regarding regional media, *El Nuevo Liberal* and *La Opinión* are liberal newspapers, and *El Colombiano* is a conservative newspaper. Secondly, there are national and regional media included in the sample. Finally, sampled opinion articles are written by 124 different authors, ranging from current and former politicians to former government officials, writers, journalist, and organized civil society leaders. Consequently, an array of perspectives and voices is represented in my research.

⁹ Including editorials

Table 2*Primary role of authors*

<i>Role</i>	<i>National Media</i>			<i>Regional Media</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>El Tiempo</i>	<i>El Espectador</i>	<i>Semana</i>	<i>El Nuevo Liberal</i>	<i>La Opinion</i>	<i>El Colombiano</i>	
Journalist	16	18	6	3	3	18	64
Editorial	10	17		9	7	15	58
Politician	11	3		8	15	3	40
Universities Representative	6	10	2	5	5	11	39
Writer	7	1	1	7	7	5	28
Current and Former Officials	6	4	1		7	3	21
Civil society/ NGO representative	3	4	3	1			11
Entrepreneur	2			1	1	2	6
Former Military					1	2	3
Church Representative	1	1					2
Unknown				1			1
Grassroot organization						1	1
Total	62	58	13	35	46	60	274

Note. This table shows the primary author's role of sampled opinion pieces.

Data Processing

Once the opinion articles sample were selected, I identified the discourses representations within the sample. I used the analysis of metaphors and other figurative representations as a tool to identify themes and currents in reconciliation discourses from 2017 to 2021. In this line, sampled opinion pieces were reviewed producing a list of twelve categories: reconciliation, what reconciliation is not, polarization, truth, justice, hate/vengeance, forgiveness, victims' reparation, reintegration of former combatants, ongoing armed conflict, 2016 final peace agreement implementation, and corruption. In the end, figurative language was disaggregated into keywords to facilitate tracking discourses.

To complement the analysis of opinion pieces' impact(s) on readers, this thesis sought the population's thoughts regarding reconciliation with FARC-EP. This research configuration was intended to “gather data about people's opinions, attitudes, [and] expectations” (Government of Canada, 2013, p. 22). In pursuing this objective, my research triangulated analysis results with comments posted in response to reconciliation related opinion pieces circulating in the national sampled media websites and Facebook¹⁰. I limited my analysis to user comments in response to posts citing sampled pieces for the years 2017 (ex-ante) and 2021 (ex-post). Therefore, I processed 1,909 reader's comments of 21 opinion articles (eleven from 2017 and ten from 2021). In the end, keywords associated with the discourses have been used to track their appearance in user comments using a data analysis software.

Data Analysis

For my data analysis I partially followed the multi- perspectival approach for discourse analysis as proposed by Candlin, Crichton, and Moore (2017). Drawing upon existing theorizations, the multi- perspectival approach to discourse analysis seeks to offer a way of doing this kind of analysis by considering the various possible perspectives. In short, the multi- perspectival model proposes to work with: i) text perspective, ii) readers' perspective, iii) social action perspective, iv) socio/institutional perspective, and v) Analyst's perspective.

My conclusions are the result of analysis of the text perspective, the socio/institutional perspective, and my perspective as an analyst. Following Fairclough (2013), opinion pieces are the written text produced, while the reconciliation process with FARC-EP is the discourse event. In my research, the opinion articles and editorials were the analyzed text. Furthermore, my thesis

¹⁰ According to *Digital News Report 2021*, 70% of users consume digital news through social media, with Facebook being the dominant platform with 67% of the total digital media audience (Reuters Institute, 2021).

provides information on the socio/institutional perspective. In other words, the contextual conditions in which the discursive practices on reconciliation with FARC-EP arise in Colombia. In chapter 2, my document review allows me to describe the conflict's current state and the 2016 final peace agreement's current circumstances after five years of implementation.

My thesis does not include an analysis of the extent to which discourses present in the opinion pieces shape peoples' thoughts, giving rise to the so-called readers' perspective. In seeking inputs for the study of this interdiscursive relation, I attempted to work with readers' comments focussing on “(...) their attitudes, impressions, and beliefs are about what has been said, read, listened to, seen or experienced” (Candlin, Crichton, & Moore, 2017, p. 254). I processed the comments gathered for 21 opinion pieces; however, I found that to track the impact on readers it would be necessary to process the comments posted for the 274 opinion pieces, which would be itself another research project. Therefore, I present the processed information of the reader's comments as a complement to the analysis, but it does not have the scope to be considered a standalone analysis of the readers' perspective.

Finally, this research does not include the social action perspective. Social action examines how participants, in this case, public opinion' readers “collaborate in co-constructing knowledge, how they interpret each other's discourses” (Candlin, Crichton, & Moore, 2017, p. 255). Please note the analysis of actions was beyond the scope of my work from the beginning of my research, it was never expected.

Significance of My Research

Colombia has a long way to go in achieving true national reconciliation. The challenge has evolved as the internal armed conflict has also done. Reconciliation is a relevant issue for

Colombia amid attempts to adhere to the terms of the peace agreement and subsequent implementation processes. These processes are so complex and time-consuming that every single step forward is quite significant. Identifying discourses that portray the meaning of reconciliation for different individuals and groups, their dissemination, interpretation, and consumption, will prove key to defining and identifying meaningful actions aimed at strengthening peacebuilding processes and impacting people's assumptions and attitudes in support of the repair of Colombia's torn social fabric. There is value in building new representations of the world through discourses bolstered by public opinion.

From an academic perspective, there are at least two main contributions this research seeks to make. First, it contributes to conceptualizing reconciliation in the Colombian context based on public opinion and its tight relation with the prospects of peacebuilding. Even though the proposed research and investigative methods have previously been used to analyze peacebuilding in Colombia, there is no evidence of prior publications or projects that focus specifically on perceptions of reconciliation and its processes. Secondly, this thesis will also consider potential strategies for addressing aspects of the reconciliation process that involve Colombian society as a whole. Usually, despite that on a theoretical level, there is consensus on the need to include reference to the whole society when making sense of conflict and post-conflict milieux, academic work tends to privilege the relational level linking victims and the perpetrators. This project seeks to go some way toward addressing this insufficiency.

Limitations of My Research

This thesis will present a qualitative study using an established methodology designed to interpret public discourse. Drawing from written press articles (raw data) has an advantage in

terms of trustworthiness since the data is in the public domain and was reproduced by well-known news and information sources in the country. Accordingly, there will be no credibility or ethics issues involved in the gathering of primary data beyond those ordinarily involved in secondary scholarship.

Data representativeness and the widespread results obtained from data analysis are the main limitations of my research. My research will rely on three digital sources with national circulation, and three media sources with regional exposure. On the other hand, as pointed out by Cervera (2014), although opinion articles are addressed to a diverse population, readers are mostly audiences comprising readership niches. In addition, printed and digital media are limited sources for public opinion in relation to peasant, Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations with lower levels of literacy who have more access to radio. In fact, the results of my research will enable empirical generalizations that are not technically representative but instead indicative of prevalent discourses on reconciliation in the Colombian context based on sampled media.

Despite the representativeness limitations, the proposed study rigorously follows a social scientific method. Singleton and Straits (2017) note that when scholars “cannot know for certain that the conclusion is true; we can only judge how probable it is, based on the evidence” (Singleton & Straits, 2017, pp. 32). This idea reflects what is called inductive reasoning. Considering that my qualitative data gathering relies on opinion pieces, which is a specific resource of data within a universe of possibilities, it may not be possible to reach certain conclusions. Rather, it may be necessary to “infer empirical generalizations from the data” (Singleton & Straits, 2017, pp. 32). Consequently, an inductive analysis was conducted using the variables identified in my theoretical framework.

Chapters Overview

My thesis is divided into five chapters. I presented my problem, research questions, and the proposed theoretical and methodological framework in this first chapter. In chapter 2, I describe relevant facts that enable an understanding of the historical evolution of the armed conflict in Colombia. The chapters 3 and 4 correspond to the research results on public opinion discourses based on the opinion pieces analyzed and the identified figurative representations. In chapter 3, I present the outcomes associated with reconciliation in and for Colombians. In chapter 4, I present findings relating to the primary concerns identified regarding the reconciliation processes with FARC-EP. Finally, my conclusion summarizes my main findings and reflects on what can be done to support reconciliation processes in the country.

Summary

My research problem focuses on society's engagement in the reconciliation processes as a challenge to achieving peace in Colombia and how media can be helpful in inclining a society toward a peaceful coexistence. My primary research question is: What are the main discourses serving to frame and shape public understanding of reconciliation between the Colombian society and FARC-EP guerilla group? Following the explanation of my research problem and questions, I provided key concept definitions on reconciliation and public opinion discourses. Thereupon, I explained how my theoretical framework is underpinned by three main methodological pillars: CDA, the use of metaphors and other figurative language as discourse representations, and conflict analysis. Next, I described how my methodology and research methods have been configured to work with/on 274 public opinion pieces from three national and three regional media in Colombia. In addition, I examined the significance and limitations of

my research, being data representativeness and the widespread results my main limitation. In the end, I provided an overview of the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 2. Background on the Colombian Conflict

Introduction

This chapter provides background context on the South American country's armed conflict. First, I address the historical setting surrounding the origin of the conflict. Then, I include references to the peace process carried out with FARC-EP between 2012 and 2016. Finally, I describe subsequent conflict-related events that occurred during the five years following the signing of the 2016 peace agreement.

1948 - 1964: The Origins of the Colombian Internal Armed Conflict

The Agrarian Nature of the Conflict in Colombia

To discuss the armed conflict in Colombia, academics often must first describe several civil wars that occurred since the country's independence from the Spanish Empire. However, in this document, I intend to present a context that allows an understanding of the most recent armed conflict in Colombia and the short-lived post-conflict period, emphasizing those elements I consider likely to be most impactful on the population's perception regarding the 2016 final peace agreement and ongoing reconciliation processes. In short, on my view the current armed conflict's origin in Colombia is agrarian, as described below.

Peasant struggles over land distribution in Colombia have solid roots in the 19th century. However, this research is focus on the cycle of historical violence that began in 1936, with the issuance of the Law 200/36 (Franco & De los Ríos, 2011). At that time, the central discussion revolved around the distribution of land to small peasants and how to fulfill the land's social function by avoiding the accumulation of large tracts of land by small fractions of the country's

population. In fact, the structure of land distribution in Colombia remained deeply tied to inherited colonial institutions, which ensured that only the wealthy class or the local aristocracy had property rights.

Modification of that land ownership structure has not been possible to date. In Colombia, 78% of the properties are less than 10 hectares in size and represent only 6% of the country's total agricultural area (Segrelles, 2018). Additionally, 0.19% of the properties are greater than 1,000 hectares in size, covering 54% of the country's surface area (Segrelles, 2018). In short, a few families own most of the country's agricultural land. Paradoxically, Colombia's armed conflict played a role in increasing the concentration of land. With the massive forced displacement of populations owing to violence, many large landowners consolidated significant tracts of land (LeGrand, Isschot, & Riaño-Alcalá, 2017). For this reason, it is not surprising that comprehensive rural reform was included as the first point of the 2016 final peace agreement.

Liberal and Conservative Partisan Struggles: The National Front

The National Front resulted from a peace agreement signed between the Liberal and Conservative parties in 1958 to end what is known as *La Violencia*. This civil war broke out in 1948 between Conservative and Liberal after the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a Liberal candidate for President (Tahar, 2009). Because of this civil war, the first rebel movements in Colombia were precisely of liberal ideology. Amid *La Violencia*, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, a former Army Commander, took power in a coup d'état in 1953, becoming de facto President of Colombia. During his regime (1953-1957), the government demobilized some liberal rebels; however, others escaped and founded small enclaves of resistance. Afterwards, Conservatives and Liberals united against Rojas Pinilla, forcing him to resign in 1957 (Tahar, 2009).

The traditional Liberal and Conservative parties established the National Front in 1958, an agreement based on the principle of alternating political power from 1958 to 1974 (Aya, 2017; Ortiz, 2019; Tahar, 2009). With its creation, the National Front left many of the armed peasant movements that accompanied the Liberals during *La Violencia* without any opportunity for political participation (Aya, 2017). These peasant movements had agrarian reform as their fundamental aim, which was supported ideologically by the Colombian Communist Party (Ortiz, 2019), a nascent political force also excluded by the National Front agreement. Following Robert Karl, LeGrand et al. (2017) argue that *La Violencia* was also a conflict over the country's property and land dispossession structure.

Marquetalia: FARC-EP foundation landmark

Ultimately these peasant movements became armed insurgencies. Given an absent agrarian reform, an incomplete demobilization process and the establishment of the National Front, peasant movements experienced political marginalization and in response founded small agrarian communities (Tahar, 2009), so-called “independent republics” by the Conservative government and subject to military attack (Ortiz, 2019). Marquetalia was a peasant-led communist enclave in the Huila Department that the Government Army destroyed in 1964 (Aya, 2017). Survivors of this military intervention founded FARC-EP in 1966. For this reason, we can consider Marquetalia to be the FARC-EP's foundational moment (Ortiz, 2019; Aya, 2017; Tahar, 2019; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica [CNMH by its Spanish acronym], 2013).

FARC-EP emerged in Colombia as a guerrilla group in 1964. FARC-EP is the result of resistance to the exclusion from the mainstream political arena of a third political force by the allied Liberal and Conservative parties during The National Front (Aya, 2017; Ortiz, 2019).

Since its foundation in 1966, FARC-EP has been formally structured as a peasant-based communist guerrilla movement. The National Liberation Army guerrilla organization (ELN by its Spanish Acronym) also emerged in 1964 (Ríos, 2018).

The 1970s and 1980s: Emergence of New Guerrillas and Paramilitarism

In the 1970s and 1980s, other illegal groups joined the armed conflict. Three additional guerrilla's groups surged: the Popular Liberation Army (EPL by its Spanish acronym) in 1967; the April 19 Movement (M-19) in 1974; and the Quintín Lame in 1984 (Ríos, 2018). In this context, self-defense groups emerged as civilian organizations whose purpose was to react against the guerrillas' armed actions. However, as these groups gained experience fighting insurgents, they were called on by different economic and social groups, including drug cartels, to provide security services as private armies (Bedoya, 2018). Later, these self-defense groups evolved as a political, military, and social project with the support of Colombia's national military forces (Velásquez, E., 2007).

The National Security Doctrine promoted by the United States of America throughout Latin America also took place in Colombia. The Cold War and the fight against communism materialized in Colombia with the establishment in 1978 of the Security Statute, a pro-extermination policy directed against guerrillas and communist political movements that was bolstered under Julio Cesar Turbay's Presidency (1978-1982) (Bedoya, 2018). In consequence, FARC-EP expanded its sources of financing to include the extortion of civilians in order to mobilize funding to counter the government's military offensive (Bedoya, 2018). In addition, the persecution of the Communist Party and other leftist movements increased the number of FARC-

EP combatants, and the guerrillas turned their military strategy from defensive to offensive war (CNMH, 2013).

The first failed attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully with FARC was made in 1984 by President Belisario Betancourt (1982-1986). Betancourt offered a general amnesty to guerrillas and signed *La Uribe Agreement*. This agreement allowed FARC-EP to participate in politics by creating a political party, Union Patriótica, a political group whose members were systematically assassinated by paramilitary and military forces (CNMH, 2013; Martínez, K., 2021). Unión Patriótica was structured as a broad political front, including former FARC-EP combatants, other political leaders, and leftist trade unionists (Martínez, K., 2021). Union Patriótica achieved electoral success threatening the traditional elites and military forces who saw Union Patriótica as the pathway for guerrillas to secure political power (CNMH, 2013). The murder of Union Patriótica's militants led to La Uribe peace process's failure in 1987 (CNMH, 2013).

In the 1980s, the self-defense groups turned into paramilitary groups. The formation of the Association of Farmers and Ranchers of Magdalena Medio (ACDEGAM by its Spanish acronym) in Puerto Boyacá in 1983 constitutes the historical milestone of the emergence of paramilitarism in Colombia (CNMH, 2019). These paramilitary organizations were no longer there for the purposes of self-defense, instead they were offensive groups that worked alongside the armed forces in the fight against the guerrillas (Velásquez, E., 2007). LeGrand et al. (2017) notes that these “anti-guerrilla, right-wing paramilitaries were formed with the support of local elites, narco-traffickers, cattle ranchers and members of the Armed Forces in Antioquia and the Caribbean coastal department of Córdoba, who sought to expropriate peasants and consolidate large landholdings” (p. 265). In this regard, it is undeniable that paramilitary interventions served

to further land accumulation amid the conflict, bringing elements of the core conflict factor back into prominence, further underscoring the agrarian nature of the conflict.

The government's response to the rise of paramilitary groups was ambivalent. Through Law 48 ruled in 1968, there was a general acceptance of the creation of self-defense groups that could be used by the army (Velásquez, E., 2007). In 1988, President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) declared these self-defense groups illegal, but later, between 1993 and 1997, the paramilitaries were able to create a legal framework that allowed them to function as private security cooperatives under the governments of Presidents Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994) and Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) (Bedoya, 2018). Finally, President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) ordered the legal dismantling of these groups (Velásquez, E., 2007).

In the 1980s, FARC-EP undertook a process of significant expansion fueled by money obtained from drug trafficking (Ávila, 2019). At first, the FARC-EP participated only in a small portion of the illicit drug business chain. However, hand in hand with drug cartels, FARC-EP expanded its participation in the illicit drug business, enabling the strengthening of its military efforts (Ortiz, 2019; Contreras, 2018). Contreras (2018) argues that the inclusion of drug trafficking changed the revolutionary character of FARC-EP, turning it from a revolutionary guerrilla group into a criminal organization. In this regard, although drug trafficking was always present, it is noteworthy that the political component of the conflict remained a FARC-EP's fundamental claim until the advent of the negotiations upstream of the 2016 final peace agreement.

1990s and 2000s: A Stiff Escalation of Violence

In the early 1990s, several guerrilla groups demobilized, inspired by a renewed democratic scenario and a new national constitution. After a peace process led by President

Virgilio Barco (1986-1990), in 1990 the M-19 guerrillas' group demobilized (Aya, 2017). Some of the political agreements between the guerrilla group and the government, including those related to potential political and agrarian reforms, helped the idea of reforming the constitution gain traction and materialize during the presidential elections of 1990. The political process led to the National Constitutional Assembly, which gave rise to the National Constitution of 1991, the charter that is today in force in Colombia. The 1991 National Constitution recognized the state based on the rule of law. It opened doors to the political participation of multiple parties, leaving behind the conservative segregationist constitution of 1886 (CNMH, 2013). In 1991, guerrillas from the Quintin Lame and EPL groups also demobilized (Aya, 2017).

FARC-EP did not welcome the National Constitutional Assembly and decided to remain in arms (Ríos, 2018). FARC-EP demanded political representation in the Constitutional Assembly agreed upon by the government instead of direct representation that was subject to popular election (CNMH, 2013). The government's response was negative. In addition, there was a military attack on Casa Verde in La Uribe, Meta, where FARC-EP leaders were located, closing off any possibility of dialogue at that time (Ortiz, 2019). This was the second failed attempt to find a negotiated solution to the conflict with FARC-EP.

From 1996 to 2005 were perhaps the most violent years of the armed confrontation in Colombia. The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC by its Spanish Acronym) were founded on April 18, 1997, led by the (eventually murdered) paramilitary chief Carlos Castaño. AUC resulted from an effort to coordinate the different existing paramilitary groups (Bedoya, 2018; García, P., 2016). During these peak years of violence, paramilitarism co-opted various state institutions and politicians, a phenomenon known as Parapolitics (García, P., 2016; CNMH,

2013). As a result of increasing levels of armed confrontation, the civilian population was left in the middle among FARC-EP, the Army and the paramilitaries forces (CNMH, 2013).

