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Trauma and Identity: Action as a Response to State Violence in Colombia

Alison J. Paul

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Trauma and Identity:
Action as a Response to State Violence in Colombia

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By Alison J. Paul

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Master’s Thesis Committee:

Dr. Enora Brown
Dr. Stephen Haymes (Chair)
Dr. Elizabeth Lozano
Abstract

Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict has produced a myriad of types of violence as well as individual and social trauma. In the early 2000s, the proliferation of extrajudicial killings of non-combatant citizens by the Colombian armed forces left behind thousands of families to deal with the aftermath of their loss of a loved at the hands of the state. This phenomenological research specifically looks in depth at the narratives of seven Colombian victims of state crimes that have been transformed through their experience of political violence and the actions they have taken in response to state crimes. Both individual and collective actions taken in response to the traumatic loss of a family member through state violence are examined as are meanings associated with their actions. The findings reveal that these actions are motivated by a deeply seeded sense of obligation to the self, the dead, and the country and that participating in collective actions creates a strong sense of belonging. By working with others, individual victims note a sense of belonging to a common victim community that provides them strength to carry out their obligation to take action in response to their traumatic loss due to state violence, but at the same time have noted that forms of social violence carried out at an organizational level have presented challenges to collective action participation. This research draws the conclusion that victim organizations within Colombia carry the possibility of fostering conversations about patterns of exclusion that may be upheld in their own victim community in order to provide a both/and approach to tackling both social and political violence collectively.

The information revealed through this study reflects an important depth of information that exposes the paradoxes that define the victim experience, specifically both the strength and frustrations produced in collective victim spaces and contributes an in-depth exploration of victim experience as to promote an understanding of the important personal and collective impacts of state violence in Colombia.
Acknowledgements

When I returned from living and working in Colombia for two years in January of 2009, I arrived inspired and awed by the Colombians I worked with who continually fight for human rights, as well as shocked and disheartened by the outrageous levels of political violence that face them everyday. I needed to understand more about how individuals within Colombian social movements were able to do their work every day while facing such immense odds. How were they able to summon the energy to fight for what they believe is right? This thesis research strives to begin to answer that question and none of the following 155 pages would have been possible without the continued support of my diligent thesis committee. A special thanks goes to Dr. Enora Brown for both inspiring me to look in-depth at the intricacies of the self as well as challenging me to clarify my intended contribution to theories of the self. Much thanks goes to Dr. Stephen Haymes, my thesis committee chair, for working with me throughout my time at DePaul University to develop these ideas from my initial questions to research proposals to conducting research and then, finally, gathering it all together and writing.

An immense amount of gratitude goes to Dr. Elizabeth Lozano of Loyola University who closely guided, supported and mentored me throughout the process of writing this thesis. The countless hours together in coffee shops throughout Chicago over the past year and a half have made an invaluable contribution to my academic thinking in general and this thesis research in particular. She gracefully guided me through difficult times and always brought an amazing amount of energy that kept me focused on the big picture goal of making a contribution to a community that I care so deeply about.

I would like to thank my parents for raising me to ask difficult questions and to continually be fascinated by all the possible answers. They, along with my sisters, have encouraged and supported me to bring integrity and care for others to all aspects of my work, which I’m continually grateful for. I’d also like to thank Suzanna Collerd who was amazingly always able to put a positive spin on what felt like a never-ending process of writing and rewriting and rewriting this thesis.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the Colombian victims of state crimes who contributed to this study. Their words reflect immense bravery, rage, frustration, passion, love and courage. Given an environment in which speaking out about state violence necessarily makes one a possible target for future violence, these words reflect the amazingly courageous and complex people who are continually attempting to put the pieces back together after their loss of a loved one at the hands of the Colombian state. I am quite honestly forever in debt to these research participants as well as awed by their candor and perseverance despite a shockingly difficult set of circumstances. It is my hope that this research does their work at least a little justice.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

I am the mother of the young man Diego Alberto Tamayo Bercerra. I lost my son on August 23rd and two days later, the 25th, he was killed by the army’s 15th Brigade from the Norte de Santander (Morris, 2010)

On September 23, 2008 eleven young men from Soacha, one of Bogotá’s impoverished southern neighborhoods, were found dead in common graves in Colombia’s Norte de Santander province. The state authorities claimed that these young men were guerrillas killed in combat, however the mothers of these young men publically challenged those claims leading to the revelation of a widespread military scandal in which thousands of young men from poor neighborhoods were lured away from their homes with the promise of work only to be killed by the Colombian armed forces and presented as guerrillas killed in combat, resulting in various army rewards for those who killed them for their help in the “war on terror.” These extrajudicial executions, often termed falsos positivos (false positives), have left behind thousands of families to deal with the aftermath of their loss of a loved one at the hands of the state. As one mother from Soacha notes:

Hopefully, we, the mothers of Soacha, are the ones taking on this sadness of losing our sons the way that we did. We have found that we aren’t the only ones, but that there are many others, wives and siblings, that are going through the same pain, plus the orphans, so we have a long fight, all of us who are going through this. We must lend a hand in this struggle […] the young men who are in heaven give us strength to continue fighting even though threats come our way. (Morris, 2010)

The mothers of Soacha are representative of Colombia’s many victims of state violence in recent years; the actions they have taken to achieve truth and justice in the aftermath of their loss have brought them together, inspired others but also resulted in numerous death threats, harassment, exile and additional killings.
What happens to one’s identity when faced with this type of traumatic loss? How do people make sense of the violent events that create the loss in a way that permits them to live life day-to-day? These questions are based on an attempt to understand how people conceptualize themselves after experiences of loss and how they make new meanings out of their lives and actions in conjunction with others. While these questions have reverberations for various contexts, here they set the stage for my research regarding trauma, agency, and victim identity in Colombia. In particular, this research explores what people do to try to make sense of their loss and what those actions mean to them and their sense of self in order to understand how people cope individually and collectively when a loved one is murdered by the State in the context of Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict.

Colombia provides a contemporary example of the dialectical relationship between individual experiences of trauma and the social context in which they occur. Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict between left-wing guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitaries, and the State has marked the lives and psyches of Colombians for decades. The dynamics of Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict are complicated by the prevalence of corruption, organized crime, and rampant drug trafficking which has fueled illegal armed groups on both the right and the left and continued to promote a war based on the struggle to control natural resources. Massacres, forced

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1 For my research, losing a loved one to the Colombian state in an extrajudicial killing is considered a traumatic loss (see Chapter 2) due to the way in which research participants described their experience.

2 “Coping” in this research refers to the process of making sense of life after a traumatic event by creating a new self narrative that incorporates the experience of traumatic loss. Coping refers to any process that a survivor is engaged in that helps him/her make sense of her/his life after the trauma has taken place. In regards to trauma, many authors speak of achieving “healing” or “recovery” which I have purposefully not used here since it can insinuate a recovery to some previous state.

3 There is debate around when the current armed conflict in Colombia actually began. Some attribute it to the past 60 years, while others believe that its roots and causes go back much further, even to the initial Spanish colonization. Just as there is no agreement about the exact start date, there is no general agreement about what to call the conflict; it is referred to as war, protracted war, and an ongoing armed conflict among other titles. Here I refer to the politically motivated violence that has plagued Colombia in a pronounced way for the past 60 years as Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict.
disappearances, extrajudicial executions, threats, politically-motivated selective assassinations, and forced internal displacement are rampant and continue to shape how many Colombians go about their day-to-day lives. This backdrop of extreme violence shapes how individual and community identities are formed and interwoven. Social and political violence are both embedded in the stories that Colombians tell as well as how daily life is navigated.

At times, those impacted by the violence come together in collective networks to try to find solutions to the conflict, often rooted in their own experiences of the ongoing armed conflict. These collective networks seek solutions to the violence through collective actions as well as represent spaces where meaning is created and maintained for many Colombian victims of state violence. These places and activities highlight both the challenges and successes of grassroot approaches to experiences of trauma in the context of armed conflict.

While many Colombians have experienced traumatic losses due to the ongoing armed conflict, the proliferation of extrajudicial executions and falsos positivos in recent years deserves special attention. Between 2002 and 2009, over 3,000 cases of extrajudicial executions were documented in Colombia (cited in Sumpter, 2010). Those that took place between 2002 and 2007 marked a 67% increase from the five years prior (Colombia – Europe – United States Coordination Group Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Observatory, 2007). Impunity levels are estimated at nearly 99% for these types of murders (UN Special Rapporteur Press Release, 2010) and family members of those killed, such as the Mothers of Soacha, are often threatened and harassed for speaking out about these killings and the impunity that accompanies them. This form of state violence is one example of a modern day warfare phenomena in which the majority of victims are non-combatants; since the end of World War II more than 20 million people have been killed in armed conflicts, 84% of these have been civilians (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009, p.
Given the proliferation of state violence in Colombia and in other conflicts around the world, it is important to understand how victims of state violence pick up the pieces after traumatic loss. This research in particular strives to uncover how Colombian victims of state crimes react, respond, and make sense of life after experiences of traumatic loss in the context of ongoing armed conflict.

**Purpose**
My thesis research strives to uncover how people make sense of the self after experiences of traumatic loss within the Colombian context. Specifically, this research aims to understand what actions Colombian victims of state violence take that are motivated by their loss of a family member at the hands of the state and what meaning those victims place on those actions. The essence of the question is how do people make meaning out of their lives through action, both on their own and in community with others who have had similar experiences? Individual experiences of trauma cannot be seen as separate from their collective impact on society, in this case defined by a social context ripe with a plethora of types of violence. By examining how individual identities intertwine with other victims, this study seeks to understand if those connections helped empower victims in making sense of their lives and their process of rebuilding and recreating new assumptions about the world after their experience of traumatic loss.

**Research Questions**
This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- After experiencing the loss of a family member at the hands of the Colombian armed forces, what actions do Colombians who self-identify as victims of state crimes take that directly relate to their loss at both an individual and a collective level?
- What meanings do these self-identified victims of state crimes ascribe to both individual and collective actions and what do those meanings signify for their identity?
**Significance**
People respond differently to tragedy. In the case of Colombians who have lost loved ones to state violence there is a range of extreme responses, from highly vocal outrage to fearful silence. Why are some victims silenced to oblivion while others take numerous actions to address their lived experience of trauma? The difference in individual responses impacts the course of action that is needed for individuals to be able to participate with collective networks in the struggle to end state violence. While no one person’s experience is the same, by exploring the narratives of several victims I decipher the essence behind several personal experiences of Colombians who have lost family members to the State by specifically looking at the actions that they take that relate to their loss, the meaning they place on those actions, and what it means for their sense of self. Uncovering these essences is aimed at contributing to a greater understanding of how individual meaning making is located in relation to social movements working to bring justice to Colombia.

Individual trauma does not take place in isolation and the subsequent individual meaning making processes cannot be extricated from the social context in which they occur. Supportive communities are important to individual coping (Herman, 1992) and victim rights organizations have the possibility of embodying that support for individuals dealing with their experiences of trauma. Both Colombian and international human rights organizations attempt to support victims in their quest for truth, justice, and comprehensive reparation, and in order to do so, they therefore need to understand how individual processes fit into collective networks including those at the organizational level. This research shows specifically that victim support organizations provide spaces where meaning is made and navigated collectively, but that they
can also be places of patterns of exclusion. These findings contribute to the conversation about how to improve the supportive web between victims, collective networks, and organizations.

Lastly, in order to come closer to a peaceful negotiated end to the violence in Colombia individual experiences of trauma need to be valued and given voice through truly participatory collective platforms. My thesis research aims to decipher how individuals see their relationship to supportive organizations in order to allow for victims’ interpretations of truth, justice, and reparation to be collectively realized. These interpretations influence the social context and, hopefully, grant the possibility of coming closer to a peaceful resolution to the conflict by coming closer to understanding and recognizing the experiences of those who are directly impacted.

This masters thesis begins with an explanation of the social constructivist theoretical lens that views the self and the social context as intricately and dialectically related. Social constructivism is then applied to the Colombian context through a brief examination of Colombian history including social and political influences on the Colombian context and the role of social movements. In order to answer the above research questions with a social constructivist lens, I then examine several academic debates on concepts of the self and arrive at definitions of the self, identity, subjectivity and agency that guide my research in order to lay the groundwork for interpreting the data in the findings found in Chapter 4.

In the third chapter, I explain my phenomenological methodology and research procedures in order to set the stage for analyzing the information from victims’ testimonies. Aspects of narrative inquiry are explained as to note that victim testimonies will provide the raw data for interpretation of the essence of what they feel about their actions and identity. After examining all of the minutia of the structure and execution of this study, I examine what actions
victims of state violence take after the loss of a loved one to the State, what do those actions mean to the victims themselves, and what impact do those actions and their meanings have for victims’ sense of identity at both individual and collective levels.

The findings highlighted in Chapter four reveal the paradoxes and contradictions that saturate the human experience, in this case for those who are victims of state violence in Colombia. This chapter begins by first defining what is meant by actions taken, followed by an examination of the various actions that victims of state violence reported having taking after their experience of loss. This information is then analyzed further to show three principle themes associated with their actions and subsequent impacts on their identities: Obligation, Belonging, and Patterns of Exclusion. Obligation is shown through individuals’ decision to participate that comes from a sense of obligation to themselves, the dead, and their country. They believe that they take actions because they have no other choice than to attempt to regain the honor of their loved one. The second theme, belonging, is revealed through how individuals relate to supportive organizations. Their words reveal that these organizations are sites of useful identity formation in terms of belonging and contextualization of the occurrences post loss. The third theme exposes that these same sites of belonging at times are victim to patterns of power and exclusion that have plagued Colombia for centuries.
Chapter 2

A Social Constructivist Lens: the Self and the Colombian Context

This research uses a social constructivist theoretical framework, which I examine here with an emphasis on how it can be interpreted within the Colombian context. I provide a glimpse into Colombian history that shows the prevalence of a myriad of types of violence as well as its accompanying individual and social traumas. Applying a social constructivist lens to the Colombian context, I then aim to decipher several patterns of violence throughout Colombian history and signs of resistance embodied in contemporary Colombian social movements in order to lay the groundwork to interpret the current reality facing victims of state violence. Lastly, to be able to decipher the findings on identity as experienced by victims of state violence in Chapter 4, I explore several academic debates on concepts of the self and arrive at definitions of the self, identity, subjectivity and agency that inform my research both in methodology and data analysis.

Social constructivism

My thesis research uses a social constructivist theoretical framework to examine the self and the social context. Social constructivism views the self as developing heuristically in an ever-evolving relationship with the social context. As opposed to a Universalist or Kantian viewpoint that believes that there is a universal human experience, social constructivism provides a lens that views the human experience as deeply embedded in the social context. This viewpoint sees human experience as unstable, ever changing, and influenced by culturally situated discourses and practices and relationships of power (Holland et al, 2001). In turn, social constructivism grants that people shape and influence the social context in which they exist in a dialogical relationship. Holland et al (2001) note that social constructivism sees discourse and practice as the tools that create the self on the backdrop of contexts of power and not as
reflections of stable interpretations of world values passed on through enculturation. The self in
practice will be examined later on in this paper as one of the integral tools for how the self is
navigated.

Applying a social constructivist lens to examine how Colombian victims of state violence
conceptualize themselves through their actions therefore means that victims are both influenced
by and also influence the social context. Their experiences of the self are unstable and always
developing in a dialectical relationship to the social. This play between the self and the social is
what is of interest to this study, specifically the dance between individual expressions of action
and the collective spaces where identity is made for victims of state violence.

Social constructivism closely examines how the self interacts with the social context in
which it is embedded and in the case of Colombia this means there is a need to understand some
of the social, historical, cultural, and political contexts that have shaped the lived experience of
Colombians today. To better understand these current contexts, I give a brief synopsis of
Colombian history with special attention paid to the patterns and pluralities of violence in
Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict and their subsequent traumas and social movement
responses.

**The Colombian context**

Colombia is Latin America’s third most populous nation after Brazil and Mexico, with
approximately 46 million inhabitants (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2011) that reflect
Colombia’s history of conquest and resistance; from the attempted Spanish take-over of
indigenous peoples’ land beginning in the 1500s, to the enslavement of Africans and their
subsequent escapes and eventual emancipation, to various armed conflicts between the
Colombian armed forces, paramilitary groups and various leftist guerrilla groups. In this section I
focus on recent Colombian history with an emphasis on the ongoing armed conflict that started in the 1940s and 1950s in order to show how multiple forms and patterns of violence characterize the Colombian context, influence the social fabric, and also set the stage for active social movements. The ongoing armed conflict in Colombia has historically included a range of armed actors and dynamics, but since the 1960s it has primarily been dominated by the power struggle between leftist guerrilla groups and the Colombian armed forces and right-wing paramilitary groups that aim to eliminate them. While there are many much more complex dynamics to the violence, these three main armed actors provide a starting point from which to interpret experiences of state violence in Colombia today. In looking at Colombian history, what becomes evident is that the use of political violence to maintain power is not a new concept; the combination of a weak state and nation within Colombia has repeatedly led to the use of force in an attempt to produce hegemony by those with power, which has left tens of thousands dead. This use of state violence to ensure political exclusion can be seen today in Colombia in the prevalence of extrajudicial killings that have produced the victims interviewed for this study.

Latin America is considered one of the most violent regions in the world (McIlwaine and Moser, 2004, p. 1) and Colombia in particular is often described as the worst humanitarian disaster in the Western hemisphere (Ramirez, 2010, p. 85). The Colombian social context is much more complex than merely a war between several armed actors. Various forms of violence shape peoples’ experiences and long-term exposure to violence impacts how people make meaning in their lives and how they conceptualize themselves within the social context (Adams, 2011, p. 5). The reflections of violence on the social context are seen in Urrego’s 2001 findings that in Colombia there is increasing “distrust and little credibility placed on the action between various social actors is a product of the destruction of the social fabric that is experienced with
the accumulation of conflicts” (cited in Zuluaga, 2009, p. 38). Ongoing violence is complex and multidimensional (McIlwaine and Moser, 2004, p. 1) and in Colombia violence shapes how individual and community identities are formed and interwoven. As shown through Colombia’s complex history below, the Colombian social context is defined by multiple complex forms of violence that influence individual and collective meaning making processes, and simultaneously impact the self and the social. This study focuses on cases of state violence, and in order to decipher how state violence is interpreted and responded to in the Colombian context concepts of political and social violence must be further understood.

Political violence is violence within the context of armed conflict that aims to attack and debilitate political opposition, for example the military’s use of violence to weaken leftist guerrilla groups or a rebel group’s kidnapping of local political leaders. Political violence can take many different forms and in general is not easily characterized. Winifred Tate (2007), a leading anthropologist focused on Colombia, has found that Colombian history uncovers various types of political violence that are often complexly interwoven: partisan, insurgent, and counterinsurgent that at times overlap with criminal violence and the fight to control natural resources. Similarly, Pecaut finds that there are many interconnections between different types of violence in Colombia (cited in McIlwaine and Moser, 2004). Political violence such as massacres, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, threats, selective assassinations, and forced internal displacement among other abuses committed by all armed actors are rampant and continue to shape day-to-day lives in Colombia. High levels of political violence in Colombia have defined its political culture and accompanied the façade of long-lasting democracy (Ramirez, 2010, p. 85). It is clear that political violence is rampant: between 1996 and 2006 the sociopolitical violence in Colombia resulted in the loss of 3,145 lives per year, which is nearly
equal to the total number of deaths during Chile’s 17-year military dictatorship (Archilla, 2011, p. 68).

Political violence occurs on the backdrop of social violence, which is often more subtle and is imbedded in everyday actions. Social violence is the backdrop of “normal” violence that characterizes day-to-day life and interactions, the violence that becomes “routinized” or “normalized” as an important part of societies’ functioning (McIlwaine and Moser, 2004, p. 4). In this sense, extrajudicial killings (a form of political violence exerted by the armed forces on civilians) are carried out in a context of social violence, which is much more difficult to decipher but is felt and sustained through “everyday” occurrences. In Latin America there is a specific need to understand how violence becomes naturalized and reproduced in everyday life because it carries ramifications for how violence impacts social relations and how it “consistently provokes perverse behavior among vulnerable groups, undermines how people treat each other, and destroys the social support for democracy” (Adams, 2011, p. 2).