FARC-EP reached its maximum military capacity between 1995 and 2002, with more than 13,000 combatants and a military presence in urban areas within the country's largest cities (Ávila, 2019). According to the National Center of Historical Memory, FARC-EP dealt heavy blows to the state military forces, including several attacks on police stations and army posts in remote areas lacking government authority, as well as hostile incursions in communities (CNMH, 2013). The selective and massive kidnapping of soldiers, politicians, and civilians was a flagship strategy. In addition, there were massacres, attacks on the electrical and road infrastructure, restrictions on mobility with illegal checkpoints, restrictions on political participation and elections; and limitations on the powers of the state in the areas under FARC-EP' control (CNMH, 2013). By then, it was widely known that the national government was being militarily defeated (Contreras, 2018).

In this context, President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) led peace talks in a third attempt to seek a negotiated solution with FARC-EP. The terms initially negotiated included the demilitarization of a vast geographical area which could then serve as the epicenter of the peace negotiations while assuring security conditions for FARC-EP. The San Vicente del Caguán municipality in Caquetá, served as seat for the negotiations (CNMH, 2013). Unfortunately, during the three years that the negotiations lasted, FARC-EP managed to consolidate its permanent presence in 200 municipalities, doubling the number of its military fronts, and increasing the number of rebels from 13,000 to 18,000 (Ríos, 2018). Despite negotiation efforts, there were no significant advancements; and in the end, the peace process ended up broken after FARC-EP kidnapped a commercial airplane and abducted Senator Eduardo Gechem on February

20, 2002 (CNMH, 2013). Due to its attacks on civilian populations and the failed peace process, FARC-EP lost political support from local communities.

2002 - 2010: The Search for a Military Solution to the Conflict with FARC-EP

From 2002 to 2010, FARC-EP was combated militarily by President Álvaro Uribe (Ortiz, 2019). Uribe led the implementation of the Democratic Security Policy crafted as a national response to, and expression of support for, the United States-led “War on Terror” that emerged from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. After the failure of the peace process with FARC-EP in San Vicente de El Caguán, Álvaro Uribe was elected President of Colombia (2002-2010) on the platform of defeating terrorism. The Democratic Security Policy in Colombia was based on a conception of the military struggle against FARC-EP as against a terrorist group instead of as a guerrilla organization, which made their elimination as the only way to achieve security. An enemy-centric counterinsurgency strategy (Ríos & Zapata, 2019).

During Álvaro Uribe's presidency, the government negotiated peace with paramilitary forces. The AUC was the main paramilitary group in the country. Through Law 975/2005, the Law of Justice and Peace, paramilitaries were demobilized in exchange for alternative sentences¹¹ of eight years in prison for those responsible for crimes against humanity and human rights violations (Bedoya, 2018). Later, top paramilitary leaders were extradited to the United States (García, P., 2016). Furthermore, during Álvaro Uribe's government, there were recurring scandals due to the government's illegal monitoring of opposition leaders, and the extrajudicial

¹¹ Please note, this was not a transitional justice system like the one created by the 2016 final peace agreement. As part of the peace process with the paramilitary, what was granted was reduced sentences within the ordinary justice system.

execution of civilians then claimed to be guerrillas' casualties by the national army in order to show progress in the war on terrorism (Pachón, 2019).

The Álvaro Uribe's government launched a military offensive against FARC-EP that returned an image of strength to the state. During this government, several devastating blows were settled against FARC-EP, including the dismissal of important commanders, the rescue of political leader and presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt held hostage for six years, and other kidnapped persons (Ortiz, 2019; Pachón, 2019). In addition, the government recovered territorial control of part of the country, and mass kidnappings decreased (Pachón, 2019). These military triumphs consolidated Álvaro Uribe as the most popular president in the history of Colombia (Pachón, 2019) and an influential figure until today. After his second term as President, Álvaro Uribe was elected for two congressional periods, and has led the main opposition political party to the 2016 final peace agreement, the Centro Democrático.

As a result of government efforts, by the end of 2010 FARC-EP eased back on its military actions, and combatants moved mainly to rural areas of Colombia (Ávila, 2019). Basset (2018) states that violence was more intense in border areas and along Colombia's coasts than it was in the country's centre. Similarly, in *Detrás de la Guerra en Colombia* [Behind War] (2019), Ávila argues that development of the armed conflict influenced the population's daily life in such a way that the country was, in the end, divided. During the years of confrontation, FARC-EP achieved a military presence in 452 of 1,103 Colombian municipalities (Ávila, 2019), severely impacting those living in rural areas much more than urban populations. In turn, this has created apathy in urban areas toward the peace process with FARC-EP (Ávila, 2019).

2010-2016: Pursuing Peace with FARC-EP

President Juan Manuel Santos initiated peace talks in 2012. Santos served as Minister of Defense from July 2006 to May 2009 under the government of President Álvaro Uribe, leading the military campaign against the so-called terrorist guerrillas following the Democratic Security Policy. Moreover, in 2010, Santos was elected President with the political support of Álvaro Uribe, hence the public's surprise around his decision to pursue a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. Contrary to his predecessor, Santos acknowledged the existence of the armed conflict under national and international law, recognizing FARC-EP's belligerent¹² status as an insurgent actor.

After three failed attempts to reach a negotiated settlement to put an end to violence with FARC-EP (Aya, 2017), the fourth peace process that was negotiated from 2012 to 2016 successfully ended with the signing of the *Peace Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Sustainable and Lasting Peace* on September 26, 2016, in Cartagena (Nárdiz, 2019; Aya, 2017). During these four years of negotiations, increasing polarization arose in the country over the nature, scope, and direction of the peace process.

The 2016 peace agreement was supposed to be endorsed by the Colombian population through a national plebiscite. At the beginning of the bargaining process, the government committed to seek the population's endorsement of the peace agreement negotiated with FARC-EP. Indeed, this happened on October 2, 2016 (Roa, 2019). However, this final endorsement by the country's population complicated the negotiation's closure stage. The plebiscite asked whether Colombians agreed with the terms of the peace agreement. 50,21% of voters said they did not agree, while 49,78% of them indicated that they supported the agreement (Nárdiz, 2019;

¹² “The laws, rights, and duties of war apply not only to armies, but also to militia and volunteer corps fulfilling the following conditions: To be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates; To have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance; To carry arms openly; and To conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war”. *Hague Convention*, (1907), Art. 1)

Roa, 2019, Basset 2018). Undoubtedly, Colombia is what peace scholar John Paul Lederach (1997) refers to as a deeply divided society.

The against-vote victory in the 2016 plebiscite left a stain of disapproval from the Colombian population on the peace agreement, nourishing polarization in the country. Koopman (2020) states that conflict most affected regions supported the peace agreement in the plebiscite, while those less affected expressed their disagreement at the polls. The against-vote victory was achieved with less than a one-digit difference and only 13.066.047 (37.43%) of total eligible voters (Nárdiz, 2019; Valencia & Muñoz, 2020). After this reversal, the Government initiated a renegotiation process culminating in what is formally titled the *Final peace agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Sustainable and Lasting Peace* that was signed on November 24, 2016, in Bogota and ratified directly by Congress. Notwithstanding its ratification, though, a profound social disagreement was left unresolved, impacting the legitimacy of the peace settlement as well as its implementation (Roa, 2019; Valencia & Muñoz, 2020).

2017-2021: Colombia After Signing the 2016 Final Peace Agreement

The 2016 final peace agreement comprises six major agreements. The first two of these agreements addressed the structural causes of the conflict. The first one focuses on comprehensive rural reform, and the second one on political participation for FARC-EP former combatants. The fourth and fifth points were intended to address the consequences of the conflict, with an agreement on a solution to the illicit drugs problem, and the creation of a Comprehensive System for Justice, Truth, Reparation and Non-Repetition for Victims of the Armed Conflict. The other two agreements were intended to disarmament and demobilization processes, and the last one set up the implementation, verification, and public endorsement

mechanism. As pointed out by LeGrand et al. (2017), the 2016 final peace agreement addressed most of the critical issues driving the conflict, such as the land distribution inequality, social reforms required for the countryside, the creation of a transitional justice system to avoid impunity, fight against drug trafficking, and former combatants' political participation.

After signing the 2016 final peace agreement, former FARC-EP combatants handed over their weapons. They went into a process designed to reintegrate them into civilian life, including creating a political party called the Common Revolutionary Alternative Force (FARC by its Spanish acronym). As of November 2021, the Colombian Higher Commissioner's Office for Peace (OACP by its Spanish acronym) registered a total of 14,021 FARC-EP combatants demobilized (Agencia para la Reincorporación y Normalización, 2021). Some of the reforms required for implementing the 2016 final peace agreement began to emerge in 2017. However, President Juan Manuel Santos reached the end of his term in office without concluding several of the most critical reforms, such as the creation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP).

In 2018, the presidential election contest focused on debates about the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement and its modification. The dispute center was between Gustavo Petro, a left-wing candidate and a former M-19 combatant supporting the implementation of the agreement, and Iván Duque, Uribe's political heir and presidential candidate for the Centro Democrático (Uribe's party). Iván Duque's political campaign emphasized the illegitimacy of the 2016 final peace agreement, the need to amend it, and also to continue the armed struggle against terrorist groups. Paradoxically, the government of President Duque ended up being responsible for implementing the 2016 final peace agreement.

In 2021, the country commemorated the peace agreement's fifth anniversary amid ongoing polarization. The Kroc Institute at Notre Dame University, a body mandated to measure

the agreement's implementation progress, reported that only 30% of what was agreed upon was ultimately achieved (Echavarría et al., 2022). Nonetheless, different sources note that perceived favourability regarding the 2016 final peace agreement has improved. According to Los Andes University (2022), the population's support for the peace agreement implementation increased from 41% in 2016 to 51% in 2021.

Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition

The Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition is the core system created to achieve reconciliation as prescribed by the 2016 final peace agreement. The system is comprised of the Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Recurrence Commission, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), and the Unit for Searching for Persons Deemed as Missing. The comprehensive system aims to contribute to several goals, including the realization of victim's rights, accountability, guarantees of no recurrence, legal certainty, and reconciliation in the following terms:

Coexistence and reconciliation, by building mutual trust starting from the positive changes instigated within society by the peace agreements, in particular through the recognition of the victims, the acknowledgment and the establishment of responsibilities, and, in general, the acknowledgment by society as a whole of the need to take advantage of this opportunity to build a future based on social justice, respect, and tolerance. (Final peace agreement, 2016, p. 137)

The Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Recurrence Commission is a temporal non-judicial mechanism. The truth commission was created with three specific purposes: first, to search for the truth about the conflict; second, to bolster recognition of the victims as citizens and political

subjects, acknowledge perpetrators of violations, awareness of the violent legacy among the whole society; and third, to contribute to coexistence by enhancing a culture of tolerance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Final peace agreement, 2016). The commission's mandate was established for three years starting in December 2017; however, it was ultimately extended until August 2022 (United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia [UNVMC], 2021). Regarding reconciliation, the truth commission is a core component in the Colombian case as the single agency mandated to engage the whole of Colombian society in peacebuilding.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) is the judicial component of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition. Redressing victims' rights is at the centre of the 2016 Final peace agreement. SJP follows a restorative justice model seeking the reparation of victims instead of the punishment of offenders. As with many restorative models, just those actors who committed severe offenses in contravention to Human Rights (HR) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are subject to SJP procedures. In the same vein, those combatants prosecuted for crimes associated with the conflict's political nature, such as rebellion, are granted pardons (Final peace agreement, 2016).

The SJP was created on April 4, 2017, and it is legally entitled to rule over all actors involved in the conflict willing to join its jurisdiction by providing truth. At the end of 2021, the SJP received around 500 reports of violations that occurred during the conflict (UNVMC, 2021). Over 13,000 individuals are subject to its jurisdiction; 74% are former FARC-EP combatants, 25% are members of security forces, and 1% are others, such as entrepreneurs and government officials (UNVMC, 2021). In terms of reconciliation, the SJP is a place where victims and serious offenders can engage with one another about truth, justice, and reparation through face-to-face encounters. It is therefore a place where reconciliatory work is done on the relationship level.

Since its beginning in March 2018, the SJP has been working on macro-cases. The strategy is to prioritize macro-level cases following the same pattern such as taking of hostages. Macro-cases are selected considering the severity of the violations, the number of direct victims, and the representativeness of the cases (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2018). As of September 2022, ten macro-cases¹³ remain open and under investigation, with 334,374 victims linked to the processes (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2022). During the first two years, the SJP focused on receiving reports from victims and civilian organizations. In future years, SPJ will cover public hearings on responsibility acknowledgment, indictments, and sanctions (Corporación Excelencia en la Justicia, 2022). However, no sanctions have been imposed under the SJP until today.

Finally, the Unit for the Searching for Persons Deemed as Missing is a humanitarian and technical body. The unit works jointly with the Truth Commission and the SJP. From 2017 to 2021, the unit recovered 345 bodies including 132 that were returned to their families (UNVMC, 2021).

Status of the Conflict from 2016 to 2021

The Colombian armed conflict remains active. At the end of 2021, the country registered 9,231,426 victims with 987,763 of these (10.07% of the total) having been recorded between

¹³ Case 01: Taking of hostages, deprivation of freedom and others in connection; Case 02: Prioritize territorial situation of Ricaurte, Tumaco, and Barbacoas; Case 03: killings and forced disappearances presented as casualties in combat by State agents (also known as false positives), committed by State agents; Case 04: Prioritize Uraba region territorial situation; Case 05: Prioritize territorial situation in North of Cauca and South of Valle del Cauca; Case 06: Victimization of the members the Patriotic Union party; Case 07: Forced recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; Case 08: Crimes committed by the public security forces and other State agents, including in partnership with paramilitary groups and civilian third parties; Case 09: Non-Amnestiable Crimes committed by the former FARC-EP nationwide; Case 10: Non-Amnestiable Crimes against ethnic peoples and their territories.

2017 and 2021. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), at least five non-international armed conflicts¹⁴ have been identified taking place in the country:

Four between the Government of the country and the ELN, the EPL, the Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC, by its Spanish acronym), and elements of the former Bloque Oriental (Eastern Bloc) of the FARC-EP that have not accepted the peace process. There is also a fifth non-international armed conflict between the ELN and the EPL, centred in the Catatumbo region (ICRC, 2019, para. 12).

Despite FARC-EP demobilization, conflict continues in rural and periphery areas fueled by illegal economies. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) registered 143,000 hectares of coca in 2020, a slight decrease from the 146,000 hectares registered in 2016. However, there has been a tendency toward increasing coca cultivation over the last decade, since 2013 when only 48,000 hectares were detected (UNODC, 2021). Similarly, illegal gold mining operations covered 64,000 hectares, with an estimated 69% of Colombia's gold coming from illegal mining (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021).

Recidivism has been another significant issue complicating the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement. On August 29, 2019, alias Iván Márquez, one of the peace agreement's former FARC-EP top peace negotiators, appeared in a video accompanied by Jesus Santrich, El Paisa, and Romaña (all aliases), three former FARC-EP commanders, to launch the second Marquetalia. In Márquez' announcement, he proclaimed the launch of a new guerrilla group in response to failures to implement the 2016 final peace agreement, pointing out the lack

¹⁴ Following the IHL, an armed conflict is considered to exist when there are confrontations in a territory between armed forces of the state and organized armed groups acting under a centralized command, with territorial control, capable of conducting sustained military operations (Additional Protocol II Geneva Conventions, 1977, Article 1)

of governmental leadership and willingness to achieve peace (Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, 2019).

The unabated assassinations of community leaders, ex-combatants, and accompanying massacres of civilians has led to calls on the government's to accept its responsibility and protect Colombia's general population. This has become yet another obstacle to achieving peace. From November 2016 to December 2021 in Colombia, 303 former combatants (UNVMC, 2021) and 1,270 community leaders and human rights defenders were assassinated (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz [INDEPAZ], 2021). In terms of the killing of community leaders and massacres, the departments of Cauca, Antioquia, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, Putumayo, and Norte de Santander are the most affected, in this order (INDEPAZ, 2021).

Conclusions

The current Colombian armed conflict's origin dates back to the early 1960s, with roots in peasants' demands for agrarian reform. The current conflict was born along with FARC-EP. However, various armed actors with different motivations have joined the conflict over the years. Concerning actors in the conflict, one could speak of leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary groups, and the state's armed forces. Although the Colombian Government did negotiate different peace agreements with guerrillas and paramilitary groups, the 2016 final peace agreement became more relevant in virtue of its scope. The 2016 final peace agreement created institutions such as SJP, the truth commission, and several legal frameworks to address some of the structural drivers of the armed conflict.

The dilemma of choosing between a negotiated or a military solution to violent insurgency in Colombia has been on the public agenda since the beginning of the conflict. In the last two decades this dilemma increased, nourished by the exponential growth of the armed

conflict, which reached its maximum expansion between 1996 and 2005. Although President Andrés Pastrana's approach (1998-2002) sought a negotiated solution, after the 2002 peace process's failure, President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) led the country into a “war” on terrorism, a conflict that allowed guerrillas to be viewed as merely terrorist groups. This military struggle severely impacted FARC-EP's military capacity, creating conditions for insurgents to agree on the need to find a negotiated solution to the conflict. Nowadays, after the 2016 plebiscite, the dilemma is about the legitimacy of this agreement, or perhaps its widespread acceptance more than its legitimacy, which has led to contentious polarization on the subject.

Considering ample evidence that Colombia still has a long way to go in terms of conflict resolution, it makes sense to explore what it means to reconcile in the existing post-agreement scenario. The 2016 final peace agreement ended 60 years of armed struggle with FARC-EP in attempt to create a sustainable and lasting peace. However, the armed conflict remains active in Colombia. Beyond delving into the drivers of armed conflict and the underlying contradictions that make impossible a peaceful resolution to all conflicts present in the country, in the short term at least, it seems well worth analyzing whether there will be a future in which reconciliation with a demobilized actor is possible.

Chapter 3. Reconciliation Meanings in and for the Colombian Public Opinion

Introduction

In this chapter, I pursue answers to my research question about what tensions and overlaps between reconciliation discourses reveal about what reconciliation with FARC-EP could mean for Colombians, while exploring several of the different meanings given to reconciliation. First, I will provide some general insights about the data gathered in the sampled media. Next, I analyze discourses on reconciliation. I have divided the figurative language representations into three groupings: The first group corresponds to representations about attitudes and assumptions hindering reconciliation, the second group comprises representations about what reconciliation means in and for Colombians, and the third group analyzes the components of reconciliation. Finally, I present my conclusions.

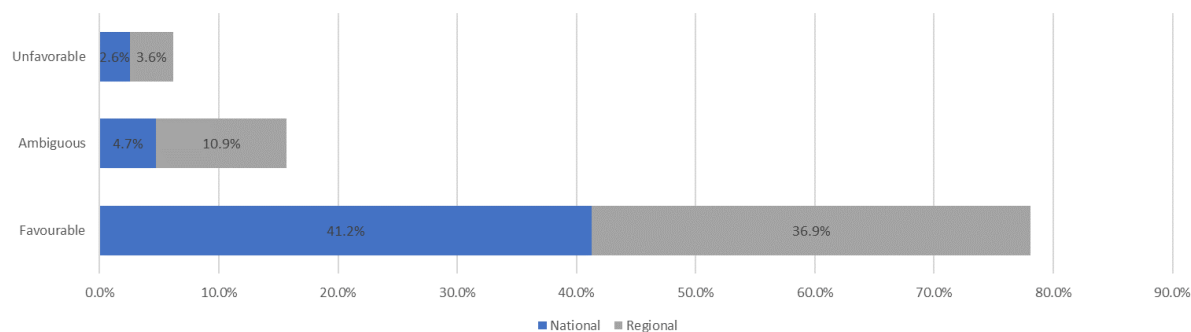
General Insights Into Sampled Opinion Pieces

My first finding is that the issue of reconciliation needs more discussion in public opinion. Most opinion pieces focus on related concerns or associated topics rather than reconciliation itself. Out of the 274 articles analyzed, only 49 address reconciliation as a central theme, 30 were published by national media, and 19 by regional media. On the contrary, most opinion pieces reconciliation through a different topic, such as the nature of truth, the 2016 final peace agreement, polarization, justice, hate, forgiveness, and victims' reparations. In addition, the selected sample comprises 105 articles published in 2017, a number that fell drastically to 34 in 2020, and then slightly increased to 44 in 2021. This trend indicates the topic's relevance throughout the public opinion agenda.

My second finding is that when public opinion addresses reconciliation-related topics, there is clear support for these processes instead of an attack on or negative connotation given to them. 78% of the 274 sampled opinion pieces had a favourable position regarding reconciliation, only 6% were unfavourable, and 16% were ambiguous. Regarding the 78% of opinion pieces supporting reconciliation and its associated topics, 41% come from sampled national media and 37% from regional press. In addition, it is noteworthy that there are no significant differences regarding favourable and unfavourable positions between sampled national and regional media, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Favourability toward reconciliation



Note: This figure shows favourable vs. unfavourable positions toward reconciliation, disaggregating national and regional sampled media.

The third finding is that there are no different dynamics concerning support for reconciliation between regional and national sampled media beyond the media's political and ideological orientation. Unfavourable and ambiguous positions are slightly higher in the sampled regional media than in national media, as shown in Figure 2. However, to analyze this I verified the disaggregated information. I found that 95% of sampled opinion pieces with an unfavourable

position came out from the two media with a conservative ideological orientation, the newspapers *El Tiempo* (National media) and *El Colombiano* (Antioquia Regional Media).

Finally, doing a literal review of the opinion pieces, the most common references to reconciliation found are process, objective and rhetorical use. In short, 52% of the articles refer to reconciliation as a process and/or objective: 22% address the issue as a process, 17% as an objective, and 13% of articles have ambiguous references where it is impossible to determine if they understand reconciliation as a process or objective. Moreover, 23% refer to reconciliation only rhetorically, 3% assume reconciliation as a synonym of peace, and 6% have undefined references.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that 10% of the articles refer to reconciliation as a choice or decision, a path to follow, or a right. The representations on reconciliation as an objective, process and choice will be elaborated hereunder.

Public Opinion Discourses on Attitudes and Assumptions Hindering Reconciliation

Pessimism

Colombian society is characterized as pessimist, particularly about anything that concerns the 2016 final peace agreement and reconciliation processes. Pessimism is found and discussed as a topic in 16 opinion pieces (10 national, 6 regional). Cortés, E., (2017) argues that believing in Colombia is a “leap of faith,” adding that it is difficult to believe that reconciliation and peace are possible. On the contrary, Arango (2017) questions pessimism in the country, stating that it seems “as if malice was a second skin” for Colombians. On the one hand, Cortés's argument about the leap of faith is an ironic depiction that suggest believing in reconciliation even though

¹⁵ Opinion pieces that simultaneously refer to reconciliation as a process, and/or objective, and/or rhetorical use, and/or synonym of peace.

it is yet to happen while conveying a tone of skepticism. But, on the other hand, in Arango's representation of malice as a second skin, there is a question about the distrust prevailing in the country regarding the 2016 final peace agreement's implementation. Indeed, pessimism and mistrust cloud the positive facts of the process with FARC-EP. For example, referring to former combatants asking for forgiveness, Charria (2017b) notes that “these images should fill retinas with hope.” In this case, using a conceptual metaphor to elaborate on the problem, Charria (2017b) draws attention to positive images about peace that could bring hope but, unfortunately, do not reach the retina since Colombians do not want to see them. These representations are about Colombian society's reluctance to acknowledge reconciliation actions.

Pessimism in this context is associated with the belief that nothing will change with the 2016 final peace agreement. Barbosa (2017b) argues that Colombia is “suffering gatopardismo.” Gatopardismo is a reference to the novel *Gatopardo* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, published in 1957, in which the central argument revolves around the idea that all changes led by politics usually are intended to maintain the status quo (Gatopardismos, 2020). Therefore, analyzing Barbosa's representation of gatopardismo as suffering, one might say that behind it, there is an appeal to overcome a pessimistic belief that all the efforts to bring the 2016 final peace agreement to a successful conclusion eventually focus on sustaining the war instead of building toward national reconciliation. In another sample, López, C., (2017b) points out that for many people, the solution is “not to change the rules of the game.” In other words, that it is necessary to continue the war with FARC-EP that, except for the peace processes under Andres Pastrana and Juan Manuel Santos's governments, has been the guiding rule of the relationship between the Colombian state and the rebels. In both cases, we find a high level of pessimism and skepticism toward peace and reconciliation.

Radicalism

There is radicalism in Colombia. Radicalism is identified as a problem in 21 documents (11 national and 10 regional media). Civico (2017b) argues that in Colombia, there is “individualist fundamentalism” based on radical positions presented, understood, and appropriated as absolute truths. Fundamentalism is traditionally associated with a narrow and rigid interpretations of religious precepts and texts¹⁶. In this sense, Colombian fundamentalism is a metaphorical representation of radicalism and polarization in the country, which is opposed to peace. Like a religious precept, political fundamentalism implies eliminating others and their perspectives alleging their closedness and inability to change.

As a consequence of radicalism, reconciliation may be understood as a fight between the right and the wrong side. To illustrate this point, Congote (2018) argues that in Colombia, there is a paradox placing people on the side of reconciliation or on the side of a “bloody cave”. In this representation, referring to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Congote points out that some people have decided to leave the cave to face new challenges. On the contrary, others invite people to stay in the bloody cave, a depiction about the continuation of the war. The story of Plato's cave is thus fundamentally construed as an allegory about taking positions. In Congote's representation, the cave represents the wrong place where the 2016 final peace agreement's opponents are. As occurs when an inhabitant leaves Plato's cave, the veil of ignorance is lifted. In other words, those who are against the 2016 final peace agreement live in ignorance. Behind Plato's cave allegory, I identified many attitudes and assumptions hindering reconciliation in Colombia, such as the assumption about the existence of two sides, good and bad, and the discursive violence.

¹⁶ Koellner (2022) notes that the claims of truth, superiority, universal validity, and restoring the past are fundamentalism's four key components.

Policy of Hatred

Hatred is a considerable problem for reconciliation in Colombia. Hatred is addressed in 105 opinion pieces (52 national and 53 regional). Quiroz (2017) points out that hatred is a germ transmitted faster than the “flu” and is also a “finger on the trigger of a gun”. In this sense, hatred is comparable to a contagious disease capable of triggering physical violence. Along the same lines, Lara (2017) argues that in Colombia hatred spreads through tweets like “gunpowder”, and Giraldo, C., (2018) notes that the country has a permanently “primed hate-bomb”. The references to gunpowder and hate-bomb depict the danger of hate as a potential weapon with killing power. In all the examined statements, hatred is not desired and works as a trigger of violence.

In Colombia, people hate for different reasons such as politics, religion, and views of peace. Flórez, C., (2017) states that hatred has “become wild”. When one speaks of a wild fruit, one speaks of a fruit that grows everywhere and without much human intervention. By affirming that hatred has become wild in Colombia, Flórez's aim is to highlight the presence of hatred in multiple spheres of social life; people hate due to politics, religious differences, and armed conflict. Similarly, Said (2018) argues that in Colombia everyone hates ones another: former FARC-EP combatants hate Álvaro Uribe, Álvaro Uribe hates Juan Manuel Santos, and Colombians hate their neighbours if they happen to think differently. I agree that hatred is present in many social spheres and is a critical problem; however, it is not true that hate is wild. On the contrary, it arises and is sustained due to human intervention.

In Colombia, hatred is collective and ideological, it does not happen individually or by chance. Duzán (2017) notes that in Colombia people is “sentenced to hate.” A metaphor comparing the existence of hate in the country to a final court judgment, where there is no other path forward for the indicted but to serve a sentence. Recalling Carolin Emcke in *Against Hate*,

Barbosa (2017a) argued that “behind the screens of worried citizens,” there is a hatred that follows specific patterns and associations. In this case, there is an argument about the systematic nature of hate hidden behind a speech of concern about the negotiated peace. Along the same lines, Guerrero (2017c) notes that “hostility was consciously embedded in people's guts.” Like guts processing food for feeding the human body, Guerrero's metaphor of people's guts reflects on those elements feeding people's behaviours. A depiction of hatred as a deeply rooted feeling breeding violence, highlighting the intentionality of this practice. Indeed, Gómez, D., (2018) mention the existence of a “policy of everyday hatred,” Said (2018) notice a “hate speech,” Reyes (2021) refers to “scripts of repeated hatred,” and Narváez (2017) argues about a “political economy of hatred.” All these representations depict hate's systematic and deliberate nature as a policy. By acknowledging this, we are forced to think about the implementation devices and agents of such policy.

Elites are responsible for bolstering hatred in Colombia. López, C., (2017a) argues that there are national elites who “transmit feelings of hatred toward former rebels.” Therefore, civil society's hatred of former FARC-EP combatants comes from the elite's hatred of the 2016 final peace agreement. Likewise, Guerrero (2017c), Pérez (2019), Muñoz (2020) and Gutiérrez, M. (2020) support the idea that hatred has been the responsibility of political parties and leaders dedicated to profiting by “exploiting” these feelings of hate. The representation of exploiting hate illustrates a clear association between hatred and the role of political actors amid the post-agreement scenario in predisposing Colombians against the peace with FARCP to serve individual purposes.

The problem of hatred against FARC-EP is cultural. Guerrero (2017c) in an article titled “Cómo desintoxicar esta leonera de país” [How to detoxify this den of lions], introduces a

metaphor for addressing the level of hostility in Colombia, arguing that the problem in Colombia with the extinct FARC-EP is rather cultural. It is cultural to the extent that demonstrations of hatred may be found everywhere in the day-to-day interactions among the population. Guerrero (2017c) refers to “street ferocity where the fraternity or the bark are defined.” In this case, I agree with the idea that hatred is part of the culture of Colombians. It cultivates ferocity instead of fraternity on a day-to-day basis, finding multiple expressions in the daily lives of Colombians. For example, appealing to stop hatred against former combatants' families, Lozano (2021) notes there is no “blood crime.” In other words, no one should be blamed for the crimes committed by their relatives. However, in Colombia, that is a reality for the former combatant’s families that also face resistance in various scenarios.

Public Opinion Discourses on What Reconciliation Means

Reconciliation is an Objective

When addressing reconciliation, the first reference focuses on reconciliation as an end goal. The literal references make associations with goals, purposes, and tasks, something to insist on, not give it up, and something to defend (Santos, J, 2017a; Santos, J; 2017b; Fernández, 2017a; Hernández, J.,2017a; La paz debe ser un propósito de todos, 2021). Therefore, I grouped these figurative representations as portraits of reconciliation as an objective. To illustrate this point, Bejarano (2018) and Cortés, E., (2018) imagine reconciliation as a “dream,” and other authors such as Ruiz, A., (2018) and Ramírez, J., (2021) think of reconciliation as a “hope.” Along the same lines, Rojas (2021) refers to the “promise” of reconciliation. I found it is interesting to talk about reconciliation as a promise, hope, and dream since these terms imply talking about something whose achievement is still pending, something that is far from being

accomplished. I identified this approach in several opinion pieces¹⁷. Hence, I have concluded that achieving reconciliation is an objective whose accomplishment is part of the current concerns.

Reconciliation is a Complex Process

Reconciliation is not merely equivalent to the handover of weapons or the demobilization process. There are four opinion pieces portraying reconciliation as a process following the “silencing of guns” (2 in national and 2 in regional media). For example, Barbosa (2017a) notes that reconciliation is not merely “giving up of weapons,” Fernández (2017b) points out that “selling the end of the conflict” goes beyond media-showcased demobilization, and *El Colombiano* newspaper remarks that “silencing weapons” does not mean reconciliation (Victimas preocupación vigente, 2017). These references, about silencing the guns and selling the conflict as a resolved dispute, question the forcibly showcased delivery of weapons as a reconciliation result itself, highlighting that reconciliation does not occur spontaneously following the handover of weapons. Hence, I have concluded that in these cases reconciliation is understood as a process instead of a one-off event such as the surrendering of arms.

On July 19, 2017, former FARC-EP and former AUC commanders held a meeting in Bogotá to discuss peace. Sandoval, L., (2017a) points that meeting was important since reconciling is different from ceasing the war, and so, “reconciliation must follow to the effort of silence the guns.” In this case, the figurative concept describes a positive perception of progress toward reconciliation after surrendering arms, showcasing the encounter between former FARC-EP and AUC leaders as a reconciliation achievement between old enemies. These metaphors about silencing weapons appeared in the aftermath of the disarmament process during the first

¹⁷ Including Parada (2017), Sánchez (2017), Bejarano (2018), La fotografía de la verdad (2017), Duzán (2018), Cortés (2018), Vargas (2019a), Cristo (2021a), and Duncan (2021).

half of 2017. The examined representations tend toward expression of the idea that reconciliation starts after achieving FARC-EP' disarmament and demobilization processes.

During a visit to Colombia in 2017, Pope Francisco adopted a campaign slogan inviting Colombians to “take the first step” toward reconciliation. This calling to take the first step had several representations in public opinion, with mentions in 13 opinion pieces (5 national and 8 regional). The Pope insisted on reconciliation challenges in Colombia as a deeply divided country, reminding that taking the first step is always necessary for any project or activity, and that anyone can be the first to take the needed action toward reconciliation (Riveros, 2017a; El papa Francisco viene a unir, 2017; Solarte, F., 2017; Y si escuchamos el mensaje de Francisco, 2017; Carta al papa Francisco, 2017; Lara, 2017; García, G., 2017).

From a political dimension, there are positive representations produced by those who support the peace agreement as itself of what it means taking the first step. For example, Mosquera (2018) argues that signing the 2016 final peace agreement constitutes such a first step. In a similar illustration, Lara (2017) notes that opponents can take the first step by recognizing that the 2016 final peace agreement saved lives, and Juan Manuel Santos can take a first step in acknowledging the military struggle led by Álvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010 against FARC-EP made it possible to bring them to negotiation. In the examined representations, the central topic is the 2016 final peace agreement as a huge accomplishment in seeking reconciliation. In addition, Lara brings attention to what a first step means to those supporting the peace agreement as well as to those on the opponents' side, providing a good sample of the conciliatory discourses needed to build toward reconciliation.

In a second group, I found representations of what it means taking the first step from the point of view of the 2016 final peace agreement's opponents. Illustrating this case, Madrigal

(2017) notes that taking the first step involves stopping Juan Manuel Santos, a government that “sacrificed” the country for the so-called “false gold of Norway”. Behind Madrigal's statement, there is a critique of the illegitimacy of the agreement considering the plebiscite's results, highlighting that the decision to move forward despite the results was made to secure the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Juan Manuel Santos in Noruega. From a more radical position, De Toro (2017) proposes to modify the 2016 final peace agreement as such a first step toward reconciliation. In other words, De Toro ask for a renegotiation process including political actors in opposition. In a final sample, Madrigal (2017) and Lafaurie (2017) note that taking the first step would require not manipulating Christian principles or the figure of the Pope. In this case, Madrigal and Lafaurie criticize the use of the Pope's visit as a political strategy to speak about reconciliation avoiding the debate about the agreement's lack of legitimacy. In short, these representations are a good illustration of the polarization in Colombia. The opponents' discourse tends to portray exclusively what the other's side (i.e., the agreement's supporters) should do in taking a first step toward national reconciliation.

Moving beyond the political dimension, a third group of representations refers to the individual dimension to taking the first step. To give an idea, Zambrano (2017) and Ramírez, J. (2017a) argue that former combatants can take the first step by telling the truth and asking for forgiveness, Buitrago (2017) notes that victims must take the first step in overcoming the temptation of revenge, and Mosquera (2018) states that everyone has to take the first step toward generosity and compassion in communities with ex-combatants, victims and with political leaders. Hence, these representations acknowledge that everyone shall take the first step in order to achieve reconciliation, and that it involves ex-combatants contributing to truth for victims'

reparation, the victims giving forgiveness, and each individual who is part of the society actively participating in the reintegration of former combatants into local communities.

The multiple representations addressing what it might mean to take the first step lead us to the next conclusions. First, the power of the Pope, and therefore Catholicism in the country, to generate discussions on relevant issues within the sphere of public opinion is undeniable. However, a message of a spiritual nature toward reconciliation gained strength in many political statements around peace, such as Colombia's sacrifice in seeking the Nobel Peace Prize award, the use of religion to manipulate people, the agreement's lack of legitimacy, and finally, the need to amend the agreement regardless of what was agreed. In any case, the various representations of taking the first step shed light on what needs to be resolved to achieve a national reconciliation (e.g., polarization, reintegration, justice, reparation, etc.).

Turning the page is a third way of representing reconciliation as a process and it is mentioned in 20 documents (6 regional and 14 national). Turning the page implies a voluntary and conscious decision to leave something behind, to advance to a new page whose content can be filled anew and together. For example, Muñoz (2020) argues that after fifty years of barbarism, it is possible to turn the page thanks to the 2016 final peace agreement. However, different voices, such as Álvarez (2017), Muñoz (2020), Vargas, G., (2020), Duncan (2021) and Chaves (2021a), note that Colombians have not been able to turn the page on violence. Turning the page on violence is a call to leave violence behind taking advantage of the renovated scenario with the 2016 final peace agreement. In a different depiction, López, J., (2019) and Ways (2021) state that time indeed turns all pages, but waiting for time to pass before we can talk about reconciliation would be unfortunate. In this case, Lopez and Ways appeal to address the difficult conversations instead of leaving them in oblivion through the years.

I found a second group of references that associate turning the page with truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition for victims. For example, Jara (2017) argues that turning the page of pain is possible if there is peace in conflict-affected territories, and *El Espectador* newspaper notes that turning the page is possible with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) ensuring justice for victims (La promesa de la justicia, 2017; El primer año de la JEP, 2019). In addition, there are references to the role of former combatants in victims' reparation. For example, Chaves (2021b) mentions that turning the page of history is possible with FARC telling the truth to victims, and Acevedo (2021a) concludes that FARC cannot ask to turn the page without committing to repairing their victims. These representations focus on guaranteeing victims' rights as a critical element to ensure reconciliation, including peace in the conflict-affected territories as a realization of victims' right to non-repetition. Furthermore, it is also interesting that the examined representations point out that the Colombian government must guarantee justice to the victims through the SJP, while the extinct FARC-EP is the actor portrayed as responsible for truth and reparation.