Social violence impacts both the individual and social and guides norms and normality (Das et al, 2000). It is both consumed and produced by both the self and the social: “Violence creates, sustains, and transforms their interaction, and thereby it actualizes the inner worlds of lived values as well as the outer world of contested meanings” (Das et al, 2000, p. 5). Social violence takes on multiple forms and shapes the social context as well as how individuals experience them (Das et al, 2000). Kleinman (2000) notes that this type of violence is both multiple and mundane and therefore fundamental because of its hidden nature “out of which images of people are shaped, experiences of groups are coerced, and agency itself is engendered” (p. 239). Social violence is the backdrop on which other forms of violence, such as political violence, take place and is interwoven into everyday experiences.
Similar to the idea of social violence is Jenny Pearce’s term “chronic violence” which Adams (2011) sites as the “new normality because it is embedded and reproduced in multiple spaces that range from mother-child relations to the ways that people practice religion and think about their governments” (p. 2). In this sense, Adams (2011) advocates that a narrow focused approach to political violence is likely to fail due to the need to look into the complex ways that chronic violence transforms vulnerable societies. McIlwaine and Moser (2004) find that the endemic violence leads to fear and insecurity in Colombia, which in part then impact the social context where state victims are left to navigate after their experience of loss.

Why does Colombia, a country that is known for being a long-time democracy, continue to be plagued with various phenomena of social and political violence? A brief exploration of the past 60 years of Colombian history shows how the Colombian context has been defined for decades by political violence aimed towards solidifying political exclusion in order to maintain unequal power structures. These patterns are reflected in the current trend of political violence in the form of extrajudicial killings which produce the victims of state violence who are the focus of this research.

The current ongoing armed conflict in Colombia is often tied back to a period known as *La Violencia* (The Violence) that immediately followed the 1948 assassination of the dissident Liberal populist political candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in Bogotá. Gaitán symbolized positive change for many Colombians, and his assassination marked the beginning of riots that led to a 10-year civil war between Colombia’s two political parties at the time, the Liberals and Conservatives. These two parties showed little significant difference between their political platforms, however their rivalries ran deep. Families belonged to either the Liberal or
Conservative political parties for generations. Both parties were run by Colombia’s elite and most of their disputes appeared to be over the control of natural resources (Tate, 2007, p. 36).

*La Violencia* was primarily carried out in rural areas and left somewhere between 200,000 (Schneider, 2000) and 300,000 people dead (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 2011). This period is thought to have come to a close in 1957 when a power sharing agreement, called the National Front, was signed in which the Liberals and the Conservatives agreed to alternate governance every four years. This agreement was in place until 1974 (Ramirez, 2010) and while it did decrease violence in the short term, it also solidified political exclusion of the non-wealthy. Ramirez (2010) notes that the duopoly of power created through the National Front influences the current political violence:

> …the resulting political order was explicitly exclusive to all actors outside the duopoly, that is was established as a long-term structure, and that strict political exclusion was maintained by the state well after the official expiration of the National Front, combines to explain the emergence of political violence and illicit activities in marginal areas (p. 85)

These two parties kept hold of their power and enforced hegemony through both direct state violence and violence carried out by other armed actors, such as paramilitaries, that at times had the acquiescence of or even collaboration with the armed forces (Ramirez, 2010). Thus, Colombia’s democracy appears to be one that has relied heavily on militarism and the promotion of dirty war practices as state policy (such as frequent and long-term state of siege and brief states of exception) for decades (Ramirez, 2010, p. 103-4).

At the same time that the Liberal and Conservatives were formalizing their power in the 1950s, leftist guerrilla groups began to solidify into formal factions. During the 1940s, while the Conservatives were in power and were persecuting Liberal families, Liberals began to form self-
defense groups while at the same time the communist party began to organize campesinos\(^4\) into armed self-defense groups. At first, the communists and the Liberals were somewhat united, but by 1951 they had split. The overall violence in rural areas led several self-defense units, one of which became the **Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia** (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces), known as the FARC, in 1964. In 1966 Manuel Marulanda took command of the FARC and they then spread to different parts of Colombia, much of which had seen little or no state presence up until that point. The FARC is Latin America’s largest and oldest leftist guerrilla group with origins as far back the 1930s (Tate, 2007, p. 41). While there have been many guerrilla groups that have emerged in Colombia since the 1960s, the FARC is the most prevalent and noteworthy for this study because the cases of false positives involve citizens who were accused of being members of the FARC and therefore other guerrilla groups are not explored at any depth here.

As with other Latin American leftist guerrilla movements, the FARC also tried to promote their political vision through electoral politics in the 1980s when they formed the **Union Patriotica** (UP) (Patriotic Union) political party. The UP slowly gained seats in many municipal-level governments; however, reflecting Colombia’s historical tendency toward the consolidation of power through violence, over 3,000 UP members were assassinated in the 1980s and 1990s, essentially eliminating their political party altogether (Archilla, 2011).

The Colombian armed forces have been a primary player in Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict although they have remained somewhat fractured for much of Colombia’s history, with regional bosses running the show until well into the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century (Tate, 2007, p. 45). While the armed forces have not instigated military dictatorships as has happened in many of Colombia’s

\(^4\) Small-scale subsistence farmers.
neighboring countries, they do embody the brute force of a weak state. The armed forces have been central to the state’s institutional dynamics and have been important in maintaining the power of civilian governments (Ramirez, 2010, p. 85). The Colombian armed forces have been notorious for their dirty-war tactics and the use of paramilitaries to forcefully maintain the status quo. They have remained heavily supported by the U.S. since the year 2000 when Plan Colombia, a U.S. foreign aid plan, was implemented. This primarily military spending plan has made the U.S. one of the main players first in Colombia’s War on Drugs and later in their War on Terror. Overall, this ongoing military spending program has provided training and over $8 billion U.S. dollars in funding for the Colombian armed forces since the year 2000 (Latin American Working Group, 2011).

Paramilitaries emerged as self-defense groups that were promoted and supervised by the military in the 1980s, the most well known and nationally coordinated of which was the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) (Colombian Self Defense). They were initially financed by large landowners and drug traffickers who sought the protection of their wealth from guerrilla groups who were extorting them. Close ties between the paramilitaries and the armed forces continued well after the official break in support in the late 1980s, in fact many human rights groups continued to document close ties between the paramilitaries and parts of the armed forces up until the paramilitary demobilization in 2004. Due to these close ties, there are concerns about the effectiveness of the 2004 paramilitary demobilization. Since then, armed groups similar to the AUC have emerged and while they appear to protect similar interests as the original AUC they lack a central organizing structure and have taken on different forms and objectives in various regions throughout the country.
The appearance first of drug traffickers and cartels and later coca (the raw material for cocaine) have complicated and, in many cases, also financed the Colombian conflict. Both paramilitaries and guerrilla groups have benefited from the drug trade, using it to finance their operations. At times their struggle for territory appears closely linked with the struggle to control the drug trade. To give one example, it is estimated that the FARC makes between $100 and $200 million dollars annually from drug trade (Tate, 2007, p. 44).

There have been several overtures of peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC in recent history; the last round of official peace negotiations took place from 1998 to 2002 (Ramirez, 2010 p. 96). These negotiations eventually fell apart and solidified the public’s frustration with the FARC and Colombia’s overall instability due to the ongoing armed conflict. It is unclear from the data collected for this study if this period of disillusionment with the peace talks influences how the victims of state violence conceptualize what it means to be called a guerrilla today in Colombia, however, what is clear from the interviews is that there is a clear stigma associated with being accused of being a guerrilla (see Chapter 4), reflecting the negative attitudes about the FARC held by many Colombians.

Many analysts believe that the failed peace talks paved the way for Alvaro Uribe’s presidency from 2002-2010. While President Uribe has been lauded by supporters for having restored a sense of security to urban dwellers, his presidency also marked an increase in extrajudicial killings, the false positive military scandal, and has been strongly criticized by human rights groups; during the first five years of Uribe’s presidency approximately 14,000 non-combatant Colombians were reportedly killed due to socio-political violence according to the Universal Periodic Review which is made up of four Human Rights and Peace Platforms representing a total of 1,200 organizations throughout Colombia. Of these deaths, approximately
75% are attributed to the state or armed groups in collusion with the state in cases where the alleged assailant was known (cited in Colombia – Europe – United States Coordination Group Human Rights, 2008).

While the dynamics of the armed conflict today reflect some of the root causes of the initial violence in 1948, they have taken on different forms in recent decades. Often thought of as a war to win the hearts and minds of the people, much of the conflict is played out on the civilians who are put in the middle of warring armed actors. At this point much of the violence appears to be located in zones rich in natural resources and the struggle over control of these resources, first seen in the early conflicts, continues today.

This study is focused specifically on current trends in state violence in Colombia today. Specifically, it looks at the impact of the Colombian State killing its own non-combatant citizens through extrajudicial executions, such as the false positive cases of the mothers of Soacha’s sons who were killed by the army and then dressed up as guerrillas and presented as FARC soldiers killed in combat. During Uribe’s Administration, the Colombia – Europe – United States Coordination Group found that there were over 3,000 cases of extrajudicial executions documented in Colombia (cited in Sumpter, 2010), making it one of Colombia’s leading human rights concerns. Extrajudicial killings, a form of political violence, impact all of society (Papadopoulos, 2005) and need to be viewed in their complexity and context in order to decipher how they influence the identities of victims of state violence.

Poverty and political exclusion remain strong in Colombia as does politically motivated violence targeting those who oppose the political elite. In particular, in recent years victims of state violence who speak out and organize have been targeted throughout the country - receiving death threats, being harassed, and at times even being assassinated for their work. Impunity for
those who target human rights workers, victims of state crimes and advocates of land rights remains quite strong and those who are able often seek justice in international courts with mixed results.

To conclude, recent Colombian history shows a myriad of patterns of violence that have shaped how Colombians navigate a complex social context. Their identities reflect meaning making in light of lived experiences of political and social violence. In order to understand how this social context impacts individual victims we must also look at the impact of trauma both individually and socially in the context of ongoing armed conflict.

**Trauma: Individual and Social.** The violence that marks the Colombian context creates trauma for those who experience it. A 2011 World Bank report found that more than 1.5 billion people live in situations with conflict and long-term violence and that the impact of those experiences are passed on from one generation to the next (Adams, 2011, p. 1). In order to look at how victims of state crimes think of themselves after experiences of political violence there is a need to look at individual experiences of trauma and their collective social impacts. Ignacio Martín-Baró (1989) defines trauma, at its most basic level, as an injury (p 13). Based on his liberation psychology work in El Salvador, he found that trauma is present when a person is marked by the “permanent residue of what happened” and it is understood as trauma because it is understood as negative and unfavorably marks one’s life (*ibid*). Pilar Hernández (2002) has found through her research in Colombia that the negative residue of trauma is the product of inhuman relationships (p.16). Similarly, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman (2004) writes: “traumatic life events shatter our fundamental assumptions about ourselves and our world” (p. 30).
For this study it is assumed that the loss of a family member to state violence is an individual and social trauma stemming from political violence. This is shown in that victims of state violence interviewed for this study noted that their assumptions about how the world is ordered were fundamentally changed through their experience of loss. Those impacted by this type of violence explained that this loss was traumatic, created hardship, pain, regret, and in many ways destroyed their lives. Fundamentally, they noted a shift in the self after their experience of loss. Several interviewees noted that their loss was distinguished from other experiences of loss due to the political nature of the violence. This is not to qualify the degree to which their loss was traumatic, but to show that my assumption that their experience is in indeed a traumatic one is based in their words and reflections on their own experiences.

Culture can provide tools for dealing with trauma, however Patricia Hayner (2002) has found that: “The impact of culture on how people respond to and recover from extreme trauma is not yet well understood” (p. 146). While this thesis research does not closely examine the treatment of trauma, it is worth noting that various scholars focused on trauma treatment advocate for the re-establishment of systems of assumptions that fuel meaning making and identity formation (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009, p. 291 and Janoff-Bulman, 2004).

Trauma is both individually and socially felt and, as such, individual interpretations of the experience and the social context which has produced the experience must be interpreted as integral to one another. Social trauma, as termed by Martín-Baró (1989), is “the way in which some historic process can leave a whole population affected” (p. 13). Social trauma is attributed to “historical and societal dynamics that have injured people and continue in a mediated interaction between individual and society” (cited in Hernández, 2002, p.16).It is important to note that although impacts of trauma are often manifested in individuals, the trauma itself has
also been socially produced. Martín-Baró’s (1989) definition of psychosocial trauma provides a dialectical relationship between the individual and society; it: “implies that the injury or damage depends on the particular experience of each individual, an experience conditioned by his or her social background and degree of participation in the event and by other characteristics of the individual’s personality and experience” (p. 13-14). The source of trauma is not within the individual but within society, and is consequently maintained by the relationship between the individual and society. This has important implications for how trauma should be approached, especially in the context of ongoing armed conflict. While there are many differing psychological approaches to dealing with trauma, what is useful for this study is to first understand the link between the Colombian social context, political violence, and the trauma it produces in order to set the stage to decipher if victims of state violence feel that the actions that they take post-loss aid them in dealing with their experience of trauma.

Trauma in the Context of Armed Conflict. In examining trauma in the context of Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict it is important to talk about the impacts of recurring trauma, meaning not a one-time traumatic event but a situation where an individual or group of people live with the constant threat of additional violence and trauma, which is often the case for Colombian victims of state violence who speak out. Judith Herman (1992), one of the leading scholars on trauma in the U.S., believes that ongoing trauma is a form of complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Herman (1997) argues that “repeated trauma can occur only where the victim is in a state of captivity, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator” and that there is necessarily a relationship involving coercive control (p. 87). Under this definition, zones in Colombia that experience armed conflict can be considered sites of ongoing and complex trauma for those who face the threat of further violence even after the initial
traumatic events have happened, due to the nature of the conflict. From a psychological standpoint it is important for victims of state crimes who are at risk of further victimization to have models for coping that include ways to further thwart violence in order to assure them the right to non-repetition of the abuses. This approach requires not just looking at the physical manifestations of political violence, but addressing social violence as well.

War-torn regions are often impoverished in part due to armed conflicts and there is a complex relationship between violence, oppression, poverty and trauma (Lykes & Collquillon, 2009, p. 288). The relationship between poverty, trauma, and violence is easily seen in many Colombian cities where internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often crammed into shantytowns at the city’s periphery. IDPs often face discrimination and extreme poverty in addition to the trauma of being uprooted from their homes due to violence. Losing a family member to the state can also result in economic hardship, which can complicate how one deals with the traumatic experience. Hayner (2002) found that “The difficulty of healing from political violence is even more complicated by the intersection of basic economic and social problems, which may have been exacerbated by the very event in question, such as with the death of the family breadwinner” (p. 141).

By viewing trauma as both individual and social, it is seen as quite complex and entwined in multiple layers of violence, including poverty. Victims’ organizations in Colombia often focus on supporting victims to be able to understand the root causes of the extrajudicial executions in order to help them make sense of why their loved ones were targeted. In line with a liberatory psychological viewpoint, the promotion of the understanding of the root causes of suffering and trauma on personal and collective levels can help build new assumptions about the world that can aid in one’s dealing with the loss.
The residues of the initial and ongoing traumas can complicate how victims navigate their social context. For example, within the Colombian context, Riaño-Alcalá (2008) finds that fear plays a key role in social control; she notes that “acts of violence have become a dominant language by which left wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary, the army and drug traffickers communicate with civil society and regulate social life” (p. 2). Because fear is an individually-experienced emotion that is socially constructed and shared culturally (*ibid*), it follows that fear’s imprint on the psyche can continue to influence one’s life after the immediate threat is gone.

Drawing on Daniel and Knudsen’s work, Riaño-Alcalá (2008) states that violent events threaten not only a way-of-being in the world, but also force “the individual to see it differently” (p. 12). Working through and with trauma involves embracing new social identities and the process of doing so also fuels social movements that in turn question the existing social order (Hernández, 2002, p.17). Trauma should be dealt with on both individual and social levels and intervention criteria should be rooted in communities and developed through relationships with community members (Hernández, 2002, p.24). These human and imperfect relationships that are built through the submerged networks of meaning making of social movements are important in countering the victimizers’ desires to isolate victims. PTSD scholars have established that “[a]s long as the victim maintains strong relationships with others, the perpetrator’s power is limited; invariably, therefore, he seeks to isolate his victim” (Herman, 1995, p. 93). The definition and role of social movements that follows is useful in identifying ways that individuals can create and maintain those connections to others in order to work towards solutions.

**Social Movements.** Colombia’s long history of violence has also made it a hot bed of social movements that rise up in opposition to the repression. Alberto Melucci characterizes social movements as “submerged networks” where individuals participate in “experimentation
and practice of new cultural models, forms of relationships and alternative perceptions of the world” (cited in Haymes, 1995, p. 13). Collective actions, mobilizations and acts of activism are therefore expressions of these networks where meaning is produced and navigated. In this sense, social movements provide a site for transformation by promoting the interaction of individual and collective meaning making processes in light of experiences of trauma. Social movements, including victim support organizations, are constantly analyzing and contesting power structures within areas of armed conflict, which can aid victims of state crimes in understanding the root causes of their loss. Their effectiveness supporting victims to those ends, as shown through the data collected, is explored in Chapter 4.

Similar to Melucci’s notion of submerged networks is Sluzki’s (1998) notion of the personal social network, which he defines as “that rather stable but continually evolving interpersonal fabric woven of close and distant family members, friends, work and study connections, and relationships that results from informal and formal participation in community organizations…is a key repository of our identity, our history, and our well-being” (p. 360). Both Melucci and Sluzki’s models highlight that meaning is forged and navigated simultaneously in the submerged and personal social networks, leading to an examination of how these networks influence the ability to deal with trauma in the Colombian context. For this study, several sites of collective meaning making were focused on, specifically groups of people or organizations that support victims (and in many cases are also victims themselves). In this paper I refer to these networks as organizations, knowing that some are officially recognized organizations with staff and leadership while others are more informal networks of victims.

Consciousness raising or concientización has been found to be a key component to both personal and social transformation and is integral to social movements. Consciousness raising is
a form of meaning making through contextualization that explains the past and sets a plan for the future. The ordering of past events into the larger social context is often closely linked to a sense of agency and empowerment for victims of state violence in Colombia who then work to educate others to understand the Colombian context. The consciousness raising of social movements can be linked to both liberation and critical psychology approaches to trauma that use education towards transformation. These approaches draw on Freirean notions of power stemming from knowledge and the centrality of people’s knowledge as fundamental for social change (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009, p. 293). By embracing knowledge based on people’s real life experience, an interpretive lens emerges that demands structural change. Martín-Baró argues that:

…the most significant avenue for psychology in education and mental health is consicentización (the process of raising consciousness in education)...[which] implies a change in the therapeutic focus: from individual alienation to group dealienation through a critical understanding of reality that shapes people’s lives. People can understand and articulate their experiences through dialogical teaching, reflection, and action, and then can appropriate a personal remodeling in their lives and their communities (cited in Hernández, 2002, p.17).

Similarly, citing Foster, Chaudhry states: “liberation psychology involves questions of the psychological processes, dynamic capacities and practices through which people may achieve emancipation…and escape from particular structures of oppression” (2009, p. 299). A liberation psychology lens depends on community-based development aimed at the reestablishment of social networks and survivors’ development of various capabilities and a sense of self efficacy, and partnered with creating local economics to support the survivors in order to “unlock their human potential and to recognize structures of violence, while supporting grassroots efforts to rethread community relations and the social fabric” (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009, p. 286). While I do not purport to evaluate the effectiveness of these psychological approaches, it is clear that
consciousness raising can be a powerful tool to overcome trauma while working within social movements.

Social movements are shaped by and also shape the social context in which they take place. Social movements as responses to violence are evident in Colombia where the highest rates of social mobilization are also where there are the most human rights violations (Hernández, 2002, p.18). As Urrego notes, the same violence that gives root to social movements also constantly debilitates Colombia social movements:

The social movement is situated between the radicalization of the right, the weakening of the left, and a strengthening of armed actors, all of which has contributed to the situation of a scaling up of the violence. As a result, the popular movement has been weakened (cited in Zulanga, 2011, p. 38).

There are systemic violations of the right to life, freedom, and basic human rights by the State as well as other armed actors. The armed conflict violence is seen to have a double effect - both representing the source of the motivation for collective actions and acting as a dismantling force towards social organizations due to threats and direct violence against those who participate (cited in Zulanga, 2011). As Roldan (2010) has found:

In contemporary Colombia violent pluralism describes the growing resort to authoritarian and antidemocratic policies by the Colombian state in response to the proliferation of violence and to the emergence of grassroots demands from citizens most affected by violence for a greater participatory role in shaping the policies used to confront it (p. 64).