To close my analysis of the metaphor of turning the page, there is a third group of representations that are focused on polarization. To illustrate this case, Martínez, F., (2017) urges turning the page of confrontation between Álvaro Uribe and Juan Manuel Santos. Similarly, Hernández, J., (2017b) notes that it is necessary to turn the page of sterile confrontations of irreconcilable political positions. In Martínez and Hernández's statements, there is a clear association of the political polarization arising from the dispute between those supporting the 2016 final peace agreement and those in opposition, embodied by main political actors such as Uribe and Santos. In addition, Cristo (2019c) states that there are political actors not interested in turning the page and vested in continuing the confrontation. This third group of representations is

concerned with overcoming the political polarization around peace as a necessary act to move toward national reconciliation.

Finally, there is one last representation of reconciliation as a process embedded in implementing the 2016 final peace agreement. Ochoa (2019) deploys a metaphor about national revival, which calls on several concerns essential for reconciliation. Ochoa (2019) states that the country is in an “emergency care unit” and needs to go to the “reconciliation facilities” enabling the peace implementation. This conceptual metaphor revolves around the idea that the country is in critical condition, like a patient being cared for in a medical care unit. Therefore, the only way to get well (i.e., to achieve peace) is by moving into the reconciliation unit, in other words working toward reconciliation. Following the conceptual metaphor, Ochoa (2019) recalled four issues needing “first aid”: the SJP implementation, the reintegration of former combatants, and the social and economic reforms for peasant populations. All of these are key elements contributing to the understanding of what reconciliation as a process entails in the country.

In conclusion, following Cuervo (2017) reconciliation is best understood as a “trial by fire” of a peace process (i.e., the critical test). To further analyze the intersection between reconciliation as a process and the implementation of the peace agreement, I selected and presented four major figurative representations: the effort after silencing weapons, taking the first step, turning the page, and national resuscitation. These representations illuminate the complexity of the reconciliation process in Colombia, which includes overcoming political polarization, reinforcing and achieving the individual willingness for peace and, most importantly, reconciliation of citizens, victims, ex-combatants, and politicians while implementing and guaranteeing rights to truth, justice, reparation, and grantees of non-repetition.

Reconciliation is a Choice

My research analysis has shown that there are also various representations of reconciliation as a choice. For explanatory purposes, it is noteworthy that introducing the visit of Pope Francisco in 2017 to Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, President of Colombia (2010-2018), wrote the following opinion piece in *El Tiempo*, also replicated in *El Espectador*, *El Colombiano* and *La Opinión*: “Su visita, por supuesto, también nos ayudará a sanar las heridas, a remover los muros que aún nos separan y a construir puentes que nos ayuden a reconciliarnos como nación” [His [The Pope's] visit, of course, will also help us heal our wounds, “remove the walls” separating us, and “build bridges” that will help us reconcile as a nation] (Santos, J., 2017a, para. 7). In this case, there are two figurative representations associated with reconciliation subject to analysis: removing walls and building bridges.

Building bridges is a metaphor for reconnecting communities. The metaphor about bridges is mentioned in 11 opinion pieces (4 national and 7 regional media). Several voices urge Colombians to work on building bridges in support of reconciliation (Lara, 2017; Y si escuchamos el mensaje de Francisco?, 2017; Santos J, 2017b; Dussán, 2018; Yace, 2019). For example, by remembering Diego Calderon's case, a biologist held hostage by FARC-EP who worked with former combatants in a scientific expedition to the Anorí forest in Antioquia, Guerrero (2019b) notes that nature served as a perfect bridge supporting reconciliation. Similarly, Civico (2017a) makes a call to political leaders to build bridges for reconciliation. Analyzing Guerrero and Civico's samples, one may say that a bridge is ultimately everything bringing Colombians and ex-combatants together in different social, political, cultural and community spaces. In short, building bridges is about reconciliation as a process, about

opportunities enabling reconnection and dialogue among communities. However, bridges that reconnect communities do not work merely by existing.

Building bridges is pointless if people do not decide to cross them and relate again and differently with someone once considered the enemy. Charria (2018) recalls a metaphor from *Rayuela* a novel by Julio Cortazar “No bridge stands on one pillar.” The concern is how to work on building bridges if one side does not want to cross them. As an illustration from those in opposition to the peace agreement, Acevedo (2021c) argues that neither “Reyes”, nor “Cano” nor “Jojoy”, three of the top FARC-EP leaders, were killed by the Colombian Army while building bridges for reconciliation. In this case, Acevedo's representation uses irony to refer to the killing of the enemy, presenting the rebels' assassinations as their well-deserved fate. Therefore, what came out from the examined representations is the need to reflect on how we value others' lives, and going beyond to decide if we want a relationship with the old enemy and how it would be.

Removing walls is another representation of fostering relationship connections. This reference was recorded in six opinion pieces (3 national and 3 regional media). Sandoval, L., (2017b) Santos, J. (2017a) and Yace (2019) appeal for breaking down the walls separating Colombians. In a case in point, Arias (2021d) states that the 2016 final peace agreement created opportunities where there were only walls. However, Fernández (2017a) notes that Colombians built a wall of silence against peace, and Sandoval, L., (2017b) argues that mistrust and hatred are walls to overcome. In all the examined statements, walls are a metaphorical representation of issues that divide a society, including a forced silence, mistrust and hatred, calling to remove them as the only way to reconnect with others. I found myself personally represented by Fernandez's metaphor about the wall of silence, silencing conversations about peace, the peace

agreement and its implementation to avoid conflicts. In short, the challenge is communicating with others about peace-related issues.

Metaphorical representations about crossing bridges and removing walls are about reconciliation as an option. I have concluded that beyond building bridges, the 2016 final peace agreement has enabled spaces to build bridges. These spaces are in each community where ex-combatants, victims, and others converge as opportunities to redesign and reimagine the way we live in society. One may say that there can be multiple bridges; however, each person can decide if they want to cross a bridge and better interact with others. Similarly, each person can decide whether to remove a wall allowing different relationships with the one on the other side. Hence, reconciliation is also an individual choice, which implies wanting a positive relationship and day to day interactions with others.

Reconciliation as a “pathway” is my last sample of reconciliation as a choice. There are mentions in 11 pieces (7 national, 4 regional) of reconciliation as a pathway, a means of moving forward that is necessary to build a viable society (Santos, J. 2017a; Santos, J. 2017b; Santos, J. 2017c; Sierra, 2017; Fajardo, 2017; Fajardo, 2018; Cañar, 2018; Vargas, A., 2021; Arias, 2021c). Although representation as a pathway is very close to reconciliation as a process, I found it important to present it separately, given the connotation of choice. Reconciliation is one of the possible paths; there are other paths. That is to say, there are choices to be made.

Public Opinion Discourses on What Reconciliation Entails

Reconciliation Implies Unity and Collective Work

Reconciliation recognizes a collective purpose above the individual. To illustrate this point, Mera (2017) notes that Colombians must all unite instead of continue turning on the

“waterwheel of resentment.” In Mera's metaphor, the waterwheel represents the ongoing confrontation in Colombia around peace. Similarly, Renteria (2017) notes that “going into the storm, rowing the same boat” is for the better. The same boat means heading toward the same objective and the storm is a metaphorical representation of political polarization in the country. In a third representation, *El Espectador* newspaper appeals for “turning a deaf ear to the siren song of divisions,” remembering that Colombians are all in the same boat (La subversión es reconciliarnos, 2017). In addition to the same boat, this editorial includes the mermaid's symbolic representation. A depiction of the voices contributing to the country's polarization. *El Espectador* calls to protect the country from being polarized, as saving a boat from being sunk because of the curse produced by songs sung by such mythological animals. The three examined representations highlight the need to work collectively to achieve reconciliation and seek unity instead of division.

Reconciliation is About Dialogue to Agree on Minimums Rather than Absolute Consensus

Dialogue appears as a central element in several representations of reconciliation. Dialogue is referenced in 37 opinion pieces (22 national and 15 in regional media). Dialogue is everything we can build through words. The word *dialogue* etymology derives from *dia*, which means through, and *logo*, which means words (Charria, 2017a). However, Charria (2017a) argues that in Colombia dialogue spaces are not building anything, one might say there is no dialogue in Colombia. From a more positive perspective, Ortiz (2017) highlights the need for dialogue by bringing reconciliation to the “cenacles” of comprehension and understanding. Cenacles refer traditionally to a space of reunion remembering the last supper of Jesus with his

apostles. In other words, by using this metaphorical approach to recalling religious elements of Catholicism, Ortiz (2017) brings the need to speak out loud about reconciliation.

For reconciliation attainments dialogue should happen between improbable people. Highlighting the participation of Pablo Catatumbo, FARC leader, and Freddy Rendon, former AUC commander, in an event for reconciliation held with the participation of victims and civil society at Javeriana University in Cali in October 2017, *El Espectador* newspaper positively highlights that the “dialogue of the deaf” could be replaced by “dialogue between improbable people” (Más diálogos improbables, 2017, Para 5). In this case, the metaphorical use of the dialogue between improbable interlocutors, contrary to the deaf dialogue, highlights the need for discourse to circulate between different people. However, we could also understand the dialogue between deaf metaphor as an appeal in support of dialogue between those who cannot communicate. In fact, dialogue between the deaf exists through a specific code of non-verbal language. Therefore, the challenge is finding a helpful communication code among differences.

Some examples of these improbable dialogues are showcased in the public opinion pieces analyzed. In addition to other encounters between old enemies that have already been discussed in this chapter, in November 2019, demobilized guerrillas (including M-19, EPL, sectors of ELN, FARC-EP) and AUC, delivered to the truth commission a report jointly built on the truth about the conflict. Vargas, A., (2019) notes that this effort demonstrates that it is possible to leave behind violence as a method for conflict resolution, being a kind of “karma”¹⁸ for Colombians. What stands out, in this case, is the dialogue exercise that involves the joint construction of a narrative as former combatants contributing to the truth commission's task.

¹⁸ The karma recalls the concept from Buddhism about a natural law of cause and consequence produced by mindful actions. However, in Colombia it is often related to the notion that the country will live amid violence endlessly.

Dialogue is a key component of reaching agreement on minimums, it does not require or seek absolute consensus. The search for consensus appears in 10 documents (3 national and 7 regional). Salazar (2017a) states that finding a “common ground” is necessary, starting with what can unite society. Salazar's representation appeals to identify those topics with the power to bolster unity among the differences. However, other representations focus on building consensus on minimums rather than absolute consensus. For example, Duzán (2018) argues that Juan Manuel Santos left Colombians with an “agreement of bare minimums,” and Renteria (2017) notes there is a need for political leaders to work toward national reconciliation “losing a little while winning” in the search for national reconciliation. Following Duzán and Renteria's depictions we found an expectation for different political leaders to build consensus around the 2016 final peace agreement implementation focusing on the minimums to enable its implementation. Indeed, I would say that more than identifying topics that can unite society, the real challenge is building a bare minimum on issues under dispute in pursuing peace.

Reconciliation Requires Acknowledging Victims Suffering

Processing the pain of war and acknowledging the pain of victims is essential in seeking unity as a society. “Siblings of pain” is an expression from the speech made by Ingrid Betancourt¹⁹ on June 23, 2021, before the truth commission, that was addressed to FARC-EP former leaders participating in this face-to-face encounter:

“Oí con emoción el relato de mis hermanos de dolor. Los oí llorar, los vi llorar, he llorado con ellos, y me cuesta trabajo no seguir llorando. Pero debo confesarles que me sorprende que nosotros, de este lado del escenario estemos todos llorando, y que del otro lado del

¹⁹ Ingrid Betancourt is a former presidential candidate held hostage for six years by FARC-EP.

escenario no haya habido ni una sola lágrima” [I heard with emotion the story of my siblings of pain. I heard them cry, I saw them cry, I have cried with them, and it is hard for me not to keep crying. And I must confess that I am surprised that we are all crying on this side of the stage, and on the other side, there has not been a single tear].

(Betancourt, 2021, 7:04).

Becoming siblings of pain is a call to brotherhood as Colombians through the shared understanding and witnessing of victims' pain. Despite the human nature of Ingrid Betancourt's intervention before the truth commission and its significance to reconciliation processes, Cristo (2021a) notes that this encounter, became another “battlefield” between those who support the agreement and those who do not, some criticizing that Ingrid Betancourt has spoken in favour of peace, and others criticizing that she demanded repentance and truth by former combatants. This is a remarkable example, proving how difficult it is for Colombians to show empathy to victims.

Colombia is a country that still does not understand the pain of its victims. Regarding Betancourt's speech, Reyes (2021) points out that we have not understood “the emotional memory that has left Colombians marked in Colombia.” Reyes's reference to the emotional memory marking people's feelings is about the emotional truth as a pending process. One may say that, unfortunately, due to the prolonged armed conflict in Colombia, there has not been an opportunity to make a proper grieve for the several violent episodes. As a result, people is used to living with unprocessed emotions. “Algún día tendremos que llorar juntos” [Someday We Will Have To Cry Together] was the title of two public opinion articles released following Betancourt's Speech. Both pieces recalled Ingrid Betancourt's words regarding reconciliation, reinforcing that “volver a ser humanos es llorar juntos” [To be humans again is to “cry together”] (Betancourt, 2021, 21:19). Crying is a natural human response to a feeling. Therefore,

Betancourt's representation of crying together, is a call about connecting one's feelings with the victims' history. Reyes (2021) rightly points out that when Ingrid Betancourt mentions her surprise at not seeing tears from the other side of the stage, there is a profound appeal about being humans addressed not only to former combatants but to everyone on the other side of the stage, namely the whole of Colombian society.

Sincere regret and empathy by former rebels are repeatedly pointed out as a requirement for reconciliation. For example, following the encounter before the truth commission, Martínez, N., (2021) argues that alias Timoshenko asked for forgiveness by reading a speech that “came out of his pocket but not from his soul,” questioning the sincerity of the former combatants' repentance. Similarly, Ramírez, J., (2021) argues that perpetrators “did not tear up their eyes,” seeming incapable of putting themselves in “somebody else's shoes,” complaining about the lack of emotions in an encounter that was supposed to serve as a reparatory space for victims. Finally, Acevedo (2021b) notes that during the encounter the victims “turned the other cheek” while they just received in return cynicism and coldness. The criticism here concerns ex-combatants' commitment, stating the victims are fulfilling their duties in the construction of reconciliation while FARC-EP does not respond with empathy to these gestures of listening and speaking.

Reconciliation is About Forgiveness

Without forgiveness, there can be no reconciliation, 66 opinion pieces (17 national and 49 regional) discuss forgiveness as a reconciliation component. Turning the other cheek is a well-known Christian proverb²⁰ that in the Colombian context is essentially understood as

²⁰ In Luke 6:29, the Holy Bible states, "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them".

forgiveness. There are positive and negative references linked to the use of this proverb as a metaphor. In some of the sampled pieces, turning the other cheek is associated with the revictimization of victims, as was already discussed with reference to former combatants' lack of sympathy for the victims during their appearance before the truth commission on June 23, 2021. On the positive spectrum, Renteria (2017) notes that turning the other cheek is associated with a mental, emotional, and spiritually internal process intended to transform pride into humility to forgive. An appeal in favour of the individual process that does not rely on what is happening with the former combatants. A more empowering discourse on the victims.

Forgiveness is challenging but not impossible. Narváez (2017) highlights how victims provide daily examples of forgiveness: “Contra la irracionalidad de la violencia urge responder con la irracionalidad del perdón” [Against the irrationality of violence, it is urgent to respond with the “irrationality of forgiveness”] (para. 13). In this case, Narváez's representation highlights the irrational nature of violence and points out that the only viable response is forgiveness, no matter how illogical it may seem. One may say that, behind the lines, there is a recognition of how difficult forgiveness is, appealing to use the same force required for violence toward forgiveness. Likewise, Ramírez, J., (2017a) notes that Colombia is a country where “the unforgivable can be forgiven.” In Ramírez's depiction, we found an irony emphasizing the existence of forgiveness even for the most severe aggressions. From the examined representations, I agree that forgiveness is possible no matter the aggression and it is also a necessary response to overcome violence.

Forgiveness is a right of victims. To illustrate this point, Enciso (2018) notes that the victims have the right to give or deny forgiveness, and Nieto, R., (2017) states that it is a personal decision. Furthermore, Narváez (2019) argues that beyond religious connotations,

forgiveness is a “political virtue” and a “human right.” Indeed, there is a common sense that forgiveness is something to which the victims are entitled. The understanding of forgiveness as a human right or a choice is thus a common premise. However, in Narváez's representation, we found an additional reference to forgiveness as a political virtue²¹, in other words, as an expected act for the common good. In this case, what Narváez suggests is that forgiveness might also be understood as a moral obligation for the well-being of society. In fact, although forgiveness is a right of the victims, it contributes to the realization of superior purposes of coexistence.

It is also possible to understand forgiveness as a choice for those who are not directly victimized. For example, Calvo (2017) argues that forgiveness is not “making a criminal one's friend,” it implies the understanding of the context about what happened and giving up the desire for punishment. In this case, the first essential idea is that forgiveness engages not only direct victims but society as a whole. Secondly, I found that forgiveness does not necessarily imply establishing a relationship with the other, it is not making a criminal one's friend. One may conclude that it is precisely for this reason that forgiveness is only one component of reconciliation. As conceptualized in Chapter 1, following Jhon Paul Lederach, although forgiveness is essential for reconciliation, reconciliation involves in furtherance a positive relationship with the other.

Acceptance, Repentance, and Asking for Forgiveness are Necessary for Reconciliation

There is an association between acts of repentance and forgiveness as reconciliation efforts. For example, in May 2017, presenting the act of asking forgiveness by FARC-EP to

²¹ For Plato, politics is the means for realizing a moral order based on justice. In this sense, political virtue is the willingness to act correctly for the common good (Romero, 1998).

victims in Bojayá²², Jara (2017) notes that these acts open the “door to reconciliation.” Likewise, describing the acceptance by former members of the Colombian Army of their responsibility for extrajudicial killings, *El Espectador* notes that the “door of reconciliation” opens when there is public recognition and when there is repentance by the conflict' actors (Reconocimientos que abren puertas, 2021). As a final sample, Buitrago (2017) argues that reconciliation is “open the door” to everyone who has experienced the conflict. From the examined representations, I have concluded that metaphors about doors are used as synonyms for opportunities. Jara's representation focuses on former FARC-EP combatants asking for forgiveness, Buitrago's depiction focuses on accepting all who have experienced the conflict (i.e., victims and perpetrators), and *El Espectador's* representation refers to former army members asking forgiveness for their wrongs. In short, genuine repentance, the recognition of crimes, and asking forgiveness are portrayed as opportunities for reconciliation.

Finally, there is a fourth representation of reconciliation at a national level involving the use of the door's metaphor. Analyzing violent demonstrations against Álvaro Uribe and Gustavo Petro amid the presidential election campaign in 2018, Quintero (2018) argues that after signing the 2016 final peace accord, reconciliation is “knocking on the door,” and it is a must to open it. This representation goes beyond the conflict between victims and perpetrators, drawing attention to polarization as a problem and the need for all members of Colombian society to be open to reconciliation.

²² Bojayá is a municipality in Chocó Department. On May 2, 2002, hundreds of people were killed after a cylinder bomb exploded at a Church where civilians sought shelter. In the aftermath, the government and media widely presented the case as an attack perpetrated unilaterally by FARC-EP. However, according to Leyner Palacios, community leader and one of the victims, the attack was perpetrated in the context of combat between FARC-EP, the Army, and the paramilitaries, in which the latest put the community as a shield. (Turfano, 2020).