Despite the challenges of creating spaces for collective networks to be forged in Colombia, many Colombian social movements are working towards engaging consciousness raising both of their members and the general public in order to work towards transformation of their country. These social movements have the possibility of working with victims to situate their experiences in a larger structural context and to support them in becoming agents for social change through their work within social movements. The focus on agency is not to place the responsibility solely on the victim, but rather to try to provide a forum for shared meaning.
making amongst victims that leads to real and significant change. This research shows how contextualization through consciousness raising can be an important part of collective meaning making through social movements.

An understanding of social constructivism, how it applies to the Colombian social context, including the impacts of pluralities of violence and their subsequent traumas and patterns of resistance, all lay the groundwork to understand some of the big picture impacts on individual victims of state violence. Now I turn to a discussion of how to conceptualize the self within the social context by examining concepts of the self, identity, agency, and subjectivity in order to lay the groundwork to understand how my initial research questions are dissected throughout this study.

**The Self.** Concepts of the self are highly debated and evolving amongst academics in sociology, anthropology, psychology and other social sciences. In his literature review about concepts of the self, Anthony Elliot (2001) finds that all contemporary interpretations of the self are unstable, flexible, fractured, fragmented, recursive and reflexive. Elliot (2001) reports that in the most simplified form, the self is the mediator between mind and matter, the interface where the interweaving between internal and external worlds happens. Taking this definition further for my research, the self is the mediator between the mind, meaning internal mental processes, and matter, referring to all that pertaining to the surrounding social context. Said another way, the self is the mediator between inner and outer processes. The self is the interface between that which is outside the body (the social context) and that which comes from within the body (thoughts, emotions, feelings) with a recognition that neither develops in isolation but rather in a dialogical process. This barrier between the internal and external is fluid; as Biehl et al (2007) note, the self is porous and as such, is influenced and defined by its relationships to others and to
the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts. The internal cannot exist without the external and vice versa. The self is not merely influenced by the external, but is embedded in and cannot be separated from the social context in which it takes place (Elliot, 2008). In this sense, social context processes such as the Colombian victims’ movement, in part, constitute and are integral to an individual victim’s development of the self.

My conceptualization of the self is based on, but in some ways differs from various academic works on the self. Many sociologists, such as George Herbert Mead, have advocated a symbolic interactionist conceptualization of the self, in which individuals create their sense of self through engagement with others. This relationship between the self and others is communicated through symbols, meaning the objects present in our own minds and in others minds (Elliot, 2008, p. 31). In this interpretation, the self is a completely social product and an outcome of social symbolic interaction. The self is how individuals experience themselves in relation to others, a self that is carried out in reaction to and relationship with others (ibid). While I do not adhere to a strictly symbolic interactionist view of the self, its conceptualization of individuals as shaped by and in relationship to others is useful for my interpretation of the self as the mediator between internal and external worlds - specifically in looking at how victims of state violence define themselves in relationship to others.

According to social theorists Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, symbolic interactionism does not acknowledge how social interaction can often squelch individual expression, leading them to develop a theory that situates the self in relationship to power structures that in part define the self (Elliot, 2008, p. 37). As Colombian history shows, power wielded through violence has long defined the Colombian social context. The use of political violence has helped maintain elite power for decades, and thus influences how individual victims
navigate the self. Therefore, for my research, the self is necessarily defined by power structures intrinsic in the Colombian social context.

In the field of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud is central to the debate about the self. For Freud, the self is divided by repressed desires, and the experience of the self is split between the rational conscious and unconscious desire, fantasies, and memory (Elliot, 2008). While I will not use a strictly Freudian reading of the self, his theory of the self influences my conceptualization of the self in that there is an experience of the self that is divided, not unified, and simultaneously existing with its contradictions. These contradictions can emerge simultaneously as is seen in the findings explored in Chapter 4, which shows that engaging with collective groups can both provide a sense of belonging and also reproduce patterns of exclusion.

The study of the self has evolved in recent decades. The period of transformative identity politics that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. and other places reflects the emergence of feminism and other paradigm shifting lines of thought, in which the self started to be conceptualized as linked to the political due to an emerging questioning of the traditional European individualism, U.S. military and economic power, along with actions of new social movement activists and critics (Elliot, 2008). During this time, Elliot (2008) found that “the analysis of the self has been recast, from derivative of political structures or social practices towards identity, information and images as sites of possible restructuring for interpersonal relations and public life” (p. 21). This new self-confrontation leads to radical politics, of a wide ideological variety (Elliot, 2008). Colombia has also experienced an emergence of identity politics in recent decades. Various groups have come together around identities based on gender and ethnic or racial identification as well as for those who identify as victims of state crimes.
This study looks at issues of how individuals relate to others who self-identify as state crime victims through the actions they take that address their experience of traumatic loss.

Many scholars have purported that changes to concepts of the self are due to the age of globalization and technology. While still much debated, some believe that these trends have led to a dispersed sense of the self (Elliot, 2008). Technology has led to an increase in meaning making sites for the self to navigate, but this also means that there are more sites where victims can express their agency. For example, many victims of state crimes have successfully used social media to connect with others about their experiences.

These theories of the self are influential in my research since I aim to examine how people mediate internal and external worlds after experiences of traumatic loss and decipher how they redefine the self through their actions and what those actions mean to them and their sense of identity. Again, following my social constructivist lens, the self is the mediator between internal and external worlds as constructed in a dialogical relationship between the self and the social context, which sets the stage to interpret the concept of identity.

**Identity.** For my research, identity is defined as the *sense of the self*. This means that the self is perceived and conceptualized through one’s identity. Identity can be understood as an improvised self-understanding that is both social and individual (Holland et al, 2001) and to which one, on an individual level, is emotionally attached (Holland, 1997, p. 162). This improvisation is based on dialectical engagement with the social context. Put another way, Elliot (2008) purports that all forms of identity are “astonishingly imaginative fabrications of the private and public, personal and political, individual and historical” (p. 10-11), meaning that identity is one’s sense of self given one’s sense of the various facets of the social context in
which the self is embedded. As such, identity is not stable and is created in various sites simultaneously.

Stuart Hall’s (1997) writings on identity and shared meaning making shed light on how to interpret individual identity as shaped in relationship to the “Other.” According to Hall (1997), “meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we belong” and that “meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part” (p. 3). Hall notes that the constant navigation of meaning making processes by individuals in relationship with others is what creates culture, making culture a non-static, ever-changing process that is produced by interacting with others.

Although only superficially explored here, Bakhtin’s *figured worlds* and *positionality* offer a way of interpreting the improvisations of the self that are experienced through identity. Positionality refers to the self in regards to how and where one is placed in relationship to others within the cultural and social context. Positionality is in part determined by power structures that deem a social order based on age, gender, racial, sexuality, and other human-fabricated divisions. Figured worlds are where identities are developed. Based on Bakhtin, Holland et al (2001) theorize that figured worlds are socially produced, culturally constructed activities that “provide the contexts of meaning and action in which social positions and social relationships are named and conducted” (p. 60). Figured worlds are the loci where people develop their identities through improvisations in relationship to the social context. In their view, identities are formed through day-to-day activities of one’s figured worlds. While I am not specifically using *figured world* terminology in my study, my use of “identity” does assume that the sense of the self is created through everyday experiences and activities.
For Hernandez (2002), identity is what shows how people make sense of lived experience, both individually and socially and can be measured through individual narration. My research strives to uncover individuals’ sense of identity as created through actions pertaining to their loss that highlight the dance between the self and the social. I am specifically looking at how victims of state violence feel about themselves and the actions that they take after their traumatic loss.

**Agency.** Based on the work of various authors, in this study agency is defined as a socially produced and culturally constructed human *act of will*, aimed at situating oneself as an individual within a collective in the given social context. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s (2010) definition of women’s agency is particularly useful in noting how agency is inherently situational within the given social context:

> …the power, motivation, and energy that are created and/or exist in space and time, that are held by individual women or a group of women in life situations, and which are used to bring about social change….[a] social location that allows women to act, move onwards, and bring about transformations (p. 50)

Agency is about changing one’s position in regards to a collective and it often includes promoting societal and social transformation. This definition of agency largely supports my study in that those interviewed were currently active or had participated in the past with victims’ organizations in Colombia and therefore, those interviewed had expressed agency in situating themselves in relationship to a collective movement. Victims’ organizations are contextually situated and as such, the decision to participate in the victims’ movement reflects one’s choice to position oneself as a victim of state violence means placing themselves in specific place within Colombia’s social, historical, and cultural contexts. This agency is a direct reaction to the violence which has produced the traumatic loss of loved ones. It is not only important to examine whether or not victims see themselves as participants or not, but to also understand the social,
historical, cultural, and political values associated with participation, and what the implications of their actions are in the eyes of those participating in victims’ movements.

As alluded to in the discussion of trauma, restoring or creating one’s sense of agency is vital to the process of dealing with trauma. In order to support a sense of agency in areas with ongoing trauma and conflict, much attention needs to be paid to one’s perception of one’s own ability to bring about social change alongside others. If victims are not able to see themselves as agents of lasting change, they run the risk of being silenced and subjected to more ongoing trauma.

To clarify, agency here means an exploration of the actions that people decide to take after experiencing the trauma of loss. It is important to note that their agency refers not to what they do, but what they decide to do. This distinction is important because what they conceptualize individually as their decision may differ from what they actually do and how it is interpreted by others. Agency specifically refers to an individual decision to take action that in turn impacts one’s sense of self. As discussed next, subjectivity then refers to the actual actions that are taken which in turn have felt impacts on others that were unintended by one’s original agency (decision to take a certain action). Highlighting this phenomena is the example of organizational leaders who decide they want to build a victims’ social movement yet their day-to-day actions are experienced as exclusionary practices by organization members.

**Subjectivity is the self in practice.** Put another way, the self is made by doing and what one does is subjectivity. This means that the self in practice (subjectivity) is shown through behavior, which is influenced and motivated by plural meaning making sites. For Holland (1997) these meaning making sites are influenced by culturally situated discourse and practices that mold identities and meld the individual and collective together. The self is constructed through
practice, therefore actions are a tool to mediate internal and external worlds and, as such, construct the self.

Both Holland et al’s *self in practice* and Bakhtin’s *authoring self* have influenced my usage of subjectivity. Holland et al’s (2001) theory of the *self in practice* purports that subjectivity is the interface between the social and embodied forms of the self and is influenced by various meaning making sites:

> This self in practice occupies the interface between intimate discourses, inner speaking, and bodily practices formed in the past and the discourses and practices to which people are exposed, willingly or not, in the present. It authors or orchestrates the products of these sites of the self (p. 32)

Similar, albeit distinct, Bakhtin’s concept of the *authoring self* provides that the self is made through a dialogical process: “People coexist, always in mutual orientation moving to action; there is no human action which is singularly expressive” (Holland et al, 2001, p. 169). In this sense, the self is made through a constant process of being “addressed” by and “answering” to others, what is often called the dialogic selves (Holland et al, 2001). This unstable and dialogic self is made through the practice of authoring in various contexts of activity and the navigation of figured worlds is due to one’s positionality within the social context (Holland et al 2001, p. 271-2). Therefore my usage of subjectivity draws on the idea that subjectivity is an action in response to and in relationship with the social context.

Elliot (2008) finds that individual subjectivity is produced through action as well. He notes that subjectivity is more likely produced by the process in which the “individual internalizes, and responds in the process to, the obligations of culture and the demands of social life” (p. 50). Similarly, Biehl et al (2007), state that subjectivity is where historical changes and moral apparatuses coalesce and that it indicates a process of learning to live with and through the body that unfolds within realm of experience. In this sense, experience is “where things happen”
in terms of the felt flow of communications and interactions that simultaneously locate experience as both individual and social.

Das et al (2000) note that subjectivity reflects the personally felt interior experience and includes one’s positions in a field of relational power. For my reading of subjectivity, it is the action that is based on both internally felt experience and the external interpretations of those actions, which place an individual in relationship to societal positionality based on power structures. Similarly, Bakhtin believes that the authoring self is in part defined by its positionality to others in the context in which it occurs. Elliot (2008) also notes that subjectivity is constructed through “individual actions and choices, the patterning of thoughts, dispositions, feelings and desires, and the structuring of subjective experience in relation to the social order” (p. 53).

In terms of my study, subjectivity is influenced by external factors of violence that characterize armed conflict. In this context, how one acts reflects creative actions in response to social and political violence. My study intends to uncover how individuals act, how they engage their self in practice (subjectivity) with other victims and the meanings they ascribe to their actions.
The pyramid-shaped design in Figure 1.1 pictorially shows my conceptual framework. First, the social context is placed at the top, signifying that it influences and guides agency, identity, and subjectivity. The self is also influenced by the social context in that it is completely surrounded by the social context as well as the social context’s interweaving with agency, identity, and subjectivity. In turn, the social context is supported by and is in relationship with all three corners: agency, identity, and subjectivity, which form a supportive base that links them all together. The self in this diagram is situated between the agency, identity, and subjectivity base and the social context, placed as the mediator between both inner and outer worlds. The base makes up how one both navigates and perceives the human experience and is in relationship to social context. In this way, certain behaviors or actions then can situate the self in particular relationships to the social context (including collective movements). Subjectivity and agency are closely related; one being the behavior and the other the will to situate oneself in relationship to the particular social context. One’s sense of the self, or identity, influences and is influenced by behaviors and willful actions of agency to situate the self. This relationship between the social context at the top and the self in practice (subjectivity), the sense of the self (identity), and agency all influence and surround the self to show the unstable nature of the self.
To conclude, Chapter 2 presents a discussion about the social constructivist theoretical lens in order to decipher aspects that create the current Colombian social context which is plagued with various forms of violence and their subsequent individual and social traumas. Social movements are seen as responses to violence and have the possibility of engaging liberatory practices that help those dealing with experiences of traumatic loss. In order to understand how all of these concepts come together for individuals who are the subjects of this study, I then articulated interpretations of the self, identity, agency, and subjectivity which pave the way to understand both this research study’s structure and design in Chapter 3 as well as interpretations for the findings in Chapter 4.
Chapter 3

Research Procedures

This chapter contains information about when, where, and how this study was carried out. A detailed explanation of the chosen research methodologies - phenomenology and narrative inquiry - is followed by the specific details of the research site, population and sample, data collection methods, data analysis, researcher positionality, ethical concerns and study limitations.

Methodology

A phenomenological methodology as well as methods from narrative inquiry research were used to decipher the actions Colombian victims of state violence take after their traumatic loss and what those actions signify for their sense of self. Phenomenology aims to understand the essence of one’s lived experience, meaning to gain a clear idea of the “things in themselves” as people directly experience them (Denscombe, 2010, p. 77). In this study the essence of the “things in themselves” of both the actions that victims take and the significance those actions have on identity were measured through the stories interviewees told.

Originally based on Edmund Husserl’s work, phenomenology is concerned with people’s lived experiences within the life world and everyday things that are integral to social life (Denscombe, 2010, p. 77). Husserl’s phenomenology, often termed transcendental phenomenology, strives to understand the “fundamental aspects of experience - features that are universal and that lie at the very heart of human experience” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 83). For this research, actions pertaining to the experience of traumatic loss are considered the everyday things since those actions appear to define life after loss and these everyday activities locate the individual in relationship to others within social life.

This study combines phenomenology with a social constructivist theoretical lens, meaning that it seeks to uncover the essence of the human experience, while recognizing that the
human experience is both socially constructed and located in a way that makes the essence and social context inseparable. As noted by Martín-Baró “[t]here is no person without family, no learning without culture, no madness without social order; and therefore neither can there be an I without a We, and knowing without a symbolic knowing, a disorder that does not have reference to moral and social norms” (cited in Hernández, 2002, p.17). While the “I” and the “we” are defined in reference to each other, this does not mean that victims necessarily see themselves intricately related to others within the social context, so close attention was paid to how individual narratives show conceptualizations of their actions as either individual or collective, while this division truly represents how these two are dialectically related within the social context. For example, if a victim decides to do something on their own after having a negative experience with an organization than that choice is made given the context of organizational conflict and not a decision made in isolation.

Martin Heidegger’s ‘hermeneutic phenomenology’ built on Husserl’s initial framework and contributes several useful analytic tools for this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on questions of experience and understanding and questions what it means to be a person with an emphasis on the person as a self-interpreting being (Laverty, 2003, p. 32). This approach suggests that there are circular relationships and constant shifts between understanding, background (the social context), and meaning making. This hermeneutic circle reveals the dialectical relationship between practice, experience, and discourse and provides an analytical framework based on an interpretation that begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones in a constant process of new projection, creating shifts in understanding (Gadamer, 1989, p. 315). In this sense, individual conceptions shift and develop through a dialectical and ever-evolving relationship to the social context. Applied to this study, the
individuals’ sense of personal changes related to their loss, subsequent actions, and their sense of self were identified through semi-structured interviews. By focusing on how the essence of those changes was conceptualized for the victims themselves through their narratives, I attempt to uncover the core of their experience of identity as related to their actions that address their traumatic loss. The underlying premise is that not only are research participants’ concepts of reality socially constructed, but that those interviewed are active agents in shaping their reality, and as such, as individuals they have granted particular meanings to their actions which teach us about important coping mechanisms when faced with traumatic loss.

Phenomenology includes an emphasis on thick description of authentic experiences in an attempt to uncover a given situation’s complexity. Therefore, this study pays special attention to the subtleties and complications that create the human experience. Interviews aimed to uncover how individual experiences were constructed and how individuals have come to see the world as they do. Specifically, this study aims to look at how Colombians who have lost a loved one to the State have both made sense of and actively created their worlds, meaning how they are agents “who interpret their experience and who actively create an order to their existence” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 78) as shown through their actions and the meaning they place on those actions. In order to examine the day-to-day experiences, the at times seemingly mundane aspects of life that shape and define realities for Colombians who have lost loved ones to politically-motivated violence were examined through the participants’ views of their life changes before and after their loss.

To be able to decipher the multiple experiences of reality, I attempted to see things through the eyes of those interviewed and to be faithful to the original experiences as related by those affected as much as possible, however, due to concerns for victim safety, all details that could easily identify the victims were excluded from the final document in order to negate retribution.
for speaking out. An additional appendix that contains more details about the life stories of research participants without directly identifiable information was made available to my thesis committee and can be received by special request\(^5\).

Phenomenology provides a framework that is well suited for the Colombian context in general and this study in particular. The underlying paradigm of the social constructivist viewpoint combined with a phenomenological methodology uncovers the essence of socially constructed experiences and provides space for different truths for different people. This underlying assumption gives room for multiple understandings and therefore grants the possibility of multiple realities, which is an especially adequate fit for research aiming to decipher the Colombian context. In Colombia, where ongoing armed conflict has ravaged the country and its population for decades, there is a need to understand the many shades of gray that define reality. In Colombia there are multiple, often conflicting realities within the same shared physical space that make true conflict resolution a challenge. In order to bring some eventual resolution to Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict much work needs to be done to understand the multiple realities that exist, with all their nuances and imperfections. This framework provides an attempt to begin to reconcile the differing views not by valuing one over another as more factually or objectively true, but in an attempt to allow for multiple realities to be present and understood. For this study what is “true” across the board is not as important as what is felt for individuals who are navigating a difficult social context. This means that I do not arrive at a set of “best practices” or “fail-proof” approaches for organizations working with victims of state violence but instead strive to uncover the essence behind several victims’ narratives that teach us about the meaning individuals place on their actions. By exposing these meanings, this study

\(^5\) Please send an email to alisonjpaul@gmail.com to request the additional appendix.
aims to identify confluences between experiences while acknowledging that each research participant has a different and valid experience.

Narrative inquiry was also incorporated into my analytical framework. Narrative research places a particular emphasis on understanding personal experience as it connects to the larger collective meaning making within the social context. A narrative inquiry lens uncovers how talking about something in fact constructs it and exposes that *how something is told* reveals how one understands the self. Stories are extremely important for victims of state violence who work to try to preserve historic memory (see Chapter 4); as noted by Pineteh (2005) “the retelling of the past becomes a signpost for personal identification or the representation of the self in a collective discourse” (p. 384) and “storyteller does not tell the story, so much as she/he is told by it” (p. 3). Given that what is said is directly linked to the social context in which is takes place, the essence of their experience was measured through their narratives in terms of the stories they told.