Reconciliation is About Individual Actions of a Positive Relationship

Acts of reconciliation stand out in the stories showcasing positive relationships with former combatants. Mariela López is a school professor in Dabeiba Antioquia who promotes forgiveness, kindness, and humanity by teaching ex-combatants' children, although her husband and brother were killed by FARC- EP (Lecciones de reconciliación, 2018). Mariela's history was featured in *El Tiempo* (National media) and in *La Opinión* (Norte de Santander Regional Media), which refer to her as an “apostle of reconciliation promoting real and spiritual disarmament” (Medina, 2018; Lecciones de reconciliación, 2018). In the school, former guerrillas and victims' children share classes, and the parents of the children participate in joint community activities convened by the teacher around the school.

About what does it take to promote individual spiritual disarmament, Yace (2019) argues that we must “drop our internal weapons.” Dropping our internal weapons is to overcome mistrust and recognize that conflict-affected territories are interested in peacebuilding despite the violence. Yace (2019) argues that dropping internal weapons implies getting closer to the other and listening to victims and ex-combatants. Dropping internal weapons means stopping attacking, abandoning verbal violence and violent behaviour, listening, and building a relationship with others. Several public opinion pieces such as Giraldo, C., (2018), Cristo (2019c), and Cristo (2021a) follow this disarmament discourse. Dropping internal weapons is about what a person can do as an individual to build positive relationships with others.

Professor Mariela's case exemplifies what entails a positive relationship. This chapter has addressed different kinds of reconciliation between ex-combatants and victims and between ex-combatants from other armed groups. The issue of reconciliation has also been discussed as a choice that implies crossing bridges, removing walls, and choosing the pathway of

reconciliation. I chose Professor Mariela's case to close the analysis of representations because it illustrates forgiveness, willingness to dialogue, understanding of a collective purpose, and the desire to relearn how to interact and live in a community with those who were once the aggressors. In the end, a positive relationship is the indicator that reconciliation has been achieved.

Public Opinion Readers' Comments

To complement my analysis, I reviewed 19 comments posted by the opinion pieces' readers discussing the topic of reconciliation. As explained in Chapter 1, I cannot make inferences about readers based on the total number of opinion pieces sampled since I only collected the readers' comments in response to 21 opinion pieces (10 from 2021 and 11 from 2017). However, from 19 comments identified that address the issue of reconciliation, eight express a favourable opinion regarding the reconciliation processes with former FARC-EP combatants, one is ambiguous, and 11 are against it, following the same trend of high polarization.

The readers' comments follow the same discussion identified in the discourse representations. The comments supporting reconciliation highlight the dialogue between all parties, the justice that will be delivered by the SJP, the truth-seeking with the truth commission, the possibility of changing mentality, leaving hatred behind, and the importance of former combatants recognizing the truth about the kidnapping. Radical positions defending reconciliation are also identified such as “Quien se oponga a la paz al reconciliación [sic] es enemigo de los colombianos sean de derecha o izquierda ...(...)” [Anyone who opposes peace and reconciliation is the enemy of Colombians, whether on the right or left-wing...] (Helmer

Betancourt, 2017, Pos. 634). Regarding those who do not support the reconciliation processes, five specifically demand justice and associate reconciliation with impunity, one addresses the SJP's lack of impartiality, two criticize the credibility of reconciliation, and two do not give any arguments.

Conclusions

My first conclusion is that public opinion discourses on reconciliation are not undermining the peace and reconciliation processes in Colombia. Out of the total sampling, 78% of opinion pieces had a favourable position regarding reconciliation. However, my research only focused on opinion pieces that responded to the “reconciliation FARC” keyword search. Therefore, it is possible that other relevant opinion pieces do not include the word reconciliation as part of their discourses. For this reason, I can not conclude that there is more support than resistance regarding the reconciliation processes. Still, I concluded that when public opinion writes about reconciliation it is from a supportive position.

At least four major attitudes are posing a challenge to reconciliation processes. Representations of public opinion refer to pessimism, hatred, and radicalism; however, apathy is an additional one that I identified in the public opinion pieces. Overcoming hatred and radicalism are the main concerns about attitudes hindering reconciliation. In Colombia, hatred has an ideological and collective nature, promoted by the elites and expanded to the entire society, with different violent expressions in multiple social spheres. Hatred is especially dangerous because it feeds radicalism, and these both, promote exclusion. In addition, apathy is a shared problem. There is lack of empathy of some former combatants for their victims, there is also apathy of

politicians toward the peace process, and there is apathy of the Colombian society for the victims and the peace.

Reconciliation as a concept supports multiple meanings. In essence, it is both a process and an objective. The objective of reconciliation is recognized once the armed confrontation is over, and achieving it requires a complex process full of multiple threads, such as overcoming attitudes that do not contribute to reconciliation. Transforming pessimism, mistrust, radicalism, and hatred is essential in achieving reconciliation in Colombia. Moreover, other processes are essential such as overcoming polarization, guaranteeing truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition for the victims as prescribed by the 2016 final peace agreement, the construction of collective awareness, the promotion of dialogue, the recognition of the victims, the ex-combatants' petitions for forgiveness, the forgiveness of the victims and reinforcement of positive relationship with those that once were enemies. Each of these threads coincides in Colombia with different levels of progress impacting the overall progress of reconciliation.

From my analysis, I have concluded that reconciliation implies a choice at a certain point. If reconciliation were primarily just one goal, there would be a set of set steps that would get us from start to finish achieving it. However, there is no standard definition of the set of steps required for reconciliation. Each configuration is unique for each conflict, and this is reflected in the analysis of the various representations included in public opinion discourses in Colombia. On the other hand, if reconciliation were just a process lacking an objective, we would be facing a process with no endpoint. By contrast, reconciliation is a multilayered process with a starting and desired endpoint. Hence, the examined representations of reconciliation as a choice are of significant relevance since a choice or decision appears as the determining factor to complete the process and achieve the objective.

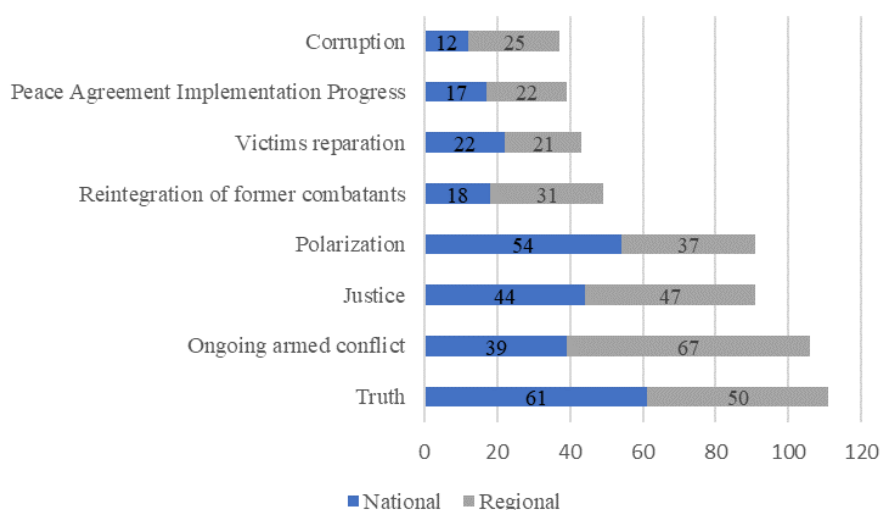
Chapter 4. Reconciliation-Related Concerns

Introduction

This chapter responds to my research question about what tensions and overlaps between reconciliation discourses reveal about what concerns Colombians the most about reconciliation and negotiated peace. In the first section, I will present an overview of the sampled media regarding reconciliation-related concerns. In the second section, I will analyze a series of representations on truth, ongoing armed conflict, justice, polarization, reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants, victims' reparation, implementation of peace agreement, and corruption. I identified these topics as the categories of reconciliation-related concerns. Lastly, I will elaborate on my conclusions from this chapter.

Overview of Reconciliation-Related Concerns

To indicate the relevance of the topics identified, I counted the number of opinion pieces addressing each issue. As a result, truth, the ongoing armed conflict, polarization, and justice appear to be the most relevant concerns. As shown in Figure 3, truth and justice seem to have similar relevance in both regional and national media; however, the ongoing armed conflict is addressed more predominantly by the regional media, while national media seems to give more relevance to the issue of polarization than the regional media. Victims' reparation, reintegration of former combatants, peace agreement implementation and corruption, are other reconciliation-related concerns found in the public opinion pieces, the last three being most relevant for the regional media.

Figure 3*Reconciliation-related concerns*

Note: This table shows the number of opinion pieces discussing the issue identified as a reconciliation-related concern, disaggregating national and regional data.

Truth: Without Truth, It is Not Worth The Cost

The realization of truth is non-negotiable in all the representations found. Out of the total sampling, 111 articles discuss truth-related issues (61 national and 50 regional). Jara (2017), Cristo (2019c), Vargas, G., (2020) and Cortés, E., (2020) argue that there is “no pathway toward reconciliation without truth,” in other words, truth is necessary in pursuing reconciliation. Furthermore, truth is a desired outcome of peace. Illustrating this point, Cifuentes (2020) notes that without truth the “national and international cost the Colombian state has had to bear is not worth it.” In Cifuentes's depiction, the cost refers to efforts and negotiations made by the government in seeking a negotiated peace. Along the same lines, Ruiz, W. (2017), Flórez, C. (2020) and Ospina, M, (2021) highlight that truth is the minimum Colombians deserve “a

minimum reparation owed to the victims.” In this case, the reference is about truth as a debt to be settled to victims and Colombian society. In short, there appears to be consensus on the idea of truth as an outcome required for reconciliation, expected from peace, and owed to Colombians.

Another group of representations acknowledges that knowing the truth is painful. For example, *El Colombiano* newspaper notes that the construction of the truth is a challenge just as big as “putting together a mirror broken into a thousand pieces” (Comienza la comisión de la verdad, 2017), a portrait of the challenging nature of seeking for truth, considering the several actors involved and the multiple episodes that occurred through a conflict of half a century. Beyond the constraints that any search for the truth might entail, Arias (2021c) notes that truth is reached after “breaking us into a thousand pieces,” and Martínez, P., (2020) that it will always “fall like a bucket of cold water,” reflecting on how sorrowful the pursuit of truth can be. The bucket of cold water illustrates something that can be painful and simultaneously shaking, a depiction of the impact of truth in raising awareness of the conflict's complexity in society. Furthermore, *El Tiempo* states that truth is a “healing balm for the ills left by war” (Una misión fundamental, 2018), referring to the reparatory nature of truth. In conclusion, for the peace agreement's supporters, the pursuing truth is challenging and painful but also a healing process.

Building a joint narrative (i.e., historical memory of the conflict) is necessary to achieve a healing impact because of the truth. Several discourses, such as Cristo (2018), Ospina, J. (2021a) and *El Nuevo Liberal* newspaper in its editorial “Día nacional de las víctimas” [National Day of Victims], agree that truth and historical memory are essential to reconciliation. Gómez, J., (2020) notes that “the past must not be buried in oblivion.” Gómez argues that memory is essential for processing pain and preventing the use of hatred as a weapon. To illustrate this point, recalling Vamik Volkan and his analysis of the Serbian conflict, Gómez, J., (2020) argues that victims

must grieve and incorporate their losses into personal and collective history; otherwise, they will transmit this legacy to future generations, creating chosen traumas that can be activated to breed violence. Gómez's statement appears to explain what has occurred in Colombia. I would add that traumas can be chosen individually or collectively. For example, kidnapping and the extrajudicial killing of civilians might correspond to those traumas. Therefore, beyond the truth, constructing a shared narrative about the past is necessary for helping to mourn unresolved grief, as a critical process for reconciliation attainments.

All Actors Involved in the Armed Conflict Must Tell the Truth

Different representations discuss the truth of the conflict, beginning with former combatants. As a case in point, Alvarez (2017) asks former combatants “not to erase with their elbows what they wrote with their hands,” highlighting that ex-combatants cannot make peace for later not to tell the truth. Similarly, Flórez, V. (2020) and *El Espectador* Newspaper in “Las excusas de las FARC,” emphasize that Colombian society is not waiting for political speeches to “dilute” what happened. The reference to not dilute is an appeal to FARC-EP to avoid the use of political justifications when giving their testimonies. As an example, Ways (2019), Flórez, V. (2020) and Gutiérrez, F. (2020) argue that it is imperative to call things by their name, kidnapping was kidnapping, murder was murder and child recruitment was child recruitment. Hence, the examined representations focus on the discourses used by FARC-EP to tell their truth. In fact, there is a desire to achieve an official FARC-EP's acknowledgment of the crimes they committed as the human rights international law recognize these crimes.

There is an expectation of a contribution to the truth by different conflict actors. Martínez, P., (2020) highlights that the most critical thing about FARC-EP ex-combatants telling

the truth is that they impede others from continuing to lie, “like setting up a #TruthChallenge.” Martínez's depiction uses a social media concept to metaphorically explain the potential impact of former FARC-EP rebels telling the truth, like in a successful challenge disseminated through social media. Along the same lines, Flórez, C., (2019) argues that all testimonials are necessary to “weave the expected truth' fabric.” In this case, Flórez is anticipating the truth of several conflict actors. Similarly, Chaves (2018) ask for the truth of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC by its Spanish acronym), whose top leaders were extradited to the United States. Chaves (2018) argues that AUC's extraditions were a “rabbit²³ to the victims' right to truth,” in other words, a hoax to the victims. In short, those in support of the peace agreement expect to obtain the truth of FARC-EP, AUC, and others armed actors.

Finally, the participation of the private sector actors in the conflict also appears in the discussions. As an illustration, Caballero (2020) appeals to the need to “unveil the nerve of war,” a depiction concerning the war funders. On the side of those in opposition to the agreement, Acevedo (2019) argues that there are biases about the narrative that involve the participation of private sector actors, including entrepreneurs and business owners, in the armed conflict. The debate revolves around entrepreneurs participating in the conflict versus those that could have been victims. For example, Lara (2019) recalls Jorge Ballen's testimony given at a truth meeting convened by *El Espectador* in May 2019. Ballen, president of a tourism compound in the coffee grower's region, explained that amid the extortions, he felt he had to “buy his own life.” In this case, buying life depicts forced extortion to protect life rather than voluntary financial support to the guerrillas. However, it is undeniable that there have been private actors funding the conflict.

²³ It is noteworthy that rabbit is a metaphor in Colombia for fraud or robbery.

Truth About Taking Hostages

Taking of hostages was a frequent practice in Colombia. References to the truth about kidnapping were found in 16 opinion pieces (11 national, 5 regional). *El Colombiano* newspaper states that FARC-EP exercised kidnapping with an “iron fist” (Las FARC historia de horrores, 2018), referencing the cruelty that characterized the abductions. Along the same lines, Guerrero (2018) notes that kidnapping was a “calvary” for hostages and their families. In this case, recalling Jesus's crucifixion scene in the calvary, Guerrero's depiction is about the prolonged suffering of hostages. I consider that beyond the direct victims and their families, taking of hostages made all Colombians feel victimized. To illustrate this point, Cifuentes (2020) states that those who FARC-EP did not kidnap “remained prisoners within the cities, fearing becoming hostages on the country's highways.” Since the abductions took place mainly on the country's roads, everyone used to fear travelling from one city to another. Furthermore, every Colombian witnessed hostages' suffering through broadcasts on radio and television. As a result, at the beginning of the 2000s, every Colombian was afraid of being kidnapped.

Throughout several interventions former combatants used to justify kidnapping with political euphemisms such as retentions (Martínez, P., 2020; Bonnett, 2020). However, it was just on September 14, 2020, that FARC party's top leaders acknowledged for the first time they committed kidnappings (Bonnett, 2020; Un gesto importante en medio del caos, 2020). Consequently, the first indictment of the SJP was about macro-case 001, for taking hostages with 21,396 victims recorded (No, la JEP no iba a ser un tribunal de indulgencias, 2021). Following the indictment, in May 2021, former FARC-EP' secretariat leaders accepted their responsibility before the SJP (La justicia transicional avanza decididamente, 2021; Se abre paso la verdad, 2021).

Truth About Extrajudicial Executions of Civilians Presented as FARC-EP Rebels' Casualties

Extrajudicial executions of civilians, known in Colombia as false positives, are another topic engaging truth. I found references on this matter in 27 opinion pieces (14 national and 13 regional). For example, Gómez, D., (2018) argues that victims of state violence were not “second-class citizens,” bringing attention to the army's victims abducted from poor and marginalized communities. Furthermore, *El Colombiano* newspaper states that truth is necessary to close the chapter on extrajudicial executions of civilians as a “chapter of night and fog²⁴” (Verdades bajo tierra, 2019), as a practice carried out underground and following orders²⁵. In this regard, Lara (2019) brings back that in the middle of the forum “Let's talk about truth” convened by *El Espectador* in 2020, Rafael Colón, a former Army General, stated that they needed to tell the truth about the false positives “to get rid of that cross,” a figurative representation of his feeling of guilt. In short, the truth about extrajudicial executions of civilians is a long-standing and controversial debate because it involves government officials and active military.

Debate revolves around the delimitation of the government's responsibility in the extrajudicial executions of civilians presented as FARC-EP rebels' casualties. During Álvaro Uribe's voluntary testimony before the truth commission in 2021, he did not accept any political responsibility for the extrajudicial executions under his administration. In this regard, *El Espectador* newspaper criticizes that Uribe often refers to the individual officers just as a few “rotten apples” (Reconocimientos que abren puertas, 2021). In other words, as isolated cases. Similarly, Velásquez, C., (2021) argues that Uribe uses soldiers as an excuse, claiming “they

²⁴ Night and Fog Decree was issued by Adolf Hitler ordering to prosecute of the Nazi regimen's opponents in occupied France, giving birth to clandestine abductions (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2023)

²⁵ In Colombia, *Night and Fog*, is also a journal that now became a database prepared by the National Centre for Investigation and Popular Education- Peace Program (CINEP/PPP by its Spanish acronym), a Colombian NGO. The database is registering each case and victim of violations against HR and IHL in the country since July 1996.

make him believe in terrorists where there were only young boys,” an ironic reference to the war on terrorism led by Uribe. By contrast, Juan Manuel Santos accepted his responsibility for acts perpetrated when he served as Minister of Defense under Uribe's administration (Arias, 2021a). In any case, several voices, such as Ways (2021), Ospina, J. (2021b), Lara (2021) and Cristo (2021b), point out that Uribe's testimony before the truth commission was relevant, considering his manifestations against the entity's legitimacy. The debate on recognizing extrajudicial executions as an institutional policy across the armed forces remains open.

Truth About Gender Violence

Other discourses refer to the need for truth about gender violence. Out of the sample, 24 articles (12 national and 10 regional) refer to violence against women. *El Espectador* newspaper notes that “the war had a woman's face” (Cinismo, reconciliación y Farc, 2021). The depiction concerns the civil women targeted by FARC-EP and the violence inflicted on women within the guerrilla forces. Ospina, M., (2019) and Rueda (2021) recall many types of victimizations, including sexual assaults, sexual slavery, and forced abortion within the guerrilla. In addition, the truth about gender violence is also about integrating a gender-sensitive perspective in constructing a historical memory. To illustrate this point, the Association of Afro-descendant Women of Northern Cauca (ASOM) points out the importance of knowing the truth about black women, about conflict's impacts and how women have “prevented war from entering their houses” (Carabali, 2019). In this case, ASOM asks for the recognition of women-led community-based strategies to prevent or decrease the impact of war on their families, but they also speak about their truth as Afro-descendant women. In this regard, Ordoñez, M., (2017) argues that beyond recognizing the effects of war on the bodies and destinies of women, it is also necessary

to officially acknowledge their potential role in building reconciliation. In short, there is a concern about the inclusion of women's voices into the conflict's narrative.

Truth Commission

The truth commission is another relevant topic associated with truth addressed in 26 opinion pieces (eight national and 18 regional). The first significant debate surrounding the truth commission revolved around its impartiality. For example, Cuéllar (2017) refers to the truth commission as a “mamertos²⁶ commission for peace,” complaining over its biased composition. On the side of agreement's supporters, Hommes (2018) argues that by questioning the commission and its members, the agreement's opponents want to “condemn the country to forget” (i.e., to avoid the seeking for truth). Along the same lines, Gómez, J., (2020) argues that the genuine concern of the agreement's opponent is that the left-wing could use the truth commission to gain what “was not achieved with blood and fire in the collective imagination.” In this case, Gomez conceives historical memory as a dispute. Therefore, the truth commission serves as a mechanism to write history, providing a space for the guerrillas to tell their history. As a result of this argument, the truth commission did not achieve active participation of the several conflict actors in building a shared narrative of the conflict.

Another debate revolves around the usefulness of the commission. Botero (2018) states that “fires are not put down with gas,” arguing that discussing the causes of the conflict and responsibilities poses a danger to people living in conflict-affected territories since the confrontation is still active. From another perspective, Sánchez, A., (2019) questions to what

²⁶ The word *mamerto* was born in Colombia in the 50s to refer to members of the communist party. From then on, *mamerto* has been used to refer pejoratively and from a radical position to those who identify with the left-wing. For example, Cuéllar (2017) says that *mamertismo* is a left-wing that despises capitalism.

extent a truth commission is helpful in a country where people “avoid giving papaya²⁷,” reflecting on the commission's usefulness if people refuse to speak. More pessimistically, Ruiz W. (2017) notes that “truth is the first sacrifice in any peace process.” In this final sample, Ruiz portrays the truth as a sacrifice made for peace, arguing that it is impossible to unveil the whole truth. However, one might say that it is precisely the opposite. Even if it is true that pursuing the entire truth is as ideal, it is still a desired outcome rather than a cost of a negotiated peace.

Those who support the peace agreement consider the truth commission an opportunity for reconciliation. Ospina, J., (2018) states that the truth commission's goal is to promote encounters between victims and perpetrators, with the state's and civil society's participation “in making it easier for Colombia to recover its soul,” a figurative representation of the truth commission's purpose in pursuing brotherhood and coexistence. However, the truth commission's potential for reconciliation relies on the encounters for dialogue. To illustrate this point, Gómez, J., (2020) states that truth with reconciling purposes comes from dialogue and not “from a sealed report of the quite questioned truth commission's authority,” questioning the reparatory potential of the truth commission's final report, given the commission's lack of legitimacy. In this regard, several voices, such as Riveros (2017b) and Gomez (2020), note that in Colombia a reconciliation-centred commission might have been more valuable than a truth-centred one. In other words, the focus should have been on the encounters enabling dialogue.

Although the commission's work is invaluable and significant, I believe that an opportunity to create wide spaces for dialogue aimed at national reconciliation was wasted. The truth commission concluded its process on June 28, 2022, with the delivery of its final report *There is a Future if there is Truth*. The report was built after “years of research and extensive

²⁷ In Colombia, giving papaya is a symbolic representation of being careful that others do not take advantage of your weakness.

dialogue with some 27,000 people across Colombian society and drawing from close to 1,000 reports received from different actors” (UNVMC, 2022, p.4). However, the history and trajectory of the conflict described by the truth commission's final report does not enjoy acceptance and legitimacy by the whole of society. In this sense, the more relevant achievements were the various meetings and gatherings between civil society, victims, and aggressors, that the truth commission successfully convened.

Ongoing Armed Conflict

Several opinion pieces identify the continuation of the armed conflict as a concern. From 106 opinion pieces, given the level of direct impact and relatability, regional media address this issue with a greater preponderance (67 opinion pieces) than the national media (39 opinion pieces). The early concern in 2017 was the occupation by other armed actors of territories left by FARC-EP. Giraldo, C., (2017) states that it is necessary to be vigilant after the disarmament “since weapons, men and cocaine are harvested every day in Colombia.” In Giraldo's depiction, the reference to men, weapons, and cocaine is warning about the return of the armed confrontation. However, it depicts a simplistic view of the conflict as a drug trafficking problem. From a more broad-minded approach, Cuervo (2017) notes that it is necessary to channel reconciliation measures in the territories to prevent its occupation by other armed actors, noting that peace without reconciliation is “half peace” (i.e., an incomplete peace). Along the same lines, Cristo (2019a) notes that ELN “missed the train of history,” expressing concern about the lack of progress in peace talks with that guerrilla. Unfortunately, different armed actors occupied the territories left by FARC-EP without the Colombian state being able to stop their expansion or negotiate peace. As a result, since 2017, we have witnessed a stiff escalation of the conflict.

From 2017 to 2021, the regional media provided various representations of the severity of the armed confrontation. For example, *La Opinión* newspaper appeals to “save future generations from the clutches of war” (Se llevan los niños, 2020), a depiction complaining about the recruitment of children by EPL and ELN in the Catatumbo region. In one sentence, *La Opinión* notes that the “horrible night” continues along Norte de Santander (No cesa la horrible noche, 2021), another reference to the night and fog metaphor highlighting the violence. Similarly, *El Nuevo Liberal* newspaper notes that acts of violence in Cauca overcome the “barrier of official silence” (Una percepción que le pesa al Cauca, 2017), appealing to speak out loud about the violence occurring in Cauca beyond the political convenience of recognizing the continuation of the conflict. Moreover, concerning the Naya region, *El Nuevo Liberal* argues that the situation “is almost a copy” of the one that existed when FARC controlled it (El Naya y el Pacífico, 2018), pointing out that despite the peace agreement, nothing changed for the communities that continue living under an ongoing armed conflict.

A final discourse criticizes the government's approach when addressing the violence in the conflict-affected territories. *El Nuevo Liberal* newspaper argues it is unacceptable that regions are only “looked at when they are hit by violence” (Más allá del repudio, 2017; Violencia, Estado y Posconflicto, 2018). In this case, the representation questions that the government prioritizes a military response instead of addressing structural causes of violence. Similarly, *El Nuevo Liberal* criticizes Duque's government displeasure with the 2016 final peace agreement social component and the return to a purely militaristic solution (El recrudecimiento de la violencia y del lenguaje, 2018). Unfortunately, in this approach, the government blames drug trafficking as the source of violence in the country, avoiding its responsibility to provide social and economic development conditions in the conflict-affected territories.

Killing of Community Leaders, Human Rights Defenders and Former Combatants

The killing of community leaders, human rights defenders and former combatants is of particular concern in 43 opinion pieces (18 national and 25 regional). For example, *El Nuevo Liberal* newspaper in Cauca and Cristo (2019d) notes that there have been warnings about dark machinery of hostility and assassinations reactivated against community leaders since 2017, asking to stop the “wave of murders” throughout the country. The wave of murders refers to the massive nature of the killings. In this regard, Sandoval, L., (2017b) recalls a slogan spread among civil society organizations: “May peace not cost us our lives,” highlighting that community leaders and human rights defenders are essentially working in support of the implementation of the peace agreement, and that should not be a reason for the armed actors to target them. Relatedly, the sustained assassination of ex-combatants is mentioned in 28 articles (15 national and 13 regional). Arias, G. (2021b) argues that the “thirteen thousand lives that were saved from war must now be saved from peace.” Arias's representation is an ironic call to safeguard the lives of former combatants participating in the peace implementation. In short, I found that all discourses agree on the need to protect the life of former combatants and community leaders.

Drug Trafficking

Finally, the issue of illicit drugs is one in which opinions appear to be divided. The illegal drug trafficking topic is addressed in 51 opinion pieces (16 national and 35 regional). Those who support the peace agreement consider the government is to blame for not addressing the problem of illicit drugs. For example, Ruiz, A., (2018) argues that in Colombia, coca-leaf derived drugs “pass under the noses of all the authorities.” In other words, no one seems to be aware of it or

take action to resolve this problem. On the contrary, those who attack the peace process consider that the increase in drug trafficking resulted from the 2016 final peace agreement. Illustrating this point, Ordoñez, A., (2018) notes that with the peace agreement, Colombia turned into a “cocaine sanctuary” that offers concessions to drug traffickers. Likewise, Velásquez, A., (2020) argues that due to the agreement, the guard was lowered to combat illicit crops; and unfortunately, the “snake is still alive.” In conclusion, all the examined representations recognize the problem of drug trafficking; however, they portray contradictory positions regarding the understanding and depiction of the problem and its relation with the conflict and peace.

Polarization: The Fight for Peace

Polarization is one of the biggest concerns when discussing reconciliation, addressed in 91 opinion pieces (54 national and 37 regional). For example, Mera (2017) notes that it is unclear who will win the “fight for peace,” referring to the polarization around the peace agreement. Moreover, Guerrero (2017b) argues that Colombia is divided into “two countries, separated by blood and fire by a thorny wall,” and López, J., (2019) notes that it is “a fight between Tyrians and Trojans.” Guerrero and López's representations portray the radical nature of the positions. Guerrero uses the reference to blood, fire, and thorns to illustrate how dangerous the division is, and López uses the metaphor of Tyrians and Trojans to recall the adversarial and irreconcilable nature of the two poles. In any case, Charria (2020) states that “day after day, we dig a trench that seems bottomless,” speaking of the continuum nature of the problem. In short, all the examined representations are portraits of polarization as almost a guiding principle.

The 2016 final peace agreement's supporters tend to attribute the polarization to the peace agreement's opponents. For example, Cortés, F., (2019) notes that the Centro Democrático

political party has the right to promote its political views, but “they do not have the right to ignite a war” (i.e., to breed conflicts). Similarly, about the mistake of dividing the country into “friends” and “enemies” of peace recalled by President Iván Duque (2018-222) during his inaugural speech in August 2018, Bejarano (2018) notes that Duque should begin by recognizing that the Centro Democrático party laid the “first stone of discord.” In this case, the reference to a first stone implicitly acknowledges that accusations have been thrown from side to side. Hence, it is noteworthy that both sides are responsible for polarization in Colombia.

Political actors utilize peace to serve political purposes. Duncan (2021) and Giraldo, J., (2021) agree that both left- and right-wing “political actors are dedicated to exploiting votes of hatred” (i.e., to divide people using hate speeches), undermining the reconciliation processes by leveraging the limitations of the peace processes with FARC-EP and AUC. Along the same lines, Guerrero (2019a) argues that both sides should work together to shed light on the “deadly virus that one day bit into their brain, allowing the mixture of politics and spilled blood in the country.” In this case, the first critical idea is the mistake of using peace for political purposes. The second one, is the understanding of this mistake as a disease caused by a virus affecting the brain and, therefore, the capacity to make good decisions. It is a deadly virus because politicizing the pursuit of peace might cost lives.

Because of the polarization, the 2016 final peace agreement is subject to constant attacks. Silva, G. (2018) notes that the peace process in Colombia, traditionally represented by a white dove, is a victim of the “piranha²⁸ strategy.” In this conceptual metaphor, each attack on the peace process is comparable to a small bite of a piranha. It is a metaphor charged with a strong symbolic connotation of violent attacks and the hostile environment in which the 2016 final

²⁸ Piranhas are carnivorous freshwater fish that live in the Amazon River and attack their prey in groups. Each fish gives a small non-fatal bite, but when added to others' bites, these may cause the victim's death.

peace agreement implementation is taking place. Still, at the same time, it is an aggressive figuration of the agreement's opponents.

Political actors have nourished the polarization to the detriment of reconciliation and unity. *La Opinión* newspaper argues that the political leaders “have kidnapped the right of Colombians to live in peace” (La guerra insuficiente, 2018). I found this depiction of polarization as a kidnapping (i.e., a deprivation of the right to peace) in various opinion pieces. For example, Zambrano (2017), Garcia (2019b), Cristo (2019b) and Cifuentes (2021) argue that President Iván Duque (2018-2022) has been kidnapped by radical voices of his party and the whole of society has been kidnapped by the discourses exalted during the plebiscite's campaign. Analyzing Silva's representation of the piranha strategy, I will add that the peace agreement's supporters are also kidnapped by radical speeches against opponents. Considering the extreme positions surrounding the peace agreement, Villar (2018) states that Colombia is involved in disputes that recall the times of the “silly homeland²⁹.” An appeal to the importance of unity in building a nation to avoid the recurrence of violence.

The 2016 Final Peace Agreement and the Original Sin

The plebiscite results are frequently debated in Colombian public opinion. Opponents of the peace agreement argue that democracy was threatened after Santos disregarded the plebiscite results. For example, De Toro (2021) refers to the plebiscite issue as a “sprain that injured democracy.” In other words, as an action that negatively impacted the legitimacy of democracy in the country. However, Cristo (2019c) states that the agreement's opponents have used the

²⁹ Silly Homeland (Patria Boba) refers to a historical period from 1810 to 1816. Right after having achieved independence, different disputes arose about how to organize the republic, internal disputes that were sized by the Spanish Crown to reconquer the country in 1816. Colombia achieved its final independence in 1819.

plebiscite as their Letter of Marque to continue the war³⁰. In the Colombian context, this metaphor refers to using the plebiscite to justify attacks on the peace agreement, specifically under the Government of President Iván Duque (2018-2022). In any case, Riveros (2018) notes that Colombians continued living in the “land of the no-vote,” a portrait of the ongoing polarization around the plebiscite's results. In short, because of the lack of support mobilized, the plebiscite remains as an open debate.

Voices call for the acknowledgment of the plebiscite results as an expression of the popular will. Ways (2021) reactivates the “original sin” metaphor, noting that no matter how narrow the no-vote victory was in the plebiscite, the first version of the agreement was defeated at the polls. Along the same lines, Sánchez, O., (2017) notes that arguing that the no-vote victory resulted from opponents' cheating “is seeking to cover the sun with a finger” (i.e., to deny the truth). In this scenario, Ways (2021) appeals to defenders “to take a step forward in accepting the shadow of illegitimacy” over the agreement. I agree that accepting the plebiscite's results as an illegitimacy shadow on the final agreement could be useful to deter radicalism. Ultimately, the 2016 final peace agreement was endorsed by Congress instead of by referendum. What is the purpose of denying this fact other than continuing fighting from radical positions?

Prevalent Polarizing Discourses

Friends Versus Enemies of Peace. One of the prevalent polarizing discourses alludes to the dichotomy between friends and/or enemies of peace. During the 2014 presidential campaign, incumbent candidate Juan Manuel Santos used the words friends and enemies of peace, referring

³⁰ A Letter of Marque used to be a royal license granted by the King of England to allow pirates to attack and loot the goods of enemies of the reign (Britannica, 2022).

to supporters and opponents of the peace process. Since then, there have been recurrent references to enemies and friends of peace. I found references to friends and enemies of peace in 37 documents (20 national and 17 regional). There are references to friends of peace, defenders of peace and reconciliation, defenders of the process, pro-agreement friends and pro-FARC friends, and clubs of peace's friends. By contrast, it is possible to find references to enemies of peace, enemies of the agreement, SJP's enemies, defenders of the NO, enemies of the peace process, friends of war. In short, the discourse on friends and enemies of the peace is replicated in everything related to the 2016 final peace agreement, including reconciliation.

Urban Versus Rural Populations. Another polarizing discourse used in public opinion concerns the division between rural and urban populations and their respective perspectives on conflict. All representations pejoratively refer to big cities and urban centres as external actors in the conflict. For example, *El Tiempo* newspaper states that urban populations are not part of the peace implementation policy agenda, as if those in cities want to continue “questioning the conflict sitting in their sofas in the living room” (La paz también es con la ciudad, 2017). In this case, the editorial questions the participation of urban populations in peacebuilding, appealing to adopt measures to include them in the peace implementation agenda. In other words, the policy plan for peace implementation should be wider than rural populations. However, with the statement: “questioning the conflict sitting in their sofas in the living room,” the representation depicts urban populations as actors not affected and unrelated to the conflict. Similarly, Lara (2017) and Nieto, L. (2017) argue that a decrease in violence does not matter to urban populations who have lived far from territories affected by violence and who have “learned about the armed conflict from television shows.” Lara and Nieto's depictions reinforce the idea that the urban population are external actors who have only experienced the conflict through television.

All the examined depictions reinforce the division of the Colombian society between urban and rural populations regarding conflict-affectation.

The Rolling Stones of Colombian Political Jargon. Political polarization is centred in two opposing poles. Guerrero (2017a) recalls the division of the country between uribistas and mamertos: “The uribistas are paramilitaries, crossed, war lovers. The mamertos are Castrochavistas, terrorists, and jammers³¹.” Guerrero (2017a) describes this terminology as the “rolling stones of the political jargon,” depicting the daily use of this vocabulary for mutual accusations. They are like rolling stones because the allegations are thrown from each side.

The ghost of Castrochavismo. A total of 15 documents (8 national and 7 regional) refer to “Castrochavismo”. Castrochavismo is a concept expressing fear over the possibility of Colombia changing its economic and political regime to either communism or socialism. Castrochavismo is the sum of the last names “Castro” and “Chaves,” recalling Fidel Castro, the late Cuban Revolution leader and president, and Hugo Chaves, the late president of Venezuela who, after taking power, created a socialist dictatorship in that country. Castrochavismo is thus fundamentally a depiction of left-wing political participation as a hazard. For example, referring to the Pope's Visit, Ospina, M., (2017) argues that the Pope would find a “nation terrified of running the same pathway as Venezuela.” In short, the peace agreement's opponents use this concept to reinforce the idea that with FARC-EP political participation, the guerrillas would have the power to shift the social and economic policy of the country.

Terrorist. The terrorist discourse is a legacy of the Democratic Security Policy implemented in the country under the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010). From then on, some political parties and public opinion leaders recognized guerrillas as members of terrorist

³¹ The word jam is common in Colombian jargon when referring to corruption. Jam is any reward obtained from corrupt practice.

groups³², a category that includes narco-terrorists and narco-guerrillas. In the sampled opinion pieces, the terrorist discourse is found in 23 documents (12 national and 11 regional). Peace agreement's opponents typically use this terminology to attack the agreement or the agreement's supporters. For example, referring to former combatants' political participation, Ordoñez, A., (2018) argues that before being Congressmen, the “terrorists” must spend the time they deserve in jail.

Uribistas. Uribistas is a concept that refers to the political followers of Álvaro Uribe, grouped under “uribismo” reference. There are 44 documents discussing the role of uribismo in the political scenario around peace (28 national, 16 regional). Some representations attribute to Uribe a messianic role. For example, De Toro (2020) refers to Uribe as the person “who liberated” Colombians, remarking on the military success of the Democratic Security Policy. However, the references to Uribe and the terms, such as uribismo and uribistas, are often used by those who support the peace agreement to attack the agreement's opponents. To illustrate this point, Flórez, C., (2017) argues that “Uribismo is a pit of hate,” and Ochoa (2021) argues that “peace with FARC-EP is like a violin and piano concert in which Uribe plays the tambourine,” referring to the permanent opposition of Uribe to the negotiated peace with FARC-EP.