Narrative inquiry requires attention to how memory shapes how the past is told. Riaño-Alcalá (2008) notes that “memories are produced out of experience, they ‘in turn, reshape it’” (p. 3). Memory melds the personal and collective; Pineteh (2005) notes that “…memory is a discursive terrain for a myriad of approaches to and interpretations of the past. The recovery of the past is often constructed around collective experiences and official narratives of historical discourse, entangled with a collection of personal and private recollections of past events” (p. 383). Memory can also influence the future; Zarecka finds that memory has its strength in “its multifaceted translation into discourse about the present and the future” (cited in Pineteh, 2008, p. 382). In examining the narratives of victims of state violence, attention was paid to how
memory shapes both the past and future and interweaves the personal and collective through the stories that are told.

Phenomenology and narrative inquiry work well together; Andrews et al (2008) show how narrative inquiry is closely related to that of phenomenology: “narrative gives external expression of individual, internal representations of a phenomena” (p. 5) therefore a narrative research lens that identifies agency, subjectivity, and a sense of the self supplements the phenomenological interpretation of data as shown in the findings section. The combination of phenomenology and narrative inquiry allow for interpretation of the complications and paradoxical nature of the Colombian context as told through the words of Colombian victims of state violence.

**Research Site**

In March 2011 I traveled to Colombia for two and a half weeks to conduct interviews in a medium-sized city in a coastal region. This city is a cultural and economic center in the area and also has become home to many victims of state violence in recent years. This primarily working class city has historically been an organizing center for social movements including human rights organizations and labor unions. State violence and other forms of violence in the region have created mass migrations of people who flee the violence; Colombia has 5.2 million IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2011) making it nearly equal to the number of IDPs in the former Sudan. Many IDPs live in cramped quarters in shantytowns along the city’s edge as a reminder of the ongoing armed conflict which is not always easily perceived in the urban centers. As noted by Schneider (2000) the Colombian conflict is “centered in rural areas and around land claims, class, race and territory” (p. 798), which means that many city-dwellers may not have the same day-to-day experience of the conflict as those in rural areas.
This research site provided the well-suited combination of active social movements and organizations that support victims as well as sufficient anonymity due to the urban setting that victims are somewhat able to carry out activism in a way that those in rural areas are unable to in part due to their remoteness and the immediate threat of violence from armed actors. That being said, many of the victims of state crimes in this city had been threatened due to their actions directly relating to their loss of a family member and their safety was a primary concern in this study.

**Population & Sample**

A convenience sample was used to find possible research participants through two local organizations that work with victims of state violence. From 2007-2009 I had contact with these organizations while I was living and working in Colombia (see Positionality) and therefore I was able to contact several possible research participants to see if they would be interested in participating prior to my arrival. Once I arrived in the city I reached out to those contacts once again as well as others provided through the convenience sample with these two local organizations, in order to ask them in person if they were comfortable participating in the study and to make sure that they fully understood the nature of the research. Each participant was given an informational sheet (see Appendixes) about the study in Spanish which I then reviewed with them with an emphasis on making sure they knew that there was no penalty for not participating, that they could stop the interview at any time, and that information that would easily identify them would remain confidential in the final document.

All of those interviewed were people who currently lived in the city I visited and self-identified as victims of state crimes. All had lost a member of their immediate family to the army or police in either 2006 or 2007. Most of the family members who were killed were men and one
was a young woman. Those interviewed were sisters, daughters, mothers, and fathers of those killed and ranged in age from their early 20s to mid-50s. Several interviewees were from the same families.

For my sample it was important that the people had not only lived through state violence but that they had publicly identified themselves as victims of state crimes because it shows that they had already connected with others to contextualize their experience and to take action to address their loss. The word *victim* has a particular meaning within the current Colombian context; those interviewed expressed that being a victim in Colombia today meant that they lived awaiting justice regarding their loss and that the state had broken their lives in a way that made them a victim. Therefore, to self-identify as a victim of state crimes locates the self socially, historically, and politically and brings them into a larger social movement striving for justice in Colombia. In other parts of the world, movements that have dealt with victims of violence have at times embraced the term *survivor* over that of *victim*, such as the U.S. based anti-violence against women movement. While their usage of the term survivor is used to indicate that they have survived their experience of violence, it’s important to note that Colombian victims of state crimes do not think of themselves as survivors of state violence. While *survivor* may conjure up images of healing, recovery, and moving on, victims of state crimes were very closely allied to their identification as a *victim* in the context of rights that have been violated by the state.

The initial abuse of human rights occurred through the death of the loved one when the state violated the right to life of its citizens. Secondly, the victims noted that the state continued to maintain them as victims because of its lack of justice in the case of state crimes. Lastly, those who speak out are often targets of additional political violence as well as impunity for

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6 The seven people interviewed came from a total of four different families.
those that attack them, making them, yet again, victims. All of these abuses fall within a human rights discourse that entails specific demands of the state that are supported by the use of the word “victim” over that of “survivor”.

All those interviewed either were currently or had at some point, taken actions in relating to their loss of a family member. Some had solely taken action by participating with local organizations that represent victims of state crimes while others had regularly organized individual actions that pertain to their lost family member. I chose to focus on those who had taken action either on their own or collectively to identify what those actions mean to them as individuals relating to a group of others with similar experiences.

There were several other similarities between research participants which were unplanned but worth noting here in order to paint a better picture of who the research participants were and their life experiences. I had met all of the informants at least once prior to contacting them about their interviews, which turned out to be an asset in having them talk about their lives in a country where building trust is especially important and often hard to create. All were working-class and faced economically difficult situations which had impacts on how much time they had available to participate in actions and events. All those interviewed noted that they were not politically active or even particularly opinionated about Colombian politics prior to their loss of a family member.

Data Collection Methods

**Semi structured interviews.** Seven research participants met with me for a total of ten semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish over two weeks time. These interviews aimed to get a sense of the persons’ identity over time including life prior to the loss of a family member, immediately following the death of a family member, and in the years since with
special attention to the meanings they ascribed to their actions relating to their loss. These interviews lasted between one and three hours each and sought to gain an understanding of how they make sense of their lives and discover the essence of what they experience as reflected in their stories.

Interview questions (see Appendixes) also delved into how victims conceptualized themselves in relationship to victim organizations and social movements in Colombia before, during and after the death of their loved one. The original interview protocol was written in English, translated to Spanish, and then reviewed by Dr. Elizabeth Lozano, a native-Colombian with experience doing research in Colombia, for wordsmithing and cultural appropriateness. These questions functioned as guides to the interviews, but were not strictly followed as to allow for a conversational flow to the interviews. This semi-structured nature allowed for tangents and roundabout stories all with the end goal of getting at the needed information as outlined in my original research questions. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee.

Interviews were spaced out by several days each to allow time for reflection for the informant and myself. In between interviews I reviewed the audio recordings and drafted follow up questions based on the interviews, field notes, and reflection. To assure participant safety, all of these documents were stored on a protected remote server to reduce the risk of the information being lost or stolen while in Colombia. The initial interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ homes or in the homes of mutual friends. The follow up interviews took place either in the interviewees’ home or, in three cases, at their workplace.

**Transcription.** These ten interviews were then transcribed into text documents, removing all easily identifiable information, between April and September 2011.
Coding of information. Once the data was collected through the interviewing process and subsequent transcription, I listened to the recorded interviews and read the transcriptions repeatedly in order to get a sense of the overall narrative and the principle messages that were conveyed. The interviews were then open coded by hand to identify emerging themes that reflected the essence of the research participants lived experience. This was followed by focused coding of all interviews by using an open source coding software, Text Analysis Markup System (TAMS). After several rounds of both open and focused coding of all the interviews based on my initial research questions and I went on to analyze the codes.

Analyzing of information. In order to begin to analyze the hundreds of codes assigned to the ten interviews, I first sorted and organized all of the focused codes into theme areas. The theme areas were then organized into conceptual maps on large pieces of paper. At that point, theme areas included: Identity, Changes, Actions with Organizations/Agency, Individual Actions/Agency, and Justice. Each of these topic areas was then divided up according to subthemes and again visually mapped to see where these concepts overlapped and intertwined to sort of the major themes to be explored in the thesis. By examining the major overarching themes, three main themes were distilled for my thesis research - Obligation, Belonging, and Exclusion - as explored in Chapter 4. Once the three primary themes were identified I revisited the interviews and found the pertinent quotes that supported the codes that led to the three

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7 In the process of conceptual mapping the codes it became apparent that my original research questions were unnecessarily complex and confusing. The original research questions read: “What is the relationship between individual experiences of trauma, an individual’s sense of agency, and individual concepts of collective meaning making processes through participation with social movements that are seeking solutions to the armed conflict that produced the initial individual trauma? What are the multiple levels of personal changes that happen after the loss of a family member to the State? And, how do victims see those individual shifts and meaning making processes as shaped by and contributing to the victims’ social movement in Colombia?” After distilling the collected data I was able to refine those questions into more adequate and clear reflections of the information I was aiming for.
themes. These quotes were then re-organized by theme, translated, and then prioritized in terms of relatedness to the themes. These themes were reviewed with my thesis committee throughout this whole process. Unfortunately due to safety concerns, I was unable to have in-depth conversations with the research participants about the themes over the phone, however these findings will be shared directly with the informants in the future.

**Limitations of the Research Design/Ethical Concerns**
Ethically speaking I had to walk the thin line between asking for information that is very personal and sensitive and not forcing participants to talk about things that were likely to be painful and difficult if they do not want to. As Hayner (2002) has noted, telling about lived experiences of violence can be healing but also re-traumatizing if not handled correctly. Hayner found that the research shows that safe and supportive environments for victims to talk about their experiences usually lead to positive results. Walking the line between being supportive and pushing for information that one was not comfortable sharing required constant reflectivity and sensitivity about how I interacted with research participants.

Lastly, because this is a phenomenological study that aimed for depth rather than breadth, it is therefore somewhat limited by its small sample size, however, I do believe that this research has produced results that are useful in determining the situation for these seven people that can be transferred to other situations where trauma, identity, and action are entwined due to its thorough nature.

**Researcher Subjectivity and Positionality**
There are several ethical concerns, limitations, and assets that emerge from my particular positionality as related to this study. First off, my life experience as a U.S. middle class, white female is drastically different from those of Colombians who have lost family members to state
violence. However, I lived and worked in Colombia for over two years with human rights organization from 2007 to 2009 and the four years prior to that I worked with Colombian labor rights advocates while living in the U.S., both of which both gave me some tools to help decipher the Colombian context as well as presents challenges to me as a researcher who is invested in findings a peaceful and negotiated resolution to the Colombian conflict due to my experience of working with those who live it. My time spent in Colombia gives me somewhat of an “insider” perspective which is an asset in carrying out this study in that it meant that I knew Colombia, the organizations, and some of the victims prior to arriving to conduct interviews. In order to minimize problems that could stem from my close relationship to and investment in Colombia, I continually reflected on and carefully questioned my assumptions I brought to the table in the hopes of being able to more clearly understand others authentic experience.

I had met all of the informants at least once prior to interviewing them, which was an asset to be able to collect this type of data in such a short timeframe. I found that most of those interviewed appeared to easily engage in difficult questions with me and that our conversations felt that they were building on the already existing relationships in a way that aided this type of inquiry. That being said, this also meant that I constantly questioned what I was not being told because of their assumptions about what I already knew. Here my role as an outsider as a non-native Spanish speaker was also an asset in that if I felt like there was more to what they were saying I would ask for clarification of what different words mean in general and to them in particular.

While it was useful to have had lived and worked in Colombia in carrying out this study, my physical distance from research participants after my research trip to Colombia was both an asset and a challenge. After being in Colombia I was able to intensely focus on the information
gathered in order to show what that data exposed, however, I was geographically isolated from those I had interviewed and therefore could not discuss my findings with them due to insecure phone connections. The Colombian context facing victims of state violence is one that includes constant shifts, changes, and frustrations. I was able to look at the data nearly in isolation without the “distractions” that seem to always appear when working in a place with ongoing armed conflict. On the flipside, this meant that I missed many of the day-to-day victim organization events and activities that would have strengthened this research.

My previous relationship to the victims and the organizations also meant that I had to continually be extremely clear about my role as a researcher, which is different from my previous role that they knew me in as a human rights worker. While I have not shed my investment in a peaceful Colombia, my role has changed and I was clear about that with research participants so that they understand that shift.

Lastly, my motivation for undertaking this study is quite personal. Since I began to work with victims of state violence in 2007 I have been awed and impressed by victims who take action despite the hardship and danger those actions represent, as well as desperately exasperated by the rampant state violence. Their experiences strike the core of my being with both sadness and hope. My drive to understand their process as it relates to a larger collective movement is based on a want to understand how they and I figure out how they think of themselves in terms of identity, belonging, and action in contexts of violence. Their voices are often not valued and they need to be both heard and understood as important players in bringing peace to Colombia. It is my hope that this study helps add their voices to the conversations about peace in Colombia, even when those discussions are not easy to have.
Chapter 4

Actions and Their Meanings: Obligation, Belonging, and Exclusion

The Actions: Individual and Collective

There’s no way to know how one will respond to the traumatic loss of a family member. In the case of those interviewed for this study the loss of a family member to the State was considered a traumatic life experience, one that marked complete life changes in terms of what they did and how they thought of themselves in the world. The interviews showed that their loss instigated changes to the self as reflected through shifts in their identity, agency, and subjectivity. After the experience of traumatic loss, the self was mediating a new set of external events and their internal impacts. Many noted changes in their way of thinking and their way of being due to the experience. Identity also significantly changed for individual victims. They began to identify as “victims of state crimes” by working with others. This new identity locates them within the Colombian context and ties them to distinct set of demands of the state. Daniela’s words clearly show some of the self-transformation that happened after her experience of traumatic loss:

You begin to find out about so many things, so many things that you didn’t believe were like that, I mean, it’s as if you had lived in a little box, like you had been in a little box, in a little light bulb, like over there, isolated, on a little island and you hadn’t known what the world is like, so then I think that this opens your mind, I mean, it’s like you say: Look, turns out that things are not like that, they are like this. You can’t believe everything you hear on television.

Not only does how and what individuals think about themselves change, but so does their agency and subjectivity. Both what they decide to do and their decision to take action directly pertaining to their experience of loss engage agency and locate them within the social context. Similarly, their subjectivity also reflected shifts in terms of the actual actions that they took post loss. All of these aspects of the self contributed to individual victims carrying out their daily lives in a way
that they believe fulfills their obligation to take action and also places them in relationship to others, creating a sense of belonging and, at times, of exclusion between the self and others. The self’s dialectical relationship with the social context is clearly seen through this transformation - how individual victims think of themselves and what they do changes given the context of traumatic loss and those actions in turn grant self-identified victims a particular position within the social context. The process of locating the self to others through action has an overall impact of changing both individuals’ sense of self as well as shaping the social context in which they live.

The following findings specifically look at research participants’ narratives that reflect the transformations of self, identity, subjectivity and agency after experiences of loss in the context of Colombian state violence. While their words shed much light on their experience, at times the overall process of transformation is not seen as clearly when focused so specifically on their exact words. To get a sense of what this overall transformation has looked like we can briefly look at the case of Sara, who quickly became a vocal advocate for justice immediately following her father’s assassination. She actively and publicly denounced her father’s death at the hands of the army which both connected her with other victims of state crimes and also resulted in an increased risk for her and her family. She survived various attacks against her and her family as well as ongoing death threats. Her change in actions (from not being politically active to being a vocal advocate for victim rights) led to a new social network as well as an increased risk to her safety, both of which then impact her day-to-day life. For example, the more she became involved with other victims the more she saw her “free time” dissolve and with each new threat her control over her free movement waned. Both the initial changes and their subsequent effects on her life all impacted how she views herself today given her lived
experience. While these experiences varied for individual victims, several important confluences in the data were identified: obligation, belonging, and exclusion.

In answering the research question: “what actions do Colombians who self-identify as victims of state crimes take that directly relate to their loss at both an individual and a collective level”, here in this chapter I first outline what I mean by “actions taken” at both individual and collective levels as noted by the interviewees. Then I turn to my second research question regarding what meanings are ascribed to those actions and what these meanings signify for interview participants’ identities in order to dissect several of the principle themes that emerged - obligation, belonging, and exclusion - that reflect how interview participants thought of themselves in terms of the actions they take and their identity post-loss.

To begin, what does action mean in this context? To take action means to do something, or to perform a deed. For this study I am looking specifically at the things that people do that directly relate to their experience of loss in some way - meaning actions that are in the realm of activism addressing their loss. Other actions may relate to the death of the loved one, but are not aimed at addressing that loss - for example, I am not looking at whether or not one decides to shop at a different market due to memories of the lost loved one that may emerge at the market where one used to shop. Actions here instead refer to the activism that one takes to directly address their experience of loss in the context of political violence which are spelled out below in terms of action type, including things like attending events, meetings, and protests, and other actions to demand justice for their lost loved one. The actions that they take are multiple and reflect ones’ navigation of lived experience. The process of taking action appears to be a way to contextualize one’s experience and connect with others in the hope of achieving justice. The
actions reported on here are considered both individual and collective and are in direct response to experiences of loss through state violence.

It is important to make the distinction between what interview participants conceptualized as individual actions and what they attributed to collective meaning-making spaces because it reflects that they see a real distinction between their own actions and those organized by victims’ organizations. While all of those actions, whether individual or collective, reflect and impact the social context, it’s important to note the distinction between the two because it reflects a sense of ownership over those actions in very different ways. For example, the research participant discourse often referred to collective or organizational actions as “their” actions instead of “our” actions, while their individual actions were usually referred to as “my actions.”

According to what research participants said during interviews, there are very important reasons why they, as individuals, choose to do things on their own instead of with a collective group as well as important reasons to choose to work with others in a formal group. Therefore, this distinction between individual and collective actions is important because it reflects a sense that the organizations are separate from individuals instead of something that is actively being created by them with others. I do not make this distinction between actions to critique or advocate either approach, but instead to note that the meaning-making places and spaces are multiple, complex, and contribute to identity, subjectivity, and agency in different ways. For example, given that these organizations are poorly financed and often run by volunteers, they do

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8Here I am using the word organization to signify both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are legally recognized entities that have paid staff, directive boards, and formalized work plans as well as more informal, smaller networks of people that come together in an organizational fashion. For the latter, this means small groups of people who come together under a common name and that have recognized participants. Both the more formalized organizations and the networks of volunteers working with victims of state violence consider themselves to be part of the Colombian social movement for justice.
not have the resources or infrastructure to provide legal support for individual cases although achieving justice in individual cases remains a high priority for victims. Individuals appear to most often pursue justice with the state on their own which impacts how they see themselves as individual active agents in the fight against impunity. At the same time, organizational events may provide a way to garner public support needed to make progress in the individual cases. While at times difficult to separate out in a simple way, individual actions usually tended to be the actions that were about demanding justice in particular cases and the collective actions appeared to be aimed at collective identity creation and consciousness raising.

Another reason for the importance of making the distinction between what is perceived as either an individual or collective action is because it reflects whether or not the victims see themselves as active agents of their own destiny due to their actions or actions carried out with others. In a sense, it indicates where they feel their power comes from - either on their own, with others, or a combination of the two. Whether or not they are engaging their sense of agency on their own or with others also impacts how they think of themselves in relationship to others. While it’s impossible for actions that victims attribute to themselves as individuals to be extricated from the social context where they take place, their distinction between individual and collective actions is important because it shows the fissure between individuals and collective spaces such as organizations where meaning can be made and navigated as a group.

Collective actions are actions that are organized by a group of people and/or victim support organizations that are made up of, or represent victims in some way. These actions are usually set up either in an organizational meeting or by those involved with the organizations’ leadership. Individuals then decide whether or not to participate in the action, whether it be planning or attending an event. The actions carried out by the organizations are usually larger
than individual events and at times are co-sponsored between various organizations and then attended by other social movement organizations such as human rights organizations, labor unions, indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups among others with the understanding that many of the issues facing different people in the context of ongoing armed conflict are interrelated and connected and therefore there is a need to not only support each others struggles but to realize that these are not separate struggles at all. The spaces that are created through collective actions can lead to collective identities for those who are resisting authoritarian-modeled governments (Schneider, 2000).

Individual actions are the actions that interviewees attributed to their own agency, meaning actions that they organized on their own and that they take that are separate from actions that are organized and taken in conjunction with others in an official organizational setting. It appears that at times these actions are accompanied by others, but not in a formalized way as they are with collective actions. It is possible that organizational representatives may decide to support the individuals, but the individual still sees the actions as his or her actions. These actions do not happen in isolation and are both influenced by and also influence larger collective actions. For example, those who touted historical memory as an important part of their individual actions also noted having learned about the importance of historic memory through their work with the organizations. Research participants subjectivity reflected several different types of actions that they participated in years following their loss both individually and collectively, which are explored here with an attention to which they do on their own and which they do in conjunction with others in order to give a sense of action taken in response to the experience of loss in the Colombian context.
Concientización/Consciousness raising. As noted in Chapter 2, consciousness raising is an integral component to personal and social transformation within social movements. The changing of ideas and thoughts through education and contextualization of events helps victims of state violence understand the past and determine what they want to work for in the future. Concientización can be seen first as the process of victims changing their view of the world through contact with human rights representatives and secondly as victims’ attempt to educate other Colombians about what is happening in their country.

All those interviewed said that they became active after having contact with representatives from human rights organizations and in several cases contact with representatives from organizations that specifically work with victims of state crimes. All of the research participants noted that their contact with the human rights workers and volunteers led to a contextualization of their loss, primarily by learning of the motivations behind state violence. All except one reported being personally contacted by a human rights representative or lawyer within the first week of the death of their loved ones. The remaining person did not go public with her loss until one year later, at which time she was contacted by organizational representatives. Their contact with organizations led all of them to change their analysis of state violence from that of a random act, to one that is politically motivated, and increased their knowledge of human rights, historic memory, power and politics in Colombia.

It is important to note that each of these individuals chose to talk to and maintain contact with the human rights workers after making initial contact with them. While those interviewed made the individual decision to work with human rights people after being approached, there are

9 All interviewees noted a change in their perception of the state after their experience of loss, however the specifics what they now think of the Colombian state were not the primary focus of the interviews and therefore are not explored in much depth here.
many victims of state violence who choose not to engage in conversation with human rights representatives or to participate in organizational actions related to state crimes. Although fear is often noted as a reason for why people do not participate, more research is needed to understand the individual experiences that lead victims to choose not to participate. Those who have chosen to maintain contact with human rights workers and volunteers over time expressed that they were motivated to do so due to the contextualization that it gave and the companionship that they felt. This initial contact with organizations is seen as one of the initial steps in the various changes that followed the loss of a family member. This entry into the organizations allows for the following types of actions listed below. The relationships that individuals have with the organizations change over time; some victims becoming organizational leaders while others’ participation wanes.

After the initial process of learning the multiple layers of the Colombian context that have created their experience of traumatic loss, victims often work for the *concientización* of other Colombians. This can be seen in the following actions that are taken in a public way, for example *plantones* and *denuncias* that aim to educate the public about what is happening in Colombia.

**Reuniones/Organizational Meetings.** Victim meetings constitute a collective event where meaning is made amongst the participants through informal conversation and formal organizational proceedings. There are various levels of involvement; those interviewed ranged from the primary organizers of meetings and actions, meaning those who had titles and leadership within the organizations, to members, referring to those who are the organization’s base and participate in meetings and/or events, as well as bystanders who know what actions are
going on but choose not to participate on a regular basis and do not consider themselves organizational members.

One victim, Claudia, notes the meetings can be a place of identity formation:

*It’s really gratifying and you feel good in these things, one feels good in the meetings because there one learns and grows, grows as a person, as a victim, and I believe that if one is dedicated to studying and moving themselves they can do good things for the victims because it’s not about making a meeting center and to just have meetings, it’s to be active.*

For Claudia the organizational meetings provide the format to learn new things in a way that can lead victims to take action, which for her, is the most important part. However, not all victims felt that the meetings are useful. One research participant noted that he had been to many meetings, but didn’t want to go back and definitely did not consider himself a member of the organizations:

*I remember being in many meetings where we spoke of organizing a registry of regional victims and of lands and displacements and all that, but I never saw results […] now I don’t go back to those meetings. Because I see that it’s like, it’s a loss, that it’s a waste of time.*

Organizational meetings remain a place where victim identity can be created and sustained but also a source of frustration at the slow pace of progress when it comes to making tangible change within a difficult social context.

*Conferencias/Conferences.* There are regional and national conferences that bring victims of state crimes and others from various Colombian social movements together periodically, and these spaces represent an important collective meaning making place for those who participate. Generally organized by nation-wide organizations, these conferences vary in size and focus. While working in Colombia I attended several of these types of conferences, including ones that the victims I interviewed had also attended. These conferences generally bring together hundreds of people from across the country who have been negatively impacted by the armed conflict such as victims of extrajudicial killings and family members of the
disappeared. These conferences often include workshops, strategizing, skill building, networking, and include a space for people to publicly give testimonies about their lived experiences. These powerful forums were noted by two of those interviewed, although nearly all reported having traveled to participate in nation-wide or larger regional victim events.

For one person in particular, the experience of attending a national conference is what motivated her to become involved with victim organizations and to become an organizational leader:

I remember, I mean, my coming together, I found out about the organizations work, but most of all the [organization name]. Because I remember I learned about the [organization name] there and I said “aaaaahhh, this is it” and I remember many people, like around 1,200 victims, displaced people, family members of the disappeared, executions, well many families and I have never seen nor thought that there were so many people who were victims. So then everything that they worked on there, the movement strategies, well all these things that they did for those three days I think it was, I said, well, this is it. This has to be it.

Like her experience, several of those interviewed noted that larger nation-wide events fueled their motivation to work with organizations and on their own particular cases. While less emphasized, several others noted having attended large-scale events, such as national and regional conferences, that were important to them.

Memoria Histórica/Historical Memory. Historical memory serves to both quantify state violence in terms of making sure that these killings are documented but also qualitatively in that historic memory aims to talk about who the person was and the importance of their life and legacy. It is woven throughout many victim actions and is used to refer to the preservation of the memory of the dead by getting the word out about who they were and how they were killed due to state violence. Historic memory can also refer to the aim of creating a larger historical account of state violence so that there is a historical record of such crimes. Because Colombia’s armed conflict has not officially ended there has not been an official truth commission to clarify the acts of violence so that, as a nation, there can be a systemic attempt to seek truth, justice, and
reparation in an attempt to move forward. Based on victim experiences in other Latin American countries that have strived to overcome armed conflict, historic memory has been seen at times as an important part of peace and reconciliation processes. It is specifically a way for sectors of the population which are historically excluded and marginalized to tell their stories and to have them collectively documented in order to participate in public life.

Commemorative events usually reflect historic memory such as those that mark anniversaries of loved ones deaths, important dates for international and national human rights. All except two of those interviewed mentioned historic memory as an important aspect of their participation. Some mentioned books, book markers, posters, murals, banners, business cards, and other materials that all strived to preserve historic memory. The idea of these materials is that their distribution helps educate others about both the person and the type of violence that led to their death along with the impunity for those who commit such crimes.

Several of those interviewed mentioned holding on to the goods belonging to their lost loved one as a way to preserve their memory such as their clothes, books, and music. For Jairo who lost his young son to the armed forces, keeping his things is a way of keeping his son alive:

“My son will continue to be alive inside of me and I want him to be alive for everyone so from there I began to learn about historic memory and I continued on in this struggle as much as I could. My son isn’t with us at home but I continue to wait for him, I’m still waiting, there are his things, his books, his clothes, so this is historic memory. Over time, I want over the years and centuries people remember a student who was cowardly assassinated […] in an act of state terrorism.

Holding on to his goods is a way to assure that his son is kept alive through historic memory and that others remember him. As Jairo’s narrative shows, historic memory is preserved both through physical goods belonging to the lost loved and through the representation of the dead by means of symbolic actions. Another example of this is Claudia who made the link between keeping the
memory of her father alive symbolically through historic memory and her participation with organizations:

_The victim has rights and all, you learn that in those talks, in the marches that you go to, and you don’t go just to go but you go in representation of that person that now isn’t here and this is a symbol that we are telling the world about or telling the people in our city about what is happening, and what happened and I feel good because what happened to us isn’t something that can be erased for us and I feel that in the moment that I am participating in order to keep my father’s memory alive._

For Claudia, participation functions as both a way to keep her father’s memory alive and as a way to educate the public about state violence in the hopes that it will not continue to be so rampant.

For one disheartened victim, historic memory represents the one area where his actions can have an impact. In speaking of the many actions that he took in the two years following his son’s death, Jairo notes:

_But in summary, nothing came out of it, nothing worked. Ah, one thing did, historic memory. Maybe a few people are going to keep the memory of all that the father of Alvaro did, a march, a movie, a song, some parks, some murals…_

Given a context in which victims of state crimes face high levels of impunity and political exclusion, historic memory appears to be one action that individuals feel can still be effective.

**Denuncia/ Denouncement.** Denouncing the murders of loved ones was extremely important to all the interviewed victims of state crimes. Denouncements can be carried out in two important and related ways. First off, to denounce meant to literally go into governmental offices and fill out the paperwork to report the crime and to officially document the occurrences for victims of state crimes. Secondly, to denounce also meant to publicly express and reject what had happened. The public denouncement often happens at events, marches, and protests and serves as a way to involve the public in the case by appealing to other citizens to see the victims’ situation and to empathize with them. Publicly speaking out is also a way to garner support for
the actual legal case proceedings by employing the notion that others will then help build public pressure on the government to bring justice in the particular cases of injustice once they hear the denouncement. In this sense, *la denuncia* is the first step in achieving justice through the legal system as well as the public rejection of the murders with the objective of garnering public support against these types of killings.

The *denuncia* is carried out in both individual and collective ways. When used as a form of public outcry at other actions (such as protests and marches) individuals often bring their own historic memory materials the represent their dead loved ones and use them to educate others and to publicly denounce the crimes in a collective way. When denouncing in the halls of governmental offices the individual was much more likely to be taking action on their own or at times supported by their lawyer, who in many cases was not specialized in human rights abuses.

Although all mentioned the importance of the *denuncia*, there are several narratives regarding denouncing that are worth highlighting. Luz Marina who lost her daughter to state violence noted that the denouncement is an important part of her actions: “*because to me the denouncement is very important, the denouncement is more important for me than a meeting.*”

Sara also placed important meaning on the act of denouncing - for her the denouncement as the only certainty in an uncertain world:

> Right now I’m not sure that the country’s situation can change. But I am sure that you have to denounce, that you have to bring to light what happens, it can’t stay hidden, this is the only thing I know. Is this going to help? I don’t know, if it’s going to get worse, I wouldn’t know. But come what may, whatever happens, if the situation gets better or worse, the human rights violations in Colombia, whatever happens, I am sure that what has to happen is that people have to make these types of crimes visible. They can’t remain forgotten, they can’t remain quiet so that these things keep happening, this is the only sure thing I’ve got.

Sara’s words reflect a lack of hope for actual, tangible progress for the country in terms of violence and impunity, but also a sense that one “must” actively denounce. For her, despite the
lack of real results in the short-term, she sees that the only option that provides the possibility of reducing violence in the long run is to denounce.

Denouncements seem to be particularly strong in the time immediately following the death of a loved one, although they appear to remain as long as there is no justice, which was true for nearly all of those interviewed. When asked why she decided to participate in various actions after her father’s murder, Daniela highlighted that her actions are both about solidarity with others and assuring that there is a public denouncement of the crimes with the aim of changing the behavior of the state:

“I feel that it’s necessary to do it, that it’s necessary not only for a process or so that there’s a judicial process but that it’s necessary to do it because simply we have to vindicate in some way, I mean those human beings that these crimes were committed against, I mean to vindicate their names, to revive what they wanted to do, what they were, as a way to tell, like to be reminding what it is to kill someone and that this someone wasn’t just whatever, like reminding also the state, the state itself, telling it: Look, see, you committed this murder and the state is responsible too in some form, I think that this helps a lot in these types of things, I think that’s why.”

Daniela overall finds taking action useful and she highlights solidarity and denouncing as motivating reasons for her actions. She notes that restoring her father’s name is a principle focus, which is explored a bit later as is the sense of solidarity and belonging that comes from taking action for some victims.

**Plantones/Protests.** Many interviewed mentioned participating in **plantones**, which literally translated means a sit-in, but in the Colombian context it has particular meaning. While it may conjure up images from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in which people used sit-ins as a form of social protest that usually ended in arrests, a **plantón** for those interviewed was more of a stationary protest or vigil carried out in a public space. It involves an individual or a group of people standing in a public place with materials such as flowers, candles, and banners, pamphlets, and signs that denounce cases of state violence. **Plantón** participants often talk to and interact with the public as they walk by as a form of consciousness raising. **Plantones** both serve
to publicly denounce state violence and also as a way to educate the public, preserve historic
memory, and call for justice.

Plantones have been used throughout Latin America in recent history by groups decrying
state violence. Possibly the most famous of these groups are the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo
(Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) from Argentina. This group of mothers originally formed in
1977 in response to their experiences of having sons and daughters tortured, disappeared, and
killed during Argentina’s war from 1976-1983 (Borland, 2006). They first gathered together to
denounce the crimes in governmental offices, and then took their denouncement public,
eventually converting into nationally and internationally recognized heroines for democracy and
human rights by 1983 (Borland, 2006). Most of them were politically inactive housewives with
little formal education. However their usage of maternity as a tool of identity politics to expose
Argentina’s state violence responsible for killing 30,000 people is lauded by many around the
world. Their vision and work has expanded since 1983 and they now remain active through two
groups that speak out about neoliberalism, poverty, and human rights. They have participated in
victim events in Colombia and their example was an inspiration to several of those interviewed.

Luz Marina mentioned the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo several times in her interview,
exposing how they have been an inspiration in other Latin American countries and have set the
stage for the plantón as a form of action that leads to truth and justice in the context of armed
conflict: “I have wanted to make, like a Plaza de Mayo, where all of us mothers would meet up,
all the families, this is my dream, to make a Plaza de Mayo.” In part, learning from these
Argentinean mothers, plantones represent a place where victims come together for their common
cause and as such they are seen as important, and even sacred for some of those interviewed.
Drawing on her high opinion of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Luz Marina noted that: “The
plantones are important, they should be sacred.” Similarly, she sees plantones as festive spaces where victims come together not to mourn but to celebrate: “When there aren’t plantones I even get sad, when there are plantones for me it’s like a party that I’m going to denounce…I’m not afraid to denounce, for me it’s incredible at a plnton”.

Plantones are most often seen as collective events that are put together by the organizations to commemorate special dates, although one woman interviewed mentioned having organized her own plantón due to her feeling that there was a lack of support from organizations for her case:

I’ve done plantones alone. I go to the [name of] plaza and those who want to accompany me can, of course [name of organization] never accompanies me, I have invited them and no, nope, so I have gone, for example, sometimes [a friend] goes and we bring our photographs there […] I denounce on my own because what else can I do?

Her sense of exclusion is explored further later on in this chapter, but what is significant here is that she feels that denouncing through plantones is so important that she will risk doing it on her own. She even noted being harassed much more when she did these types of events on her own. Overall, plantones appear to be a space that can fulfill the need to preserve historic memory, publicly denounce state violence, and create and maintain a sense of victim identity.

Otras Actividades/Other actions. In addition to these actions, there were other actions that individuals mentioned once and were attributed to individual agency (not collective). Victims employed a range of skills to carry out these actions, many of which signified a change for the individuals who had never embarked on such actions prior to their experience of loss. For example, Jairo mentioned being “a man of few words” prior to the death of his son and now considers himself a vocal advocate for justice and has become comfortable engaging with the media, doing speaking events, and other actions.
Other actions that were mentioned included the writing of books about their experience, creating video and photo montages, using Facebook to get the word out about ones’ particular case, marching to Bogotá to call attention to several years of impunity, and, in one woman’s neighborhood, collecting signatures vouching that the victim was not a guerrilla. All of these actions, while not widespread, show a sense of individual creative agency in which these victims engaged to try to achieve justice. Although reported as individual actions, they also were collective in nature at times in that they were often accompanied by other victims and sometimes by the organizations as well.

To conclude, the actions that are taken by victims of state violence are multiple, complex, and overlapping. Individuals at times see themselves as instigators of their own actions and at other times feel the need to participate with others in the actions that they take. Many different actions were talked about during the interviews as were multiple views about their efficacy and impact both individually and collectively. Next I explore what meanings the victims give to these actions and what they imply for their sense of self.

**What do Actions Mean for the Sense of Self: Obligation, Belonging, and Exclusion**

Now that it has been established what victims do in terms of actions pertaining to their experience of traumatic loss, the question remains: what meanings do victims of state crimes ascribe to their actions and what do those meanings signify for their identities? The interviews showed that all of these actions and their associated meanings are full of challenges and contradictions. The above list of actions begins to shed light on how individual victims feel about their participation in actions post-loss and here I delve deeper into what these actions mean to the participants and their sense of self. In doing so, three principle themes emerge: Obligation, Belonging, and Exclusion.
Obligation. A profound sense of obligation to take action was embedded in all the narratives of those interviewed. The word obligation comes from the Latin obligationem, meaning “engaging”, “pledging” or “binding”, thus locating obligation as an action verb of being bound by promises, law, or a sense of duty[^10]. Almost all victims I spoke with expressed a sense of obligation to take action after their traumatic loss that was experienced as a calling, a deeply rooted commitment. At its most basic level, this summons to take action was felt in terms of there being no other option than to do what they had done. Their stories show that for them, there was “no choice” but to denounce, become involved, and to take action. The political nature of the violence that created their traumatic loss appears to necessitate reaction - it is a type of violence that carries with it a responsibility to do something in response.

In examining what lies beneath their sense of obligatory agency, several subthemes emerge. First, there is a sense of the obligation to do something, to participate in actions in general that is rooted in individual histories and identities and has tangible impacts on everyday life. Secondly, there is a sense of the obligation to the dead as shown through the importance placed on returning honor to the slain loved one. Several victims were able to feel connected directly to the dead through their obligation to take action to restore honor to their names. While this encompasses several of the above-mentioned themes, it most directly relates to the need to achieve justice through the state in order to come closer to truth, justice, and reparation. Lastly, some have a felt need to carry out their obligation to their country through their actions. This obligation to Colombia is, in a sense, creating what it means to be a Colombian citizen today and is in part based on the desire to make sure that what has happened to them does not happen to others. Their belief that their actions will make tangible change is somewhat limited and there

appears to be a lack of hope for true justice to be realized anytime soon. Overall, their sense of obligation is multi-faceted and strengthens victims’ connections to the dead, their country, and themselves and reflects how individual victims’ identities are formed through action.

**Obligation to do Something.** What does a sense of obligation mean for one’s identity? Where does the need to participate come from and what does it mean for day-to-day life? Many victims noted that they were obligated to take action both on their own and with others regarding their individual cases and trying to stop state violence. As Astrid noted, once she had lost her son and learned about what was happening in the country, there was no choice other than to do something - in particular to support other members of the victim community:

> It’s really painful to hear the stories, it makes you sad but at the same time you want to accompany them. Because you go along accompanying, you accompany them, it makes you depressed but at the same time you have to accompany them.

She notes that accompanying others is not optional but that “It’s necessary, it’s a bad necessity”, reflecting that she feels that it’s an uncomfortable choice, but in essence there is no option but to do something once you’ve lived through traumatic loss due to state violence.

As highlighted through their stories, the sense of obligation to take action is not seen as optional, yet for many it is. Many victims of state crimes never speak out or denounce their loss, so where does this sense of duty come from for those who do take action? For Daniela, having to fight back is based on what she felt is “inside” of her:

> I believe that when one deals with saying: Well, my father’s name has to be defended because my father wasn’t what those people say. I believe that there’s something there from childhood, in their upbringing from when they were little that stuck with them from their parents, what they are taught when they are young, like ‘my daughter, you have to do this in this way because this isn’t done well like that or you have to be honest because or you have to be responsible because, I believe that these things come from within and when all that happened with my dad I believe they arise because you, well, its like I have these values so I can’t leave it that…or that they would make fun of someone or like that my dad’s name be left like that.

Her sense of duty comes from a moral imperative and ties her back to lessons she learned from her deceased father, in a way linking her directly to him. In this sense, her decision to take action
is an obligation that connects her to her father’s legacy. Daniela also noted that this sense of duty to take action functioned as a way to escape the experience of loss immediately following her father’s death. In speaking of the weeks following his murder, she, along with other family members actively worked to denounce the case and work for justice:

*There was this rush, I think that there was this rush then because we had to do it and to go out and denounce right there because if not he would be forgotten and all that, and this was also a way to not think about the reality I think because you left and arrived at home worn out and fell asleep, so it was a way to also think in the case that my dad had died.*

The rush to denounce her father’s death reflects her need to respond to the violence and serves as a form of productive denial of the loss. In a sense, taking action in some cases can serve as a way to not sit idle with the pain caused by traumatic loss.