Justice

As foreseen, the debate around justice revolves around the tension between retributive and restorative justice. Justice is addressed in 91 opinion pieces (44 national, 47 regional). The agreement's opponents argue that there can be no impunity for those most responsible for crimes

³² By recognizing non-state armed actors as terrorist groups, the government aimed to extinguish any possible political participation or agency that those actors might have in the future. Also, by referring to them as terrorists, the government would prevent any possible actions from external actors under the IHL, the Rome Statute and others.

against HR and IHL. For example, *El Colombiano* newspaper argues that through the 2016 final peace agreement, the state forces society to accept forgiveness and oblivion without going through the “stadium of justice” (Año de inercias y trompicones, 2017). In this case, when the editorial refers to the peace agreement as a mechanism to avoid a justice scenario, there is no recognition that justice exists within the framework of the 2016 final peace agreement. As if restorative justice is equivalent to impunity.

Peace agreement supporters criticize opponents' positions on restorative justice and their desire for revenge. For example, using a religious figurative representation, Jiménez (2017) notes that the only solution for Uribe is the FARC-EP's punishment “in a pan with a lopped handle³³.” The quoted reference criticizes then-Senator Álvaro Uribe's view that ex-combatants can be only punitively punished. Along the same lines, Calvo (2017), Muñoz (2020), and Renteria (2017) argue that countless prefer the “Lex talionis³⁴: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” In this case, one might first say that the critique lies in pursuing punishment for FARC-EP proportional to the damage they caused following the retributive justice approach. However, in the statement about the “eye for an eye,” the real question is focused on seeking revenge more than justice. Retribute justice does not aim for the punishment with the same damage as it would happen by taking one aggressor's eye in retribution for one victim's eye because that would be retaliation. Hence, the problem is more profound than the debate between retributive and restorative justice, it is about a desire for revenge.

³³ Christians believe there is a pan in hell where sinners burn in eternal fire. Since this punishment is for all eternity, the handles are not needed.

³⁴ Lex Talionis in Latin, or the law of retaliation, is a principle grounded in Roman law. Lex talionis aims to impose sanctions comparable to the damage caused (García-Hernández, 2017).

Special Jurisdiction for Peace

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) takes the biggest preponderance within justice as a reconciliation-related concern. The SJP is discussed in 30 opinion articles (18 national and 20 regional). García, G., (2019) and *El Colombiano* in “Lo que falta y se necesita en la JEP” [What is missing and needed in the SJP], refer to the SJP as the “backbone” of the agreements with FARC-EP, and therefore responsible for making peace possible. In addition, *El Espectador* recognizes the SJP as a space “to unite the truth patchwork” about the participation of the actors in the conflict (Las excusas de las FARC,2020). In other words, to find the truth among the contradictory testimonies from different conflict actors. The SJP is portrayed as an essential component of the peace agreement.

SJP's impartiality is a great concern for opponents of the 2016 final peace agreement. For example, Lozano (2017) questions if SJP's purpose is to serve “as an apparatus for revenge against political adversaries.” In Lozano's depiction, we found an expression of fear about the use of the SJP against the peace agreement's opponents. Furthermore, in a similar case to what happened with the truth commission, Hernández, S., (2017) and Cuéllar (2017) portray the SJP as a “mamertos' court,” and Parada (2017) refers to the SJP magistrates as “birds of prey of the left-wing political forces and the guerrillas.” These depictions: marmertos and birds of prey, are pejorative representations of the left-wing political and social actors. In short, the peace agreement's opponents argue that the selected SJP magistrates are jurists of the extreme left-wing or social activists, posing a problem to the court's impartiality.

On the contrary, the main concern for those who support the agreement between 2017 and 2019 was the SJP's survival. In 2017 the government led the expedition of several laws required for the peace agreement implementation. Unfortunately, amid a pre-electoral scenario

with a presidential contest taking place in 2018, the issuance of the SJP legal framework was utilized as part of the political campaigns. Illustrating this point, Valencia (2017) notes that SJP was “under heavy fire from the trenches of the right-wing.” A representation of the permanent attacks on the SJP from right-wing political actors, including Iván Duque (President 2018-2022), who proposed to amend the scope and nature of the SJP. In this regard, Sierra (2017) argues that changing what was agreed to with FARC-EP in 2018 could be the best way to “recycle” ex-combatants to violence. An expression of fear about the potential failure of the peace process, with FARC-EP resuming its armed struggle as a consequence of amending the SJP.

The presidential objections to the SJP were the focus of the debate between 2018 and 2019. After his election in 2018, President Iván Duque declared six objections³⁵ to the drafted law giving a legal framework to the SJP. About Duque’s role in attacking the SJP through presidential objections, Santos, E., (2019) mentions that Duque has the “attitude of a dove in his speech but is a hawk in his actions.” Similarly, Silva, R. (2019) argues that Duque's actions appear to be “a trick to return the country to the leap days of the yes and the no,” a symbolic reference to the polarization arising from the objections to the SJP recalling what happened with plebiscite's results. Luckily, in May 2019, the Constitutional Court denied the presidential objections (Lara, 2019), closing the controversy. However, Duque's objections added one year of delay to the transitional justice mechanism implementation and one additional argument to the fight for peace.

³⁵ Three of the objections were: 1) To exclude the military from the SJP legal jurisdiction. The peace agreement's opponents argued it was not acceptable for ex-combatants and soldiers to be judged by the same court. 2) To remove from SJP jurisdictions the third parties with direct or indirect participation in the conflict. 3) To limit the SJP's power over the extradition of indictees to ensure the SJP was compelled to submit those cases to ordinary justice. It is noteworthy that, during his voluntary testimony before the truth commission in 2021, Álvaro Uribe maintained his position of requesting an independent trial for the military by civilian judges as one of the two non-negotiable points for him to support the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement.

Since 2020 the debate about justice may be seen to revolve around the slow progress of transitional justice since there have been no sanctions imposed to former rebels by the SJP. On the one hand, Chaves (2020) points out that the opposition wants to present “the SJP as the devil when the demon is another,” a depiction of the peace agreement's opponents. But, on the other hand, the peace agreement opponents deem the slow progress of transitional justice like a proof of impunity because of the negotiated peace. To illustrate this point, Rueda (2021) notes that five years after signing the 2016 final peace agreement the only thing victims have received is impunity. In short, the SJP has yet to achieve general support and recognition.

Reintegration of former combatants

Political reintegration of former combatants

The participation of ex-combatants in politics has been one of the most controversial issues. Debate about the political participation of former combatants as specified in the 2016 final peace agreement appears in 34 opinion pieces (14 national and 20 regional). The former FARC-EP combatants participated for the first time in a political campaign during the 2018-2022 congress elections (UNVMC, 2018). Even though they did not win the contest, in compliance with the agreement FARC was granted five spots in the Senate and five in the Chamber of Representatives. This exceptional measure will be in force for one additional contest, for the term from 2022 to 2026. Once the second term is completed, the former combatant's political party will have to win their congressional seats in competition with other political forces.

From all sides, there has been and continues to be criticism of the attitude of the ex-combatants leading the FARC party. To illustrate this point, Ramírez, J. (2017b) argues that “the government has not put a bell on the cat they created with the 2016 peace agreement, which

takes out the air of a fiery tiger when faced with the truth.” In this case, Ramirez compares the FARC political party to a cat created by the peace agreement as a government pet. However, the most relevant idea is the statement about the cat that becomes a tiger, reflecting on former combatants' political leaders' lack of empathy and aggressive attitudes when asked for the truth. Similarly, Santos, D., (2017) states that former combatants should “bend their heads for the blood spilled instead of pulling the string of reconciliation.” In other words, FARC political leaders should be empathic acknowledging the crimes committed. In addition, considering former rebels' political leaders have high visibility because of their roles, their statements should be focused on bolstering positive dialogue scenarios instead of showing aggressive attitudes.

Ex-combatants face severe resistance from politicians and civil society to their political participation. Like a comedy, Arias (2017) notes that “Colombians think that former combatants demobilized to go into exile in Dante's seventh hell circle instead of doing politics,” a depiction of the Colombians' reluctance about former combatants' political participation. On the other hand, those in opposition argue that the Colombian population's discontent corresponds to the expected citizens' response. For example, *El Colombiano* notes that disapproval demonstrations of people against FARC incumbents during the electoral campaign in 2018 are expressions of the “right to boo” typical of democracy (Libertad de rechifla, 2018). Moreover, Marulanda (2017) argues there can be “no crime of having an opinion.” In other words, expressing dissatisfaction with FARC's political proposal is not a crime. In fact, Pearl (2018) states that it is true that the “transition from the mountains to democracy is not easy.” Which means that ex-combatants must understand that citizens can freely decide whether they support former rebels' political platform. However, the problem concerns the radical statements promoting the exclusion of former combatants from the political arena.

Several representations attack ex-combatants' political participation without arguments and even lies. For example, Ramírez, M. (2017) points out that the FARC will participate in Colombia's destiny “to follow the Venezuelan model” (i.e., Castrochavismo). Moreover, Grijalba (2018) refers to FARC leaders as “wolves in sheep's clothing” who are seeking votes. This is a reference to FARC political candidates who are highly recognized former FARC-EP military leaders. In a final sample, Ospina, M., (2020) argues that the election of an ex-combatant as Senate vice president in 2020 was a “slap” to the victims. Hence, in Ospina's depiction, there is a radical position presenting former combatant's political participation as an action against victims. It is noteworthy that the principal claim of the peace agreement's opponents is that those former rebels who are responsible for violations against HR and IHL cannot remain in Congress³⁶.

In any case, the peace agreement's supporters stress the importance of ex-combatants' political participation in consolidating peace. As a case in point, Gómez, A., (2017) notes that the political reincorporation of ex-combatants must be guaranteed even though many in Colombian society do not accept it, arguing that ten congressional seats are not a “high cost in exchange for stopping the war.” In other words, in Gómez's depiction, the political participation of former rebels is a cost paid to achieve peace. Along the same lines, Solarte, R. (2017) points out that the transformation of FARC-EP into a political party “could have given Colombians the opportunity to die at an old age.” In other words, the political participation of former FARC-EP rebels is an opportunity to end an armed conflict partially originated because of political exclusion.

³⁶ This position was reinforced by Álvaro Uribe during his free version before the truth commission in 2021, as the second of the two non-negotiable points for him to support the peace with former FARC-EP rebels (Ospina, J., 2021b).

Social and economic reintegration

Social and economic reintegration of former combatants is also a concern addressed in 18 documents (5 national and 13 regional). Reyes (2017) notes it is necessary “to avoid receiving former combatants in closed ghettos,” pointing out that half-inclusion into communities has been the breeding ground of marginality. Since 2019 recidivism and rearmament have been the central concern in regional media. Following the second Marquetalia announcement, Giraldo, C., (2019) notes that “alias Iván Márquez's chose a criminal company instead of building peace in a country in progress.” A depiction of the decision made by the former rebel to return to the armed struggle instead of working in the peace implementation. Similarly, *El Colombiano* newspaper argue that “Márquez, Santrich, and Paisa pointed with their weapons to the reconciliation effort made by Colombia” (El avisado rearme disidente, 2019, recognizing the peace agreement as a reconciliation effort threatened by recidivism. In any case, despite the rearmament of some of the former combatants the peace agreement's supporters appeal to continue working for peace.

Victims' Reparation

The focus of discussions concerning reparations for victims is primarily economic. Reparation is discussed in 43 opinion pieces (22 national and 21 regional). In line with the peace agreement, FARC-EP should surrender its assets and money obtained from drug trafficking and other illegal activities for victims' reparation³⁷. However, this process has not accomplished the expected results, and consequently it is one of the arguments used by the peace agreement's opponents to attack the negotiated peace. For example, Ordoñez, A., (2018) affirms that former FARC-EP's leaders are millionaires, but fortunes will not repair the victims since “in Colombia

³⁷ *El Colombiano* notes that the actual figures on the surrender of assets and money by FARC-EP was estimated at around 1 million dollars compared to 166 million dollars expected (FARC: Los bienes que no vienen, 2020).

being a criminal pays.” Ordoñez's representation remarks that criminal undertakings are profitable in the country since there is impunity, bringing back the issue of justice vs. impunity. In conclusion, the debate revolves around the contribution of former rebels to the economic reparation of their victims. Unfortunately, the reception of assets and money should have been prioritized in the early stage of peace implementation. After six years, it is unlikely that there could be a significant progress on this matter.

Corruption

Corruption is a topic that I did not expect to find in amidst the expression of reconciliation-related concerns. Corruption-related issues are present in 37 opinion pieces (12 national and 25 regional). Corruption has been a recurring theme in these pieces, often merely for rhetorical purposes. However, between 2017 and 2018, several representations linked corruption with peace implementation. For example, Salazar (2017b) and Ospina, M., (2017) criticize Juan Manuel Santos' government using “jam” for peace implementation. A depiction arguing that members of the Congress received illicit rewards in exchange for approving the laws necessary for peace implementation. The second group of representations refers to corruption as involving the theft of peace funds. As an illustration, Velásquez, A., (2017) points out that the state's ruling actors made a “rabbit out of the 2016 final peace agreement,” and *La Opinión* newspaper denounces that the funding for peace was staying within “state officials' pockets” (*Lapaz de los corruptos*, 2018). These metaphors refer to the corruption scandals associated with funds earmarked for former combatants' reintegration processes. After 2017 and 2018, there are no more specific references linking the peace implementation with corruption scandals, but still corruption is a recurrent topic referring to general problems.

2016 Final Peace Agreement Implementation

All the issues addressed in my research are part of the discussion surrounding the peace agreement implementation. However, 39 documents specifically discuss the overall progress of implementation, and identify it as a concern (17 national and 22 regional). There is a depiction identified in 19 opinion pieces (11 national and eight regional) asking to the peace agreement's opponents “not to tear up the peace.” The reference came from a political discourse of Juan Fernando Londoño, political leader of Centro Democrático party, who invited to tear up the peace amid the pre-electoral campaign in 2017. In this regard, Cristo (2020) states that the international community's support for Congress, along with social mobilization, have prevented peace “from being shredded” (i.e., torn apart). For the peace agreement's supporters, the agreement is an opportunity to address the structural causes of violence. Pizano (2021) argues that it is necessary to defend the 2016 final peace agreement's implementation as a “vehicle to execute a social agenda” instead of a militarily led security policy. In this case, there is an understanding of the instrumental nature of the agreement in pursuing better social and economic conditions in the conflict-affected territories through the implementation of reforms such as the comprehensive rural reform, in contrast with a military approach in addressing violence.

Public Opinion Readers' Comments

In so far as reader's comments are concerned, I tracked the keywords associated with different representations to look for concerns appearing in the comments. Truth claims, the relative priority of justice and impunity, and former combatants' political participation seem to be readers' top concerns. Regarding truth, these concerns focus on the FARC's wealth, kidnapping, gender-based violence and child recruitment. Concerning justice, the main dispute revolves around the

lack of in-prison sanctions for former combatants as impunity. There is a clear association made between prison and justice. Regarding FARC political participation, on the one hand, those in opposition to the peace agreement associate this issue as a reward that former rebels obtained from the peace agreement to which they should not be entitled. On the other hand, those supporting the peace agreement consider the political participation of ex combatants as a low price due to achieving peace. In short, during my review of the reader's comments, I found no difference in the topics highlighted as current compared to what was identified in the sampled opinion pieces.

What is more interesting about readers' comments arose from matching all keywords associated with discourses around political polarization. For example, readers in opposition to the peace agreement portray Santos's supporters such as guerrillas, rebels, and "farcantes," which is the sum of the words FARC and Santos in an apology to fakers in Spanish. On the contrary, the peace agreement's supporters refer to Uribe's followers such as *Uribestias* and paramilitaries. In this case, *Uribestias* is the sum of the words "Uribe" and "bestias," which means beast in Spanish.

Furthermore, another prevalent trend seems to be those commenting on castrochavismo and terrorism concerning the agreement's supporters. The peace agreement's opponents make references to the political left-wing using the terminology such as *castrochavist* and *mamerto*. In addition, the peace agreement's opponents use the discourse about terrorists as an extensive denomination to give meaning to the guerrillas, the government, and the peace itself. To illustrate this point, it is noteworthy that opponents to the peace agreement make references such as terrorists, narco-guerrillas, narco-bandits, narco-criminals, narco-murderer, narco-thieves when referring to the guerrillas, narco-government to refer to the government that led the peace process, and narco-peace to refer to the negotiated peace with FARC-EP.

Conclusions

The politicization of peace has been one of the most significant impediments to achieving reconciliation in Colombia. The reconciliation process regarding former FARC-EP combatants is an issue. However, the challenge of reconciliation in Colombia would be better understood as a challenge involving political parties, the military forces, victims, former combatants, and each citizen in the pursuit of peace. Colombia has not been able to escape the polarization that arose from the no-vote plebiscite victory from 2016 on. There have been attacks on the truth commission, the SJP, and several claims about FARC failing to fulfill their obligations. Most representations of polarization are concerned with the responsibility of political actors for the outcomes that lead to the current situation.

There is consensus on the idea that truth is a right of victims and Colombian society. However, there is no consensus on who has the responsibility to contribute to truth. On the one hand, the 2016 peace agreement's supporters ask for truth, regardless of who committed the crimes. There is an expectation of truth to be nourished by former combatants, but also by diverse voices from military and civilian actors who participated in the conflict. On the other hand, for those in opposition the responsibility to provide the truth seems to rest exclusively with FARC-EP. Regarding former rebels more than knowing the whole truth what stands out in public opinion discourses is a claim of Colombian society asking FARC-EP to recognize their crimes following the codes that society recognizes. For example, Colombian society was expecting that former rebels acknowledged kidnapping instead of insisting in ideological rhetoric explanations such as illegal retentions. Therefore, one might say that the acknowledgement of crimes by FARC-EP is a critical issue at least for public opinion debates.

The construction of memory is another concern related to truth for those in opposition to the 2016 peace agreement. From representations questioning the truth commission's impartiality and FARC-EP's role in rewriting the history from the seats of Congress, I concluded there is a concern with the memory of the conflict. What is the story that is going to be told about what happened in Colombia? The agreement's opponents fear that memory vindicates the belligerent nature of FARC-EP as a guerrilla, but more than anything they fear regarding the narrative about the role of political, military and civilians in the conflict. In any case, the opportunity for the truth commission to play a more influential role in building dialogue for reconciliation has been lost since the commission concluded its work in August 2022.

The idea of a kind of justice in which there are neither winners nor losers is still not properly understood and lacks consensus in Colombia. There are reductionist discourses that confuse transitional justice with general amnesties, such as those that occurred in Colombia in the past in peace processes with guerrillas such as the M-19. Simultaneously, there are discourses that extol the restorative nature of transitional justice in terms of truth, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition without explaining anything in detail. As aforementioned, it is yet to be demonstrated how the reparatory sanctions will work. In any case, the SJP will be in force for 17 additional years, working on a dialogical construction of truth, including face-to-face encounters and public hearings between victims, former rebels, and society. Therefore, I consider that the SJP has great potential in the short and medium term in working toward reconciliation.

Continuation of the Colombian conflict is a concern, especially for territories affected by the armed confrontation. This issue is more relevant for regional newspapers than for national media. Among the sub-themes associated with the armed conflict, the three main issues are the assassination of community leaders and human rights defenders, the killing of former combatants

and the increase in cocaine drug trafficking. There seems to be consensus on the need to protect the lives of ex-combatants and community leaders. However, the issue of illicit crops appears to be the most controversial since opinions are divided on whether or not to present the problem as a negative outcome of the 2016 final peace agreement.