This sense of obligatory duty following the death of a loved one also brings about changes to one’s day-to-day life. Sara noted that her sense of self had been significantly altered in terms of what she does and what it means to her after her experience of loss and the subsequent actions she took. For her, it signified a great sacrifice in time and energy but it also gave her a sense of purpose and identity. In speaking of whether she would settle in the case if given the chance, she noted that her fight for justice makes her who she is: “*If I received that money I would hang myself immediately, no way. That would be zero, I mean for me it is my essence, I am who I am through this.*” It is her sense of obligation that creates and sustains her identity given her experience of loss. As she notes, she is herself in part due to the actions that she takes in regards to this difficult loss. She notes that this change in her sense of self was compulsory: “*I’ve changed […] I’m not sure if I’ve changed for better or for worse, but I had to, the word is, I don’t know, obligatory.*” These obligatory changes are difficult to navigate and signify personal sacrifice:
For many years now I haven’t lived, I mean living isn’t getting up, getting dressed, leaving - no, this isn’t living. To live is to enjoy life, I mean to live your life, this is living, well then we also say that this being, living, well those things are there too…very terrible

Her last comment draws out the contradictions and paradoxes that mark her experience. She is who she is through her experience of struggle, but she also knows that it has come at great personal cost. The feeling of being “between a rock and a hard place” is what appears to birth her sense of obligation without any choice in regards to her actions.

**Obligation to the Dead.** The felt obligation to the dead was seen in two primary ways. First, obligation is experienced as the need to defend the honor of the dead by clearing their name after their death, especially in cases of false positives and extrajudicial killings. For most of those interviewed, the media had covered the story of their family members murders most often by promulgating army reports stating that they had killed a guerrilla terrorist. Families of the victims were then left not only to deal with their loss but also with the struggle to publicly clarify that the person was not a guerrilla in order to preserve their honor. For many interviewed, restoring honor to the name of the person who was killed became their primary focus. Secondly, this obligation to the dead is seen in the connection that individual victims feel to the dead when they participate in various actions relating to their loss. Victims felt that they were fulfilling their direct obligation to the dead as a way to honor the dead but also to actually keep the dead alive, or present in another form.

The obligation to restore the honor of the dead was an important part of their motivation to take action post loss for several of those interviewed. Daisi, a young woman whose brother was killed by the army reported feeling a “very difficult pain” stemming from her murdered brother being accused of being a guerrilla terrorist. For Daisi, clearing her brother’s name was one of the most important things after his death. She went door-to-door in her neighborhood collecting signatures from family friends who could vouch that he was not a guerrilla but a hard
working young man. Her words reflect that justice in her brother’s case is key to restoring his name:

I’m not thinking about money, what I need is for there to be justice and that my brother’s good name is restored because he wasn’t a guerrilla, this is what bothers me the most at times, to pass on his good name.

Daisi’s brother’s name and his honor are shown to be very important. While her brother’s death continues to bring her immense pain, above and beyond the pain is the hurt stemming from the label the army gave him. Her plea to clear his name means seeking justice, specifically restoring his honor by clarifying exactly what happened, and admission of guilt by perpetrators. When asked what this justice would mean to her she noted that “most importantly that they say what they did and how they went about saying they were guerrillas, that they say that they killed them, that they took them away with lies and killed them”.

Similarly, another young woman, Daniela, reported extreme rage at both her father’s death and the accusation that he was a guerrilla:

I think in my own case [...] there was so much rage, so much rage there because they had killed my father [...] because you have to do something, this can’t remain this way, it’s like this indignation, like this indignation about what happened and that it would stay that way and if we’re quiet and then sure my dad is going to keep this title that they gave him.

Daniela’s rage led her to take many actions and, in doing so, to connect with other victims. For her, attaining justice through the state is only one aspect of justice - what is equally important is that her father’s honor is publicly restored.

The second aspect of the obligation to the dead is the connection an individual victim feels to the dead when they participate in various actions relating to their loss. By participating in actions that aim to restore honor to the dead, several victims felt that they were fulfilling their direct obligation to the dead and also keeping the deceased alive through their actions which in turn provided them with the strength to keep fighting for justice.
For Sara, her sense of obligation to her father was directly related to providing a sense of peace for her father, especially given that, in her view, he worked so hard during his life and that he never was able to enjoy his life:

*My father worked so much, so hard, he sacrificed so much during his life and one day they came and killed him and did all that they did to him, and he never enjoyed his life, he didn’t enjoy it. And I understood this, I mean I understand his sacrifice a lot…and that why, that’s why sometimes I have tried to give him a little peace, of the soul, for example, some retribution.*

Sara’s sense of obligation relates to both who her father was, specifically what he wasn’t but was accused of being, and the need to restore his name so that he can be at peace. She goes on to say:

*For me it would have been impossible, no, to have forgotten, I mean, this pain that in the end…because it is the pain, so then I’m saying it loudly, I mean I am defending his name, that’s to say my moral and ethical commitment with him, with my dad […], I am saying for example, I couldn’t have his photo there, to stand up, to be leaving and I stand up and I see him, I wouldn’t be able to look at him in the eyes knowing that I didn’t do anything or that they accused him, what they did to him, what they said, and that I was afraid.*

In her eyes, Sara’s choice to take action was not a choice. To do anything else would have been “impossible”, reflecting how she lives out her commitment and connection to her father everyday by working to clear his name by bringing justice to his case. For Sara, given her experience of losing her father to the army unjustly and also being one of the first to arrive at the scene of the crime, she felt there was not other option but to take action:

*I don’t have a way to explain it, I don’t know how to tell someone [what it’s like] after knowing what happened, what I saw, I mean, what happened, what I felt when I saw him, well, I, I mean, I can’t do anything else.*

Similar to Sara, Luz Marina specifically and repeatedly highlighted that by living out her obligation to seek justice in the case of her deceased daughter, Laura, she was in essence connecting with her daughter through her actions. The stories shared in the interview reflected her high opinion of Laura. Luz Marina felt that Laura was such an honorable person that her death motivated Luz Marina to show the world that her daughter was not a guerrilla, but a very honorable young woman. In speaking about the stigma associated with being called a guerrilla,
she notes: “I’m not going to let Laura stay like that, not while I’m alive” and that because she was such a great person she had to “clarify her death.”

Luz Marina connects to her daughter through her actions - she will never forget Laura by continuing to participate. Luz Marina had participated in actions relating to human rights sporadically before her experience of loss because Laura had brought her along to actions while attending the university. Through these actions, Luz Marina was able to connect with her daughter on a personal level, however her true perception of what is happening in Colombia remained neutral until Laura’s death:

My daughter was right […] I had to live it with my own flesh to be able to understand that everything that my daughter said was the truth about what is happening here in Colombia, about the false positives, the displaced, about all the injustices that are committed here in Colombia with everyone, how the people are trampled, in order for me to see, they had to kill my daughter for me to see and to say: yes, Laura was right.

Once Luz Marina connected the larger situation facing the country with her experience of loss as well as what her daughter had fought for while she was alive, she was able to fuel her own actions, drawing on her daughter’s zeal for justice.

Luz Marina’s deep sense of appreciation for her daughter’s dedication and her ability to help others grew with her passing. Luz Marina noted that her daughter would have taken action if she were alive and that Luz Marina, by taking action, is connected to Laura:

The reason I always go to these marches, what I yell, what I protest and all of that, I feel that she is saying to me, “that’s it Mom, do it Mom!” Since that’s how she was and so I say, yeah, I’m doing what she would have done, right? What she would do because if the same thing had happened to me maybe she would have done the same you see? So I say, no, I have to fight so that there is justice for her because she was very important for me and for many people.

Victims’ connection to the dead extends beyond their memories of the deceased. Several victims noted that their actions actually keep their lost loved ones alive and that their actions are what maintain their presence even years after their deaths. In a sense, the dead are in fact not
gone forever because of the actions that their family members take honoring them. For those who take action, their identity is created through their actions that keep the dead alive and is maintained through their ongoing and dynamic relationship to the dead.

Luz Marina not only feels connected to her daughter Laura by taking actions that she believes Laura would have taken, but she has a sense that the actions keep Laura alive and present:

*I’m there because Laura is there, because she would be there, Laura would be in a plantón like this, where everyone is hand in hand, I went with her to this, for all of it, I was there with her, that’s why I want to go, to be there with Laura there because I know that she is going to be there.*

Luz Marina tearfully noted over and over again what a wonderful person her daughter was - how she cared for others and about justice. In order to keep Laura alive, she is obligated to take action in her honor:

*I dream of her and she says to me: Mother, for all of life I will be with you, you don’t see me but I am at your side she says and I’ll only go away when you forget me, she says, if you forget me I’ll go, but I’m there with you and you aren’t going to see me and I’m at your side, that’s how she says it, she says to me: Mom, this was going to happen, this was going to happen, I had to go, that’s how she is in my dreams, she appears to me and she says: As long as you don’t forget me, I’m at your side.*

Luz Marina’s actions keep her daughter alive. She can be with Laura through her participation and her obligation to the dead is seen very explicitly in that she senses that her daughter is present at the actions and in her dreams encouraging her to continue remembering her so that she will live on.

Jairo expressed a similar sentiment of keeping his dead son, Alvaro, alive through his actions. For Jairo, his son’s death indicated a change in their relationship, but it has not removed their relationship or even his son’s presence in Jairo’s life:

*Look, this is something that I learned, it’s how I felt, it’s something that was born from a feeling and when [Alvaro] dies, he...I said my son has gone away from here, from the earth, but not for me, no. He will continue to be alive inside of me and I want him to be alive for everyone so from there I began to learn about historic memory and I continued on in this struggle as much as I*
could. My son isn’t with us at home but I continue to wait for him, I’m still waiting, there are his things, his books, his clothes, so this is historic memory.

Jairo’s son is not dead to him, but instead quite alive. Their relationship has changed in both very real, but also imagined and symbolic ways with his son’s murder. Jairo’s connection to his son develops and changes through his actions and how he carries out historic memory:

What I aim for now is that his image is never forgotten. That he is present here and in every corner of the world. That he reminds the criminals, the people who are in charge of repression, that this shouldn’t be. And as a person Alvaro will never be forgotten for me, because he is my son and he is here even though he has died, for me he alive.

For Jairo, taking action not only changes his identity, but also the way he interacts with and conceptualizes his slain son. By taking action Jairo is honoring his son, but also keeping him very much alive and present in everyday life. While this sentiment was very much present for both Luz Marina and Jairo, more research is needed to understand how victims of state crimes conceptualize death, afterlife, and spirituality that guide and shape their relationship to the dead.

The obligation to the dead represents a very important aspect of victim motivation to take action. Fulfilling one’s duty to the dead fuels identity and how individual victims think of themselves after experiences of loss. Victims carry out their obligation to the dead in various ways - by working to clear the name of those killed and connecting to the dead through action. Their actions at times can keep the dead symbolically present and therefore alive in addition to restoring their honor and living out their legacy through action.

**Obligation to the country.** The obligation to take action after loss in some cases went beyond the obligation to the dead and extended to a felt responsibility towards Colombia as a country, albeit a complex and complicated sense of duty. The obligation to Colombia as a geopolitical space implies a sense of belonging to and ownership over Colombia and requires individual victims to uphold their responsibility to take action, in the cases explored here taking
action often meant to demand that the state fulfill its obligation to its citizens to end impunity for state violence. As noted before, victims of state crimes represent sectors of the population that have historically been excluded from politics in a weak state and even more fragile nation, therefore their actions indicate taking on a new role as responsible Colombian citizens after their experience of traumatic loss.

Given that none of the victims interviewed were active in Colombian politics prior to their experience of loss, there is a sense that they are now navigating the mostly uncharted territory of citizenship through their actions. This trend can be dissected further by looking at the particular patterns of concientización and action faced by those interviewed. The stories shared showed that individual experiences of traumatic loss at the hands of the state leads victims to question their preconceived notions of the state through concientización that leads them to understand that Colombia’s democracy and rule of law has deeply rooted and quite significant problems and as well as tightly entrenched political violence. Through this process, those interviewed decided to take action and to denounce the state crimes. Many interviewed mentioned that they were initially confident that they would quickly find justice through the court system but that the subsequent years of waiting for the impunity to end had left them somewhat disheartened that justice through the Colombian state would ever be possible. Despite the lack of hope for significant change in the high impunity levels and the lack of political will to persecute state crimes, the research participants continued to take action regarding their experience of traumatic loss and, in doing so, they are creating a form of citizenship that responds to the current Colombian social context that includes continued political exclusion and the façade of democracy. In a sense, they become active agents in creating a new country instead of passive subjects.
It’s important to note that the victims did not indicate a sense of hope for a better future for Colombia, but instead had a vision that if the rule of law is ever to work, citizens have a role to fulfill by denouncing crimes and therefore fulfilling their responsibility as Colombians. Although those interviewed did not have experiences of an effective rule of law, there was a sense that although the judicial system does not work now, if it is to ever properly function in the future, citizens must do something now. This process situates them in a new “state victim” position within Colombian civil society and in doing so contributes to the formation of a new Colombian citizenship that reflects and molds the current social context.

It is also important to note that the obligation to society was limited - not everyone spoke of it. In general, those interviewed did not have a naïve belief that things are “bound to get better” and hope was never mentioned as a motivating factor for their actions. At times they explicitly expressed that they didn’t have hopes that their actions would tangibly change the social context, however, their resilience appears to be more based on what I would term a lack of hopelessness. This double negative term reflects their sense of obligation to do something without any true hope for successful outcomes in terms of justice, truth, and reparation in the near future. Future studies are needed regarding how political violence in Colombia impacts victims’ specific belief in democracy, governance, and using non-violent means towards change.

Of those interviewed, Sara provides the most clearly articulated sense of obligation to the nation that guides her actions regarding her father’s death. While her primary motivations for taking actions were rooted in her ethical and moral obligation to her father, her sense of obligation also extended to Colombia as a floundering country, albeit an obligation that she was much less hopeful would have an impact due to the years of action with little progress in terms of justice. In her words:
If we want a different country, if we are constructing this differently and that those of us who are victims, who have birthed this pain, really, no, it’s like no one wants another to go through this and that in this want that no one goes through the same thing is, is this, it is to denounce the crimes.

Her words reflect her belief that, as a Colombian, she has the responsibility to help create another country, another context, in order to make sure that others don’t have to live through what she had to. She appears to feel she is fulfilling her role as a responsible daughter and also a civilian, reflecting her self-image as an active citizen and as an agent in creating a new Colombia. It’s clear that due to her lack of political engagement prior to her loss she has navigated this territory of citizenship without many guides and has learned by doing so and in the process has also created what citizenship can mean in the current Colombian context. She goes on to note that her commitment to her country is also a moral obligation:

*I took it on as my moral commitment, to clean his name, that’s it. I have to do this. This is it, as a daughter, but like I told them the other day, it’s a commitment as a citizen. My civil duty and my moral duty, I mean, as a citizen to denounce, the same way everyone has to, and as a daughter because I couldn’t do any less, it is to fulfill what I have to do…*

Sara’s sense of civilian responsibility does not include a real hope that things will change any time soon. She denounces the state crimes not because she thinks it will have an immediate and tangible impact, but because if the rule of law is ever to properly function there has to be a precedence of citizen pressure on the government to end impunity for state crimes. As noted above, this is her one certainty:

*Right now I’m not sure that the country’s situation can change. But I am sure that you have to denounce, that you have to bring to light what happens, it can’t stay hidden, this is the only thing I know. Is this going to help? I don’t know, if it’s going to get worse, I wouldn’t know. But come what may, whatever happens, if the situation gets better or worse, the human rights violations in Colombia, whatever happens, I am sure that what has to happen is that people have to make these types of crimes visible. They can’t remain forgotten, they can’t remain quiet so that these things keep happening, this is the only sure thing I’ve got.*
Sara’s words were echoed by another victim, Claudia, who noted that for her, speaking out about what has happened was fulfilling her obligation to society as related to preserving historical memory:

*Well, because I like it, I mean, I like these things a lot. I think that in one way or another this helps, like, so that they recognize you, or are at least recognized as a victim. I think to be in theses places helps keep clear who are the victims because if no one gets together, maybe they would disappear, I mean, no one would know that this had happened to a group of people.*

Colombia has not had any successful official peace processes or subsequent truth commissions to uncover and document the breadth of the political violence in the country. Therefore, taking part in actions becomes a way to make sure that the dead are not forgotten both personally and politically. Sara and Claudia’s sense of obligation to improve their country is reflective of Latin American countries that have depended on citizens to ensure that truth, justice, and reparation were realized in order to come closer to resolving armed conflicts. As noted earlier, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo played this role and were recognized for it once the dictatorship was ended. Colombia, however, remains a country with ongoing armed conflict and as such, there is a need for citizens to speak out about injustice and they are often targeted instead of rewarded for their contributions to building a truly democratic Colombia.

In summary, obligation to the nation is an important but limited sense of duty to change Colombia. For some, there is a real sense that real change is extremely unlikely but that there is no other choice than to advocate for needed changes. This lack of hope for the nation reflects a sense that they are between a rock and a hard place and therefore can do nothing but continue to take action, however, in doing so, they are creating what it means to be a Colombian citizen today.

A sense of obligation is reflected in various ways. It can strengthen the connection to the self and the dead as well as create a new form of citizenship that reflects the current Colombian
context in order to produce a new self narrative that incorporates their experience of traumatic loss. Obligation is expressed through the feeling that there was no choice other than to take action and that by taking action, the victims are in fact defining themselves, in a sense creating their identity through action. Carrying out their sense of obligation to the dead not only honors the victim and strives to bring them peace but also reflects a sense of keeping the dead alive and present. By acting out their obligation victims are relating to others (including the dead) and also creating a new idea of what it means to be a Colombian citizen today. Next I focus on how actions taken reflect a sense of building connections with a victim community that grants a sense of belonging for many victims.

**Belonging**

Knowing what actions victims take in regards to their loss and the obligation they feel to take such actions, I now turn to how those actions influence their sense of self. Victims interviewed spoke about how the actions they take with others created a sense of belonging to a *victim community* with a common identity. They repeatedly said that collective actions represented spaces where they felt at home, good about themselves, and could share in a common pain and struggle. This sense of belonging comes from physically being in a place where they can identify themselves with others that share a common experience of traumatic loss; being with others to whom they can closely relate often provides victims a feeling that they are supported and grants them a sense of companionship. This expressed sense of belonging is not allied with any particular organization, but rather with the larger community of victims of state violence. However, organizations and events were also seen as places and spaces where victim identity was created, maintained, recognized, and united for those interviewed. This sense
of belonging to a group appears to grant victims a sense of agency and strength that they do not feel as deeply when engaging in individual actions.

Organizations working with victims of state violence have the ability to provide spaces where identity is created and by sponsoring events, meetings, and activities where victims come together to share with one another in collective meaning making. According to Hall (1997), “meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we belong” and that “meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part” (p. 3). Organizations, therefore, have the possibility of representing spaces where meaning can be collectively made, which then fuels a sense of identity. Spaces for identity formation locally and nationally in Colombia, and therefore identification as a victim, indicates both a local and national identity within the Colombian social and political context. Choosing to identify as a victim of state crimes then means that one is plugged into a national network of people with a common shared identity and have the same or similar demands of the state. These national identifications, at an organizational level, can be tools in overcoming the social trauma of violence; taking on the victim identity plugs individuals into a network of demands of the state and action strategies to support the victims. Belonging to the victim community can help the self navigate internal and external worlds after traumatic loss. This has been true in other places that have been marked by violence as well; the aim of the violence found in many Latin American armed conflicts is to shatter the victim’s sense of self and to destroy one’s sense of belonging, community ties, and political affiliations (Hernández, 2002, p. 24). Therefore, to foster a sense of belonging to a community specifically centered on fighting state violence is also, theoretically, a way to lessen the felt effects of violence.
Identification through Participation. Participating with others in collective actions is what builds and maintains the identity of victim of state violence within the Colombian context. As Claudia talked about how it was often hard to find the time to participate, she noted that she felt she needed to go and participate in actions because, in her words, “I have to identify myself with these people, I mean these situations create victim identification.” This identification with others in collective spaces is not always an easy process. There are many demands on people’s time and while many noted feeling good while working with others, reliving and/or being reminded of their painful experience of loss is not always a pleasant experience. Astrid, who lost her son to state violence, spoke of how she identifies with other victims when she participates in large-scale events, but that it isn’t always an easy thing:

Yeah, well, you, it hurts a lot but at the same time since all the people that are there are victims, well you, you feel that these people understand you. Not like other people because they haven’t had the same experiences so they don’t understand what you feel. So when you’re with people who have had the same experiences you identify with them more.

As noted in Chapter 2, experiences of trauma often shatter one’s assumptions about how the world is ordered and this was shown to be true for those interviewed who noted a change in their way of thinking and perceptions of the world after their traumatic loss. This shift can make it hard to connect with others who haven’t had the same experience, as Astrid’s words state. Feeling that others understand your experience, especially when done in conjunction with the contextualization of state violence, can be an important component to coping with a traumatic loss.

Participation Feels Good. On a very basic level, many victims reported that their participation was based on how it made them feel, specifically that it made them feel good. The positive feelings associated with participation varied from person to person and have shifted over
time. For Claudia, the process of participation with others signified learning, growth, support, and connection:

It’s beautiful to see how the people go out and scream the name of the person that isn’t here anymore, to yell their slogan and to also demand that those who have killed know that there are people that are the voice of the people who have died. I feel good when I have accompanied [events] for example there have been few [events], the situations where the people in their commemorations of their family members because you identify with the person, […] I feel good, I feel good at that moment, you feel good because there is someone helping you because it isn’t an easy situation, it’s a very difficult situation in many cases […] it’s really gratifying and you feel good in these things, one feels good in the meetings because there one learns and grows, grows as a person, as a victim […] when I have been in those places I feel good […] and I also have identified a lot due to the fact I have and that I am relating to these people, I mean, that’s why I think I feel good.

Claudia locates a very key part of why individual victims decide to participate in collective actions: because it feels good. In her words, she identifies with people through relating to them in collective spaces and it provides her with a sense of connection. Despite the hardship, she feels good participating in actions with others and it is a source of personal growth.

Others reported a similar sentiment, although it appears to change for people over time. Several interviewees noted feeling very integrated and connected to others during the year immediately following their loss, but also felt that their connections to the organizations had changed in the five years since their initial loss (see Exclusion) and, as such, so has their sense of connection. One such case is that of Luz Marina who noted that at first she felt very at home within the organizational settings during the first year following her daughter’s death:

I felt like really integrated, very united, like I had the support of the organizations […] they were such dear people and I felt at home, like I could express my things to them, everything, right? They have gone to the cemetery with me, to the lighting, they are there with me, there, even for the lighting in December.

For Luz Marina, she felt accompanied by others during key moments of her mourning including during the holidays and for visits to the cemetery. Her sense of being supported led her to feel that she belonged, that she was comfortable, in her words she was “at home.” The ability to share her feelings and be supported leads her to feel an important sense of belonging with others.
The Same Pain. Many said that the core of their common identity with other victims was based on experiencing the same pain. Astrid noted the difference between imagined experience versus real lived, felt experience as what produced a sense of identification with others:

You feel identified because the person feels the same pain that you feel. Well, it’s not the same to imagine the suffering, to imagine what if they assassinated my son. Ah, it’s already happened. So you feel identified because these people understand the pain that you have. It’s like, like they accompany you in the sorrow, as they say, so you...these people do understand the pain each of them. Many people say I’m sorry, I lament it, but it’s only when one really has experienced it is when they really feel it. You can imagine it but it’s not the same. It’s not the same...when you feel it with your own flesh and blood, then you understand what is happening with these people.

This “same pain” leads her to feel that she is understood and also understands others. Her “flesh and blood” experience ties her to others and not only reflects her painful experience but also provides a context for what is happening to others. For Astrid support means to be with the sorrow, both her own and others. Her pain appears to be reflected in others’ loss and she can see her pain in theirs and their pain in hers. This interconnectedness stemming from the same human experiences creates a strong sense of belonging.

Other victims expressed similar experiences; as Luz Marina said: “it’s the same pain that we have felt, the same. Some have felt stronger than others, but we have all been victims so I like this - to be united with the same pain, that we feel the same pain.” This sense of union that comes with surrounding oneself with other victims helps fuel victim agency and in turn their subjectivity that facilitates identity formation. In speaking of the first victim event she ever participated in Daisi said:

This was the first encounter I had, I mean of listening to the stories. You are converted into one family because all of us have the same pain so we accompany each other and then we go along learning about the stories from other families to know that we are not the only ones, we are many and that if we are together we can generate better things.

Daisi’s description of everyone coming together in “one family” reflects her idea that they are intimately connected through their experience. They are tied to each other through their sharing and through the belief that they will be able to fight state violence when they work together in a
way that is not possible on their own. The feeling of being one family has been present in other places where victims of state violence have gathered in a formalized manner; Hayner (2002) found that in Chile there were reports of people feeling like they were like “a family” during truth commission proceedings and that it resulted in people feeling that their voices were heard and valued (p. 137).

Daisi also noted that the cohesion she feels with others was sustained through ongoing participation in victim events:

Now I feel that I have one family with everyone, that we are all one family, we meet up and see each other, we talk, and well I know their cases and they know my case and it’s like really cool, I like it a lot because you know a lot and of all of it, in the midst of all of it, the suffering of our loved ones, I have liked it a lot because I have had the opportunity to share with other families that have the same pain that we have.

Daisi’s enjoyment of sharing with those who have the same pain leads to ongoing relationships that create a sense of belonging to a collective victim identity.

The interviews show that feeling a common experience of the same pain produces a sense of belonging for victims of state crimes. For some, this same pain means that other victims understand you in a way that others (non-victims) cannot. For others, the same pain is what unites victims together and it can produce experiences of feeling like a unified family.

**Belonging Produces Strength.** The sense of belonging to a victim community gives individual victims strength to take action. Daisi was at first reluctant to take action in regards to her brother’s death, but she notes that this collective victim identity created through subjectivity also took away her fear of being attacked for speaking out - specifically through a sense that more can be done when all work together:

I’m not afraid anymore because I know that if they are going to do something against me they are going to have to do it against all of us because there are lots of us, lots and lots.
This sense of having *power together* can bring a feeling of protection for victims of state violence who fear the very real repercussions for speaking out. While Daisi may not feel fear in the way she did prior to working with others, the threat of violence is not completely gone even with collective actions. Her words then do not represent a sense that there is no threat to be afraid of anymore, but instead that she appears to go beyond fear because of the understanding that she is not alone. Overall, learning that there are others with the same experience and then relating with them overtime makes Daisi feel “better”:

*the organization* has taught me and well that we aren’t the only ones that we are many people that have had this experience so now we know we aren’t the only ones ...now the days are getting better, yes.

Daisi’s sense of belonging to the victim community gives her strength, removes her fear, and makes her feel better in her everyday life. For Daisi, knowing that she is not alone and that she belongs with others who share a common pain is a powerful combination. Claudia expresses a similar sentiment:

*The situation which we lived through didn’t just happen to us, at that time we were the only ones, but bringing to memory the things that we had heard and also when one feels related you begin to see that there are many people that have had the same experience.*

Finding out that others have similar experiences fuels a sense of belonging to a community, one based on identification as a victim of state violence. Like Daisi, Claudia’s experience of identification as a victim of state crimes is linked to knowing her case isn’t isolated but that she is connected to people through her painful experience.

Claudia goes on to show that in her view, victim identity is maintained through sustained participation:

*I think that it’s true that in these situations - the events and marches - do help maybe also as a way to not lose like this...like so that the person doesn’t lose their identification, but I also think that this is linked to the person’s perseverance, meaning to fight for their own case, to be attentive [to the case].*
For Claudia, identifying as a victim represents the strength to continue the fight for justice, which is often long and grueling with few rewards. Claudia believes that attending organizational events is what provides the time and space for identification with others and that this identification not only makes individuals feel good, but garners support to keep up their individual cases. Identification in this sense can be seen as creating connections between individuals, which leads them to feel that they belong with others who have similar experiences.

As shown through the data, the victim community can provide a sense of belonging by supporting collective spaces for victim identity formation. These spaces allow victims to come together and share their experience and learn about state violence in the Colombian context and they are able to connect with others in a way that often “feels good.” By drawing the experience of the “same pain” victims are able to relate to others and the sense of belonging created in these spaces appears to be integral to garnering strength to keep demanding justice when faced with deep-rooted impunity.

**Exclusion**

While organizations carry the possibility of fostering a sense of belonging, they can also be exclusionary spaces where some feel silenced and unsupported. The data shows that several victims interviewed felt that there were exclusionary patterns taking place within organizations and as such, they at times decided to remove themselves from organizational settings. Victims reported changes in their actions in the years following their loss, primarily due to patterns of exclusion in the political arena (shown principally through the lack of justice despite their actions) as well as within the victim organizations themselves. The combination of the two has led some to feel that their actions were hopeless when they had previously thought them to be a
source of strength. Although a sense of belonging and exclusion would at first glance appear to be at odds, these two strong feelings were simultaneously present for many of those interviewed, showing the paradoxes and complications that create daily human experience for victims of state violence.

Exclusion here means the act or an instance of excluding or the state of being excluded. To exclude someone is to keep them out, or at times it can mean to shut one out from consideration or privilege\(^\text{11}\). The sense of exclusion expressed in the interviews was the inverse of their sense of belonging to a coherent victim community. For example, exclusion was noted through feeling unsupported or unwelcome in some organizational spaces, or feeling that their “same pain” was being taken advantage of. Feelings of exclusion and belonging exist in relationship to each other; sentiments of exclusion reflect a change in the experience of belonging—from being a part of a victim community to feeling pushed out of that same community. Belonging means that one feels included while exclusion reflects a sense of being excluded. These two experiences exist in relationship to each other for the victims of state violence who were interviewed.

These sentiments are not new; exclusion can be seen throughout Colombian history as shown in Chapter 2 as different groups fight for power over others and over natural resources. Just as patterns of political violence have been found to maintain the political power of a small sector of the population, the prevalence of social violence also reflects how power dynamics and the struggle to control that can infiltrate day-to-day life. Social violence, as explored in Chapter 2, is the routinized or normalized violence of day-to-day life which is simultaneously created and experienced by the self and the social. It takes on multiple forms and can be seen as part of the

root cause of a sense of exclusion within organizations. Social violence includes how people treat each other and how power is navigated within relationships, whether it be between individual victims or a victim and supportive organizations. In this sense, the feeling of being excluded from organizational spaces is reflective of the phenomena of social violence that is deeply ingrained, and as such, is much harder to identify compared with political violence.

Exclusionary patterns seen with some organizations are reflective of a much larger phenomena. Adams (2011) finds that:

…much less is known about how violence becomes naturalized in everyday life and reproduces itself. My review of the impact of violence on social relations in Latin America confirms that it consistently provokes perverse behavior among vulnerable groups, undermines how people treat each other, and destroys the social support for democracy. (p. 1)

How people treat each other in everyday life within social movements is very much at the core of whether or not individuals decide to affiliate and participate with collective groups. At a very basic level, individual victims decide to participate or not based on their sense of obligation to take action and their sense of belonging to a collective identity. As seen in the discussion about belonging, if victims feel that they have a welcoming space where they share a common identity with others they are more likely to draw strength from and participate in collective actions. Alternately, if they feel there is no progress, a lack of organizational support, or in some cases, active exclusion, they decide to remove themselves from collective spaces. While victim organizations as a whole are focused on ending state violence, they have the possibility of being places that can enforce patterns of social violence that are deeply ingrained in Colombia.

The interviews revealed that individuals felt that things were happening (both within and outside of organizations) which made them decide to remove themselves from collective spaces where actions were taken. This state of exclusion often stemmed from individuals feeling that they were on the outside, that they did not belong in organizational spaces, or that their
participation was fruitless. The overarching exclusionary pattern that was noted was that of feeling that they were silenced by others and therefore would remove themselves from organizational spaces instead of voicing their dissent. Overall, there was a sense from those interviewed that they could not voice their opinions to change those exclusionary circumstances, thus leading them to feel further isolated from collective meaning making spaces where they felt they had belonged before.

Patterns of exclusion impact the self and subjectivity and are easily seen through the social constructivist lens laid out in Chapter 2. The self, being the mediator of mind and matter, is navigating the outward scenario that includes both the larger scale Colombian historical baggage of political exclusion, violence, and individual and social trauma as well as an organizational context that unites victims under the banner of fighting against political violence but that also embodies social violence in its day-to-day functioning. Given certain experiences of the outward context, individuals cited a sense of self that specifically defined themselves as not like those people involved with organizations - a sense of not belonging in collective spaces. This leads them to a sense of hopelessness about making progress through collective spaces that then spurs their decision, or their agency, to not take action in collective spaces. By removing themselves from these spaces, individual subjectivity or what they actually do, changes. In particular this means a decrease in the types of actions listed at the beginning of this chapter.

Three principle subthemes emerge within the feelings of exclusion expressed by interviewees: patterns of exclusion within organizations, exclusionary patterns of the state, and economic barriers to participation. In exploring these sensitive themes exact words from the research participants are seldom used and their pseudonyms are withheld as to protect individuals from retaliation for pointing out touchy internal organizational dynamics.
Patterns of Exclusion within Organizations. Patterns of exclusion within organizations were shown to influence individuals’ decisions to remove themselves from organizational activities. So what were the motivating factors that lead people to leave victim support organizations? Feelings of being revictimized, a lack of respect and dignity, organizational divisions and competition, and a sense of not being able to express their opinions within the organizations all accumulated to reveal patterns of exclusion that played a role in several victims’ decisions to stop or at least limit their interactions with organizations.

The feeling of being revictimized was evident through victim narratives that showed a sense of being taken advantage of and a lack of respect for victims within organizational settings. Revictimization was described by some as being tied directly to organizational finances. One victim noted that he had stopped attending events because of the feeling of being taken advantage of: “I don’t want them to look at me with the eyes of a money grabbing merchant.” As another victim noted, at times she felt that victims were being shown off in order to gather funds for the organization: “the victim is there as if to be shown off, like to show them off and then through this person we can get resources and through this person we can do this”(referring to organizational actions). This sense of being revictimized was seen in another woman’s narrative, which revealed that at times she felt like she was treated like a puppet being shown off: “They put you up there like a clown, like a puppet over there, over here, so no, I say no. No, no more of this, not with me. This is what deceived me about the organizations.” Her words were echoed by other victims that noted that they at times felt that they were not treated with respect or dignity within the organizations, leading them to feel a lack of support. One person specifically outlined times when she had felt that she was not included in organizational events, leading her to feel very alone in spaces where she previously felt she belonged. These quotes summarize a sense of
being used by organizations in order to gather funds - leading them to feel used and even “revictimized.” As one victim summarized: “I don’t want to be a victim of the victims”.

Although some victim organizations are founded on the need for a space for victims of state violence to have a voice, and while there has been very significant success in granting that voice through victim testimonials, some victims expressed that they did not always feel that they had a true say in intra- and inter-organizational issues. Victims noted being afraid to express their true feelings and that their opinions were not heard or valued within organizational settings. There is a perception that there is vying for power and control within the organizations and between organizations, but also that speaking out about those tensions would not be well received. As one victim noted: “I stay quiet, I don’t exist. Because I can’t, I don’t want more problems.” This struggle for power within organizations has been shown to push people away:

*If I have time, I go. Sometimes, I’m not going to deny it. I’ve been disheartened because I think all these things are the same, there is always like a self benefiting wherever you go and things are never going to function well, the way they should, but instead for one’s own benefit…*

This victim’s sense that organizations reflect the same power dynamics that are present in other parts of society leaves a sense of feeling discouraged and influences whether or not she participates in actions. Overall, the lack of victim voice within organizations reflects a larger issue of communication patterns that reinforce exclusion and take away voices that could lead to improvements in organizational functioning. When asked why they didn’t voice their concerns to the organizations directly, there was a sense of not wanting to “bite the hand that feeds you” and fear that they would be accused of being ungrateful for all the organizations had done for them.

While the victims do believe that the organizations have done a lot for them, their critiques about their lived experience working with the organizations remain unvoiced in organizational settings.

While interviewees expressed reluctance to share their opinions within the organizations, they appeared to easily speak to me about their frustrations, which were often expressed through
“he said/she said” stories told about others. This gossip form of storytelling plays a key role in communication in a context defined by various forms of violence that have created high levels of fear and suspicion. These stories usually came from second or third hand accounts of what someone said or did and usually reflected a narrative that located the teller of the story as superior to the story’s characters. It is possible that gossip in this context also plays a key role in bolstering the self-image of victims who’ve experienced a lack of support within organizations. Further research regarding the function and outcomes of such gossip is needed.

Another principle problem that pushed victims away from organizations was a sense of division and competition between various victim support organizations. Some noted that they felt that the organizations were competing for victim members and that they were fighting amongst themselves in a way that made victims feel used and thus decide not to participate. One victim noted that the division and quarreling between organizations made her feel alone: “…they divided, there were difficulties, right? And then I felt like I was over there, adrift.” She noted that this division led her to not want to be a part of any organization because it was “very ugly.” She went on to say:

...when there began to be a division in which everyone went this way and that, this - this is what I didn’t like and I felt sort of alone, thrown out, […] it made me really sad, really sad to see everyone go their own way, all this made me so sad because while we continue on this way we aren’t going to do anything, nothing. That’s what’s of interest to the government.

Her sadness at the lack of a unified victim front is compounded by the feeling that the division is helping the State and not the victims. She goes on to note that she does not want to be part of helping the government by being separated out into small groups, she does not want to “do the government a favor.” Organizational divisions pushed several victims away from participating in actions; as another victim noted, it was better not to be a member of any organization than to take sides.
These exclusionary patterns are symptomatic of structural difficulties that go beyond individual styles or personality conflicts. They do not reflect mere individual organizational shortcomings but are more illustrative of patterns of conflict that exist within organizations that deal with complicated struggles. While feelings of exclusion are very personal and disheartening for those who experience them, many still showed signs of hope for improvement in organizations and the possibility of unification in the future. Victim organizations grant the possibility of liberation from those oppressive patterns if social and political violence are focused on simultaneously and in a truly participatory manner. Because the organizations bring people together and create a common victim identity that includes demands for victim rights within a society fractured by social and political violence, they can provide spaces to discuss and navigate complex forms of violence that are most often not talked about. In addition, the consciousness raising work to contextualize political violence can be seen as a first step in the analysis of social violence in addition to political violence.

Victim organizations may be able to play a key role in transformation; Hayner’s (2002) book on truth commissions in situations of armed conflict has found that community organizations and/or networks of families and friends represent entities that could be important pillars of support for victims of state violence but that the compounded years of silence and fear make it hard for those spaces to be truly supportive (p. 146). Because victim organizations have the explicit intent of supporting victims, if done correctly, they can embody spaces of belonging and support that could lead to honest conversations that could make the victims movement much stronger in the future.

**State Exclusionary Patterns.** Organizational practices are not the only reasons why victims decided to withdraw from collective action in organizational spaces. Another principal
reason was state exclusionary patterns, meaning the state’s tendency not to punish state crimes leaving the victims to feel that they are shut out of the political arena and that the state does not take their denouncements seriously. Many of those interviewed noted that they were left without hope of ever achieving justice in their individual cases due to the state’s lack of political will to punish those responsible.

One organizational leader noted that the lengthiness of the cases led victims to distance themselves and to become disheartened. Another victim’s story in particular shows how the high levels of impunity for state crimes and the lack of citizen’s ability to significantly change the absence of a political will to solve these cases compounds his disgust with the situation. He noted that in the years immediately following his son’s death he took many actions in hope of achieving justice, but that his actions had waned in recent years as he became disillusioned with the lack of tangible results. In his words, in those first years: “there was a lot of denouncing, there was a lot of accompaniment, and I thought that doing all this was going to quickly find it, to quickly find justice. But those were lies.” He described all his initial actions as “words in the wind” that did not bring results, leaving him feeling hopeless for Colombia as a whole: “So it’s an embarrassment. Hopes that Colombia, that its people move forward, I don’t see it coming soon […] So, simply, I’m one more victim. And I know that I’m going to die awaiting justice.”

His experience has left him bitter about Colombia as a country and as a people. The egregious levels of state violence partnered with impunity reflect the hegemony of the ruling class that has continued to dominate Colombia for centuries, leaving many, such as victims of state violence, feeling helpless.