Regarding the reintegration of former combatants, the greatest area of debate concerns the political participation of ex-combatants. Opinions are divided. However, rather than excluding all ex-combatants from participating in politics, the agreement's opponents demand the exclusion of those former rebels responsible for HR and IHL violations. There is still a long way to go for the political reintegration of former combatants. A political reintegration is successful if there is acceptance and effective integration of former combatants to the political scenarios at the municipal, regional, and national level. Unfortunately, in Colombia, there is resistance from social and political sectors to former combatants' political participation in different levels.

With the coming of a new government, concerns about implementing the peace agreement will surely decrease in the upcoming years. On August 7, 2022, Gustavo Petro took office as President of Colombia. With a long political history, Petro is also a former M-19 combatant demobilized in the 1990s who has expressed his willingness to continue implementing the 2016 final peace agreement. Under his government, Colombia revamped peace talks with ELN and is looking to bring other armed actors to justice. We will see how peace and reconciliation processes in Colombia develop further in the coming years.

Conclusion

Introduction

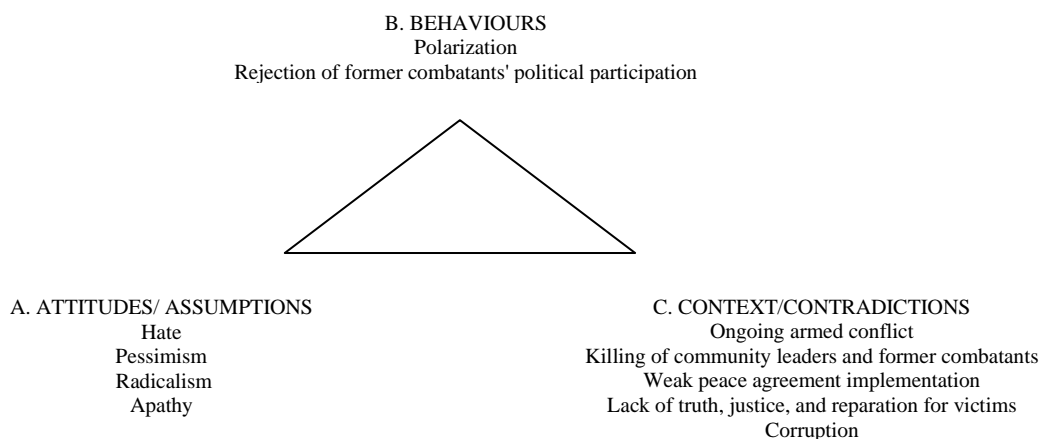
In chapters 3 and 4, I presented my analysis of discourses identified through the figurative representations of reconciliation meanings and its related concerns in Colombia. Finally, this conclusion outlines my ideas about what can be done to support the sustainability of peace in Colombia. In the first section, I recap the reconciliation challenges considering Johan Galtung's conflict analysis triangle. Next, I propose narratives to address reconciliation-related concerns with the idea of generating peace-positive discourses to be reinforced by politicians, former combatants' representatives, civil society representatives and media supporting reconciliation. In the end, I will share my conclusions.

Approach Overview

Through my research, I have identified multiple representations illuminating the various issues hindering reconciliation in Colombia. Recalling Johan Galtung's approach to conflict analysis discussed in Chapter 1, in Figure 4, I recap the different issues to achieve reconciliation in Colombia following related concerns found in public opinion discourses to give an overview of the scope of the reconciliation challenges in the country.

Figure 4

Issues hindering reconciliation in Colombia



Note: This figure shows reconciliation-related concerns using the conflict triangle conceptualization borrowed from Galtung (1996).

Lederach (1997) states that reconciliation is a practice as well as a social place where peace, truth, justice, and forgiveness occur. All these elements are part of the discourses found in public opinion about reconciliation and its related concerns; however, Lederach's (1997) reconciliation definition is only feasible in almost an idealized post-conflict situation. On the contrary, from the core elements identified in Chapter 3 concerning what reconciliation means in and for Colombians, one might say that reconciliation is a practice and a social place where the society is capable of acknowledging the victims' suffering, building a sense of unity, enabling: a) the aggressors' repentance, b) the society and victims' forgiveness, and c) a positive relationship among the different actors through dialogue.

Following my research findings on what reconciliation means in and for Colombia, I agree with Galtung (1996) that reconciliation is essentially A-oriented and required to address the more subjective needs for reconciliation, like transforming behaviours such as hatred,

radicalism, and apathy into repentance, forgiveness, acceptance and a positive relationship with the other (Corner B). By all means, the context's contradictions are important. The setting can make reconciliation processes more difficult or straightforward. However, when reflecting on reconciliation engaging the society as a whole, what makes reconciliation more difficult in Colombia is not the weak progress of transitional justice or the lack of truth and reparation for victims. In fact, the main challenge concerns the discourses reproduced around these issues that serve to polarize the country.

In chapter 4, I verified my hypothesis regarding the existence of different levels of support in Colombian society concerning various topics associated with the 2016 Peace Agreement. These levels of support find expression through different kinds of reconciliation discourses found in statements of public opinion. Thus, the discourses in favour of truth and justice are almost unanimous; however, they are divided when it comes to the SJP and the truth commission, which are the two main institutions created by the 2016 final peace agreement. Likewise, opinions are divided around the former combatants' political participation, and the narrative about the conflict. These are the major issues on which there is the least consensus and more discursive dissonance.

Following Fairclough (2013), many social wrongs identified in public opinion articles can be discursively addressed to help acclimate reconciliation. My aim is to address in some way the discursive dissonance that endangers reconciliation. In this sense, my recommendations will focus on the issues portraying irreconcilable positions in the country, including the political polarization around peace, truth, justice, the ongoing armed conflict, and the political participation of ex-combatants.

Building New Narratives

The challenge is that attitudes and assumptions must become more supportive regarding reconciliation processes. From a CDA approach, rather than writing speeches against hate as identified in the public opinion pieces that I have examined, the media and political leaders should work on discourses that do not reproduce hate. To counteract pessimism, focusing on more reconciliation success stories would be helpful. Likewise, to overcome radicalism, we do not need speeches complaining about polarization but rather discourses written from a more conciliatory perspective, respectfully acknowledging those who think differently. Regarding apathy, the media, politicians and ex-combatants shall address their issues with empathy toward the victims, society and adversaries. In short, a change in attitudes and assumptions could be a positive and desired outcome resulting from new discourses on reconciliation and its related concerns.

De-escalating Polarization Around Peace

Although it is impossible to have all the answers, I do have some recommendations to make that might contribute to reducing discursive violence. As Laclau (2014) points out, when there is a high level of confrontation, society is divided into two unique differential positions. In Colombia, it is clear that there are two poles comprising those who agree with the 2016 final peace agreement and those who disagree, comprising multiple representations used to polarize the day-to-day implementation of peace. In this sense, I propose specific actions that could help de-escalate polarization around peace in the country addressed to all the actors contributing to nourishing it, including the media, politicians, former combatants and civil society representatives.

Media discourses must acknowledge that the plebiscite results ended with a No-Vote victory against the peace agreement. Those who support the peace process often reinforce the idea

that Juan Manuel Santos' government amended the text of the peace agreement after losing the plebiscite. However, the revisions were not considered substantive by the opposition, and there was no validation from political leaders who led the campaign against the 2016 peace agreement. In this sense, it is useless to continue arguing that there were adjustments and that the agreement's approval by Congress was a constitutional and legal pathway. Instead, we must take turn the discourse toward recognizing that the plebiscite was lost while reinforcing the idea that, in any case, it is also true that the 2016 peace agreement is being implemented. Hence, we could work on building common goals from the process of implementing the peace agreement.

Media, politicians, former combatants, and civil society representatives supporting peace must stop stigmatizing those who voted against the 2016 final peace agreement and those who oppose its implementation. Ironically, friends of peace using labels such as enemies of peace to refer to the peace agreement's opponents are not helping to reconciliation attainments. On the contrary, such labels reinforce a discourse of polarization and invalidation directed against those who think differently. In other words, and paradoxically, even those favouring peace end up contributing to sectarianism and exclusion. We must accept differences in conceptions of the multiple possible ways of achieving peace. It is therefore necessary to promote the use of more neutral language, for example referring to “opponents” or “those in disagreement,” instead of using terms like “enemies of peace.”

The belief that only the countryside experienced the conflict cannot continue to be reinforced by media. Speaking about inhabitants of the cities as mere spectators of the conflict reduces inhabitants of those cities to the status of outsiders to the peace and reconciliation conversation. On the contrary, reconciliation requires including the urban population in the relevant processes. It is not true that armed conflict was only experienced in rural areas, although

it is undeniable that the countryside has been more directly affected. Neither is true that there is total indifference in the cities to the experience of those living in the countryside. Instead, any such claims require considerable nuance. Cities must be discursively involved in reconciliation processes so as to discourage violence against former combatants, and support urban victims affected by violence. Greater empathy toward victims of the conflict and former combatants must be cultivated but can not be if those living in cities are constantly portrayed as somehow “outside” the armed conflict.

Colombians need to disarm their language when speaking of political forces. Even those who recognize themselves as defenders of peace are vulnerable to using discursive violence. On the path of reconciliation, instead of promoting sectarianism between left and right political wings it is necessary to legitimize the idea of coexistence. The use of jargon, such as *uribismo*, *mamertos*, or *jammers* must be avoided since it only contributes to increasing the aggression of political adversaries. A shift in thinking is necessary in order to keep a focus on the issues rather than on specific individuals. In this sense, for those journalists who support the 2016 final peace agreement it is necessary to avoid negative references to Álvaro Uribe, disqualifying his position regarding peace, because doing so only contributes to strengthening his power to mobilize people against the agreement and former combatants. Again, discourses should focus on the issues and not on the people who voice them.

Finally, after five years, it is clear that there is no way back in the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement. This understanding is rooted in Colombia's collective imagination, so it is worth agreeing on how we communicate about all peace-related issues. This debate could be a recurrent topic used to engage public opinion. The media can insist on the need for an agreement between all the political, economic, educational, trade union, and social sectors and citizens

concerning the minimum parameters of discourse for coexistence. It is not about parties or ideologies ceasing but about agreeing on a minimum to enable a healthy debate around dialogue with the kind of respect that allows reconciliation in the country to progress. It is challenging to approach the path of reconciliation and peace amidst aggressive and demonizing discourses.

Expectations on Achieving a Goal of Truth About What Happened During the Conflict

There is a high expectation about the truth to be accomplished by former FARC-EP combatants. To reduce discursive violence around the contribution to the truth by ex-combatants, it is crucial that the ex-combatants' political party, and any spokesperson for organizations comprised of former combatants, avoid justifying crimes committed against Colombia's civilian population. I have to say there is a long way to go on this matter, given that ex-combatants still avoid sometimes even referring to victims as victims. It is necessary for ex-combatants to acknowledge victims, to speak out loud about repentance, and to avoid using political justifications when talking about their perpetration. Political discourses concerning crimes against civilian victims generate widespread and unanimous rejections from civil society, political actors, and the media.

Media can focus on FARC-EP's recognition of crimes. Obtaining the complete truth about any conflict is unlikely, not because of a lack of former combatants' commitment to doing so but because it is impossible to recall or find all of a conflict's data, facts, locations, and dates. The 13,000 ex-combatants demobilized in Colombia are the ones who came out of the conflict alive; many others died, taking information with them. Furthermore, only some of the actors who participated in the armed conflict are willing to contribute truthful testimony. Finally, when doing the examination of public opinion pieces, debate was focused on the discourses used by the former

combatants to tell their truth. This suggests that the acknowledgement of crimes by former combatants could be more helpful in mobilizing support to the agreement rather than reinforcing expectations about a whole truth.

Former combatants should prepare discourses to address the most sensitive cases for public opinion. When thinking about truth, the expectations are focused on specific cases appearing in multiple representations such as kidnapping, the extrajudicial executions of civilians, child recruitment and gender-based violence. One might conclude there is a high expectation within Colombian society to get the truth about these remarkable cases. A communications strategy could focus on these highly sensitive topics, making a point of noting former combatants' contributions to ascertaining the truth about these cases.

Broadening the Understanding of Actors Involved in the Armed Conflict

Politicians and the media must discursively acknowledge the existence of an ongoing armed conflict in Colombia, with FARC-EP being only one of the parties involved in anti-government struggle. On the one hand, the peace agreement's supporters refer to the end of the armed conflict and achieving peace as a *fait accompli* following the signing of the agreement. However, it must be recognized that the 2016 final peace agreement achieved peace only with one of the actors in the conflict. On the other hand, those who oppose the peace agreement deny the existence of an armed conflict, preferring to refer to it as a drug war and thus diminishing the insurgent origins of the now-extinct FARC-EP, the ELN, and the EPL. Critics of the peace agreement must avoid the use of language relating to the drug war or the war on terrorism, and terms such as “terrorists” and “narco-terrorists.” This kind of language has been subject to political debate for the last 20 years, and it will be necessary to continue insisting on the political origins

and aims of the present armed conflict. Those who support the peace agreement must likewise avoid using expressions such as “narco-guerrillas” or “terrorists,” since these terms obscure the stakes in (and solutions to) the present conflict.

Politicians and the media should reinforce the idea that FARC-EP is not by itself responsible for the tragedy of Colombian armed violence. Reconciliation in Colombia does not only depend on what FARC-EP ex-combatants have done and could do. The punitive path focuses on singling out FARC-EP as the sole party responsible for the conflict, while the path to reconciliation depends on recognizing all those who were part of the conflict, assigning their respective responsibilities, and building narratives around ideas of “the enemy” as those with whom one can peacefully coexist. The state, paramilitaries, other guerrilla groups, and civilians who funded or supported the war were also participants in the armed conflict.

Transforming the Transitional Justice Image

Positive discourses directed toward the role played by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) in achieving peace are essential. The SJP has barely started operating and will be in force until 2037. Politicians and media can discursively bolster the idea that the SJP is not a justice framework designed to exonerate the FARC-EP. The SJP is instead a transitional justice mechanism working to benefit the country and all the actors involved in the armed conflict.

A first discourse of those in opposition to the peace agreement is that the SJP gives equal treatment to the crimes of the insurgency and those committed by state agents and third parties during the armed conflict. Equal treatment allows ex-combatants and state agents to experience restorative rather than retributive justice. In other words, including state agents under the SJP favours former military personnel. Under military justice, these personnel could not be entitled to

the punitive benefits the transitional justice framework can offer. From a broader perspective, by excluding them from transitional justice, the country will lose the opportunity to learn more about the truth of the conflict. The transitional justice mechanism punishes the lack of contribution to truth. If the actors that joined the SJP are proven to be lying or if new information comes out that the aggressors did not include in their testimonies, they risk losing the punitive benefits and being subject to prison sanctions.

It is necessary to discursively promote the idea that jail is not the only possible form of punishment for ex-combatants. This idea is not a widely accepted and probably is one of the most disputed in the context of discourses on transitional justice. Even so, those who support the peace agreement must insist that the most important thing is not to punish perpetrators but to repair victims. Doing so involves two key ideas. The first highlights that impunity exists when there is no determination of guilt; however, the SJP will impose judge and sentence ex-combatants, so there is no impunity. Secondly, it must be clarified that the SJP deprive individuals found guilty of their liberty, but sentences will not be carried out intramurally in prison. Instead, sentences will include requirements to undertake work and tasks with a view to their reparative impact on victims. With the sanctions that the SJP will impose better conceptually defined, it will become vital to circulate this information wide showcasing the reparatory benefits to victims.

Improving Acceptance of Former Combatants' Political Participation

FARC-EP does not enjoy widespread discursive acceptance, and the permanent association of ex-combatants with FARC-EP generates a barrier for them regarding political participation. Public opinion has discursively separated FARC-EP from the 2016 final peace agreement. Still, none of the speeches validate or license referring to the FARC-EP's cause as an insurgency. Those

who support the peace process propagate a double-discourse that punishes FARC-EP for everything they were and have done while simultaneously supporting the 2016 final peace agreement and its implementation. In other words, discourse supports the idea of former combatants as at once FARC-EP perpetrators, and also individuals worthy of an opportunity for reintegration. For their part, the agreement's opponents criticize both FARC-EP and the 2016 final peace agreement. In such a scenario it may be appropriate for the media to start talking about “people in the reintegration process” instead of constantly referring to “former FARC-EP combatants.”

Bolstering Discourses on Reconciliation

Finally, the media should write more about reconciliation. The country must be flooded with more bright ideas, and this can only be achieved by talking more about topics relating to reconciliation. It is necessary to continue writing about the suffering of the victims and promoting victim recognition by Colombian society. It is necessary to continue discussing cases of former combatants' repentance and their forgiveness by victims. It is essential to continue defending the idea of forgiveness as the victims' right. Above all, it is crucial to continue disseminating success stories concerning coexistence and positive relationships between former enemies, victims and perpetrators, and the reintegration process.

Future Research

Reconciliation is a never-ending research topic. Reconciliation meanings and challenges evolve as the conflict reality changes in the country. After concluding my thesis, I have many questions, for example, how is hate built in Colombia? This research could almost be replicated to

analyze the presence of hate in discourses against the peace process and ex-combatants, analyzing public opinion around the peace process. Furthermore, which is the role in-depth of political leaders and former combatants' political leaders in nourishing the polarization around peace in the country? Perhaps by analyzing their public statements around peace, it would be possible to build better recommendations intended for the former combatants about their public opinion discourses.

For future research, it is also interesting to continue this study in a second phase for 2022-2026 and see how the reconciliation-related concerns evolve now that the country has a government supporting the implementation of the 2016 final peace agreement. The main research objectives could focus on examining if the polarization around the agreement can be overcome. Analyze if the new government can elaborate and promote discourses that unite instead of divide people and how public opinion defines and addresses related concerns in this renovated political scenario, including a potential new peace process with ELN in the country.

Finally, my research focused on responding to what reconciliation means in and for Colombians from public opinion discourses. In a different approach, it would be valuable to see what reconciliation means in Colombia from the testimonies of victims and aggressors in the hearings carried out by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace through face-to-face encounters between perpetrators, victims, and society. The SJP is just beginning its work, and some hearings have started to be broadcasted on virtual channels such as YouTube, opening a unique opportunity to study the reconciliation processes between victims and former combatants in Colombia by doing critical discourse analysis.

Last Words

The war continues in Colombia. I mean the war associated with armed confrontation, but also a conflict over manifestations of violence that do not make use of weapons. Certain matters involving physical violence, such as the murder of ex-combatants or community leaders can be addressed discursively but not resolved only by using this way. These kinds of problems are a consequence of contradictions within the ongoing armed conflict itself. Similarly, efforts in Colombia to secure justice, truth and victim reparations may not succeed as expected and planned. However, discourses on peace, justice, truth, and conflict that generate violence can be transformed in ways that support rather than hinder the reconciliation processes in the country.

All Colombians have a role to play in building and reproducing discourses for reconciliation. At the level of discourse, we must shift the paradigm concerning former FARC-EP combatants to relieve the enormous burden they carry for guaranteeing the success of reconciliation. More must be said about Colombian society's actions and responsibility for supporting reconciliation processes. In addition, political leaders and the media in Colombia must themselves do more to acknowledge their role in promoting reconciliation and bolstering discourses that can contribute to the country's unity, without compromising important dialogue and political debate.

Finally, all the social, community, and institutional activism advocating peace and reconciliation with FARC-EP continues to be necessary. Colombians need to take ownership of this activism, whose success depends not only on the ex-combatants, politicians, or media but also on what state institutions and each citizen does in schools, businesses, neighbourhoods, and communities to avoid reproducing discourses reinforcing political sectarianism, exclusion, and stigmatization of those who think differently.

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