Another victim noted a similar sense that “nothing ever changes” despite taking action and therefore it was hard to sustain the actions. She sees this reflected in other victims as well:
This has been going on for I don’t even know how long and I think that for a lot of people they get to the point where they get depressed and they come back and it’s like they come up again because it’s exhausting with so much waiting.

Many victims were unfamiliar with the high levels of impunity facing state crimes in Colombia prior to their experience of traumatic loss and, therefore, when then facing a lack of political will to resolve their cases, they are confronted by another disheartening experience with their government. Not only did the state kill their loved one, but it is also failing to punish those responsible, which can lead to a lack of hope that then impacts one’s agency to take action. This lack of real hope for change can be seen in the words of another victim who noted:

Maybe sometimes I don’t know if it’s because I say I don’t have time, it’s like, sometimes the hopelessness gets to you and you say: No, why? Look things happen that one doesn’t like and you say: no, it’s the same, nothing changes and the situations always remain the same, or I’m tired and I don’t want to go to any meeting.

This sense that nothing changes despite so many actions jades individuals and leads to a sense of exhaustion and lack of hope for a better future.

The lack of justice in cases of state crimes continues to reflect Colombia’s history of political exclusion in which laws are often only successfully implemented when convenient for those in power. While it’s true that victim actions that have been taken at individual and collective levels in recent years have influenced and shaped the Colombian political context, the significant and tangible results that victims strive for are far from being achieved. Although victim organizations can do and have done a lot to those ends, they are up against intense power structures that make it an uphill battle to achieve justice through the court system which can leave victims feeling hopeless about gaining significant change, leading them to lessen their participation.

**Economic Barriers to Participation.** In addition to organizational and state exclusionary practices, economic barriers can also hinder victim participation in collective actions. Several of
those interviewed noted that the scarcity of time and money were key factors in their decisions about whether or not to participate and influenced what the organizations were able to do in terms of victim support. Colombia’s social context, the use of violence to consolidate power and wealth, has produced a very class stratified society; in the early 2000s Colombia was found to have the ninth most inequitable wealth structure in the world (Richardson, n.d.). The use of both political and social violence to preserve power structures that maintain the elite in power impacts the daily lives of victims of state violence who most often have few economic resources. As noted in Chapter 3, all of the victims interviewed were working-class; as one young woman noted, “almost all of us are in some part people of few resources.” The sense of economic scarcity influences individual victims’ ability to participate in actions.

Many victims work long hours, pursue studies in the hopes of better jobs, and maintain families and homes, leaving little “extra” time to participate in actions. One victim leader described how she saw another victim work hard to be able to participate in one particular action:

…this lady, one day she began to get up, to stand up, to look for work, starts working and in addition to this she began to come to the marches, for example the March 10th march - one year after joining the [organization] she shows up with ten people. So this lady paid for her work day for example, this day she was off, she worked in a clinic, she did cleaning or something. Everyday she knew that March 10th was the mobilization, everyday this lady worked more, she worked one hour extra and so they gave her March 10th off.

This woman’s situations highlights some of the challenges in being able to both have food on the table and time off of work to participate in the actions they deem important. Participation in collective events is based on dedication and hard work that signifies sacrifice.

The challenging economic situations that have defined the lives of all of the victims interviewed can also complicate how they relate to the organizations. For example, one victim noted being upset at seeing what appeared to be mismanagement of organizational funds while so many individual victims were in need:
So I tell you, the dignity, the thing is that the victim, for example, I have seen at times that people don’t even have enough to be able to eat. There are international organizations that send good resources. But they don’t give the money to the victims, for a lunch, for the market goods, for just the minimum. Or even pay one of the bills.

This tension of seeing money being used by organizations in ways other than the direct physical sustenance of the individual victims highlights how many victims must first tend to their day-to-day expenses before dedicating time and money towards taking action. The tension about money points to the overall problem of lack of economic resources, leading to conflict over scarce economic resources.

The problem of scarcity of money also faces the organizations that support individual victims. As one organizational leader reported:

*I say it, but it shouldn’t be this way, one of the big big obstacles is money, money to go to where the people are because it’s a need. I mean there are lots of people for example that want to travel, to go to a march, but there’s not way for them to come from the region, from their town to the march.*

The lack of economic resources can fuel tensions within the organizations and with individual victims who are in difficult economic situations and can lead individuals to feel “revictimized” as organizations showcase victims in their attempts to gain the necessary funds to conduct their work.

The need for money is reflected in how people spend their time and several victims noted that their decision to take action regarding their loss meant taking their time away from other parts of their life. In a sense, tending to the dead took them away from the living; three people mentioned that focusing so much on the person who was lost meant that they had less time for other living family members. At times their fervor for taking action meant leaving behind romantic relationships or jobs and overall signified a change in many aspects of life and their relationships with both the living and the dead.
To conclude, these patterns of exclusion influence whether or not individuals are able to sustain participation in actions over the long-term after their experience of loss. The most prominent pattern of exclusion was individuals feeling they were excluded by organizations due to inter organizational fighting and a lack of true victim voice to lead to improvements in organizational functioning. A sense of disgust about the lack of progress with the state leads some to feel that their actions have been in vain. The difficult economic situations facing victim families also leads to tensions between individuals and the organizations as well as dictates how much free time they have to participate in actions both on their own and collectively. While the combination of these exclusionary patterns can appear to be disheartening for those who live them, it’s important to note that these tensions and conflict are not inherently bad, but actually can be assets to overcoming Colombia’s deeply rooted patterns of exclusion. Because these organizations foster an important sense of belonging, they can possibly also be places that work to overcome patterns of exclusion on various levels.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

This study asks: how do Colombians make meaning out of their lives through action, both on their own and in community with others who have had similar experiences of traumatic loss, by specifically looking at how action can be a response to trauma that in turn shapes identity. This research is aimed at answering the fundamental question of why people do what they do and how their experiences shape their actions and the self, as well as how the self is located within the social context. By taking an in depth look at the experiences of Colombian victims of state violence, I sought to uncover core aspects of victim experience that can inform and strengthen the understanding of how people make sense out of traumatic loss in order to contribute to the conversation about how to improve the supportive connections between victims, collective networks, and organizations. Here in the conclusions I first briefly summarize this study’s theoretical framework, methodology, and findings in order to then draw out the connections between the primary themes of obligation, belonging and exclusion that were revealed in the data. These connections further expose the depth of the challenges to individual participation in collective spaces as well as the organizational strengths in creating a victim community that can possibly overcome those challenges. These conclusions lead to recommendations that may help make collective victim spaces more participatory.

A social constructivist lens guides this phenomenological study that specifically asks: after experiencing the loss of a family member at the hands of the Colombian armed forces, what actions do Colombians who self-identify as victims of state crimes take that directly relate to their loss at both an individual and a collective level? What meanings do these self-identified victims of state crimes ascribe to both individual and collective actions and what do those
meanings signify for their identity? In order to examine these questions with a social constructivist framework that sees the self and the social as intricately and dialectically related, the Colombian context was explored to reveal the myriad of types of violence that have plagued the country for decades. Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict has produced both individual and social trauma as well as many social movements that respond to the violence that has defined much of Colombia’s history.

Because these research questions aim to decipher the meanings and experiences as felt by the victims themselves, attention was given to the concepts of the self, identity, agency, and subjectivity that characterize how the self is experienced and navigated in day-to-day life. In this study the self is defined as the mediator between mind and matter, internal and external worlds. This means that for victims of state crimes the self was mediating between the internal process of meaning making in light of traumatic loss, within an external context characterized by ongoing violence, impunity, and patterns of exclusion as well as spaces of belonging and strength. Identity in this study is the sense of self, or how the self is perceived by individual victims themselves. Agency refers to what victims decide to do - meaning what they choose to do in response to their traumatic loss, which also has implications for how they locate themselves in relationship to others. Subjectivity refers to the actual actions that victims take, meaning what they actually do.

Given that the Colombian external context is defined by high rates of impunity for state crimes, the victims interviewed felt they were forced to react, that there was no other option but to take action and they were often able to connect to other victims in doing so. This leads to the creation of identity through agency and subjectivity that is carried out through relationships - with other victims, the dead, organizations, and the country. These relationships are not always
positive or negative experiences, but instead coexist with their imperfections and contradictions. All of these aspects of the self create the victim experience and are used here to show how taking action impacts the self in a dynamic process that integrates the loss into a new identity and self-narrative for victims of state violence after their experience of loss.

Data was collected through ten semi-structured interviews with seven research participants who all self-identified as victims of state crimes in a medium-sized Colombian city in March 2011. A phenomenological methodology that drew methods from narrative inquiry was used both in the design and data analysis of this research. While not an exhaustive study, the findings reveal an important depth of information that exposes the paradoxes that define the victim experience, specifically both the strength and frustrations that are produced in collective victim spaces. The Colombian context is plagued with tension and conflict, but also with possibilities of connection and community. This study aimed to contribute a detailed exploration of victim experience to promote an understanding of the important personal and collective impacts of state violence in Colombia.

At the most basic level, these research findings reflect how the self is created in relationship to the social context. The Colombian context is defined by various forms of violence and presents individuals with situations that they feel they must respond to through action. Those actions in turn locate individuals within a victim community that is centered around a human rights discourse that implies specific demands of the state. Joining the network of victims of state crimes in Colombia means rallying behind a common platform that seeks truth, justice, reparation, and the right to non-repetition of state crimes. This locates victims politically and draws them into the social context in a new way with real implications for day-to-day life; some become targets of violence for those who aim to protect members of the armed forces that are
responsible for state crimes. This common victims rights platform is fostered within victim support organizations that provide a sense of belonging but can also present challenges of exclusion. This process of participating with collective victim networks after an experience of traumatic loss is a dynamic one in which new self-narratives are integrated and incorporated as the self mediates a new and ever changing internal and external worlds.

This study revealed various important aspects of victim experience and also highlights areas where future research is needed. The actions taken by victims of state violence are multiple and complex - they are often deemed either individual or collective by those who take them. While not an exhaustive list of all victim actions in Colombia, those mentioned within this study include: consciousness raising, organizational meetings, conferences, the creation of historic memory materials and events, denouncements (both denouncing to the government and garnering public support), plantones (sit ins or protests) and other, more individual actions such as writing books and promoting petitions. While the findings of what people do are important, additional studies are needed to explore the reasons why some who have experienced state violence choose never to identify as victims of state crimes and do not take action regarding their loss. There may be very important reasons why others who have lost loved ones to the state reject the identity of victims of state crimes and do not choose to locate themselves as victims within the Colombian context. Further research on those reasons may have useful implications for victim support organizations.

The above actions are at times based on tactics used by other groups with similar objectives, for example those of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who have informed and inspired actions taken by the victims interviewed for this study. More research is needed to identify the symbolic actions and icons that embody Latin American struggles, such as the
Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, as well as what they mean to the people who use these symbols as inspiration for their own actions. The proliferation of social media and technology in the age of globalization has allowed for cultural icons and tactics of resistance to more easily travel and evolve in new ever-changing contexts; academic research on the sharing of Latin American icons and methods of resistance and how their meanings and images are adapted in different contexts would be also useful.

Three distinct and important themes emerged from the interviews that reflected the victim experience: obligation, belonging, and exclusion. All expose significant information as well as the need for further research to more fully understand the experiences of Colombian victims of state violence. The first theme explored was victims’ sense of obligation to take action. This obligation is multifaceted - a combination of duty to the self, the dead, and country - which is individually felt and fuels victim actions. This obligation, in part, defined the self for individual victims who felt they were carrying out their duty to respond to state violence - their responsibility to do something. Victims expressed that they had no other choice than to react to the violence that had changed their lives. One victim even saw this response as a form of active and productive denial in reaction to her father’s murder. Another noted that to accept this obligation signified much personal sacrifice and that it has redefined day-to-day life. Overall, obligation drives people to act, to react, and to take action; it lingers for years after the death and can coexist with other strong feelings such as belonging and exclusion. Fulfilling this dynamic sense of obligation is integral to the self’s mediation of internal and external worlds and the formation of identity after experiences of traumatic loss.

This obligation at times was driven by a responsibility to the dead as shown through the need to clear the names of the deceased who were most often accused of being guerrillas by
public officials. The need to restore their “good names” reflects a sense that honor is almost more important than life and that the dead cannot rest in peace until their reputation is recovered. While the fact that people have died due to state violence cannot be changed, what victims can try to influence is how the person who was lost is remembered by the public and whether or not there is justice in their case. They work to restore their honor as well as try to prevent these deaths from happening to others. The question of honor leads to another inquiry that is not answered in this study but would be supported through additional research: what does it mean to be called a guerrilla today in Colombia for victims of state violence? More information about the symbols and associated meanings tied to guerrillas for Colombian victims of state violence would inform the depth and weight given to actions that primarily pertained to restoring honor to the dead.

The second component of this obligation to the dead was the connection that victims felt to the deceased through their actions, one that at times kept the dead alive in another form for their surviving family members. This reveals that victim relationships to the dead are fluid and evolving and that although death has changed the relationship, it has in no way ended it. Their words reflect a sense that the dead are still present, they live on in a different, more symbolic way. As noted earlier, more research is needed to better understand the evolving relationship with the dead and how it is influenced by concepts of the afterlife and spirituality.

The third and more limited notion of obligation to take action was that of the obligation to Colombia as a country that several interviewees mentioned. These victims noted that although they did not have hope for real, tangible, or immediate changes in Colombia, their actions were motivated by their responsibility as citizens to shape its future. In this sense, by taking actions that support collective victim identity formation, victims are adhering to a human rights
discourse that in turn shapes what it means to be a citizen in Colombia today for a group of people who have traditionally been marginalized and excluded from the political arena. As noted in Chapter 3, prior to their experience of traumatic loss none of the victims interviewed considered themselves particularly politically active or even opinionated about state policies and practices. In a sense, they did not feel like citizens who were participating in molding the social context, but many are now actively vocal participants in creating their country and, in doing so, a new form of citizenship that reflects the context of ongoing armed conflict. This citizenship through action is influenced by the victim community’s contact with supportive organizations and is an integral component of the consciousness raising of social movements. While only briefly explored in this research, an investigation into how political violence in Colombia impacts victims’ specific beliefs in democracy, the rule of law, and the effectiveness of non-violent means towards change is warranted.

The second principal theme found in the data was a sense of belonging created in collective victim spaces. A sense of belonging was based on the identification and connection that victims felt to others with similar experiences through their participation in collective actions. A collective victim identity was created and maintained by having a space where victims could come together and relate with other victims. Some noted that this belonging was based on the fact that they felt good while participating in those spaces even though what brought them together was a painful, traumatic experience. The ability to be with others who have a similar experience was found to fuel an important sense of collective identity from which they often drew strength to continue to take actions that they felt obligated to take. This shared experience for many was based on having felt and lived the “same pain.” The sense of belonging is an incredible asset in a country where violence has, in many cases, left a fractured society and a
weak social fabric. Having a place where people feel they can truly connect with others is fundamental to the victim experience and could be an asset in overcoming organizational challenges such as exclusion because it has the possibility of creating trust and fostering difficult conversations in a context that presents many obstacles to doing so.

Although at first seemingly contradictory, for some victims interviewed patterns of exclusion were present along with the strong sense of belonging found in collective spaces. Exclusion reflected individual victims’ decisions to remove themselves from organizational settings based on their experiences of exclusionary patterns within organizations, ongoing impunity, and economic barriers to participation. This theme reveals some of the challenges associated with supporting victims of state violence and the recommendations below strive to provide some suggestions for beginning to understand and possibly overcome some of the sensations of exclusion within organizations and beyond.

The most prominently discussed aspect of exclusion was that of patterns felt within organizations that led individual victims to stop participating in events and actions. Victims noted that they felt they were unable to express critical opinions of collective spaces within the organizations. They appeared to rely on forms of communication such as gossip to release their frustrations associated with internal organizational dynamics. Further research is needed to decipher the functions and outcomes of such gossip.

Some victims noted a sense of feeling *revictimized* by the organizations. This was shown through their statements that highlighted the feeling that they were being *shown off* and that their stories were being taken advantage of in organizations’ attempts to solicit funding. This, along with divisions between victim support organizations, led victims to leave collective spaces. These sentiments point out the need for future research focused on how organizations function
and how they can continue to emphasize their assets as being places of belonging and leave behind exclusionary practices. One primary area that would support organizations would be to investigate how communication works among the various organization participants and how differing opinions are dealt with in organizations as well as between various organizations. Conflict is common to the human experience; the idea here is not to end conflict or differing opinions within the organizational settings but instead to understand how conflict and difference are managed and navigated as a way of shedding light on how that communication can be improved. In this sense, exclusion can be used as a tool to instigate changes to how people relate to one another.

One way to understand the feelings of exclusion is through a contextualization of social violence, which is maintained and sustained through day-to-day interactions. As noted in Chapter 2, little is known about how social violence permeates daily experience. Understanding more about how victims themselves contribute to, as well as experience, social violence could be of use. As noted by Adams (2011), a narrowly focused approach to political violence is likely to fail due to the need to look into the complex ways that chronic social violence transforms vulnerable populations. Although those interviewed noted gathering together in collective spaces centered on a common victim experience, differences in opinions about how things should be run were very much present and important to those who felt them. An analysis of how difference is handled within a community with a common victim identity could lay the groundwork to coming closer to liberating these organizations from the social violence that has defined the Colombian context. Other questions that would support such a study include: How do organizations specifically sustain or challenge social violence? What are the ways that organizations support their members and vice versa? Knowing that exclusion is a form of social violence, it needs to
be understood how it is maintained in order to start the work to end it. All of the above would lead to a more nuanced understanding of how belonging and exclusion coexist within organizational spaces but also how they may be able to become more liberatory places in the process.

Another exclusionary pattern that led people to decrease their actions for justice was the government’s lack of political will to end state violence and to persecute those responsible. The rampant impunity for state crimes left once energetic victims without hope for change. Many of those interviewed noted feeling disheartened and without real hope for a better Colombia due to the fact that, despite the years of taking action, the state has failed to persecute those responsible.

Lastly, there are very real economic barriers to victims and supportive organizations that dictate what people and organizations can do. Victims noted feeling that they were stretched thin – that taking action took time, specifically time away from work, school, and other relationships. Future research is needed to identify creative solutions to those economic challenges if victims and organizations will be able to overcome economic barriers to participation.

These themes are revealing and the connections between them expose another layer of depth embedded in the information found in this study, which paves the way to make possible recommendations that draw on the assets of belonging and address the issues of exclusion. For the victims interviewed, their identity is created and shaped through actions taken both individually and collectively after their experience of traumatic loss. Actions locate the individuals in relationship to others and whether one feels that they belong or that they are being excluded from the larger victim community dictates the types of actions that people take. Belonging and exclusion influence whether one participates with others or not, or takes action at all. If one feels a strong sense of belonging to a victim community one is more likely to garner
strength in collective spaces and opt for collective actions, whereas if individuals feel that there are exclusionary patterns within the organizations and/or the state, they are more likely to choose to take action individually.

A sense of obligation appears to be present for individuals regardless of their experience of either belonging to or being excluded from victim organizations. The obligation is profound and appears to be a deeply rooted internal experience that happens despite an external context with many frustrations and challenges. That being said, a strong sense of belonging to a collective identity can strengthen one’s sense of obligation to take action, in a sense fueling collective victim actions. Conversely, if exclusion is the more prevalent feeling, victims appear to be more likely to take individual actions to support their sense of obligation.

Just as a feeling of belonging strengthens victims’ experience of obligation to take action, obligation also calls for victims to participate in actions that fortify the sense of belonging to a common victim identity. From this it can be extrapolated that without having a victim community to identify with, the sense of belonging would likely be limited and, as such, actions would also be limited. It’s clear that the sense of belonging that is fostered within the victim community brings a sense of power that comes from identifying with others.

Again, belonging to a community is in part founded on experiencing the “same pain”, and at the same time victims reported feeling good when they participated, bringing out the strength in the victim community – that despite pain being what brings them together, once they are together they feel good. This “same pain” brings with it a sense of necessity to take action with others and those actions can produce positive feelings according to the victims interviewed. The presence of both pain and “good” feelings simultaneously highlights how even given the difficult situation that accompanies traumatic loss, “good” feelings can be found in the connections
created between people with a similar traumatic loss and those feelings can strengthen their sense of belonging and obligation.

These feelings are perceived within the body, for example the experience of the “same pain.” Several victims noted that they had to live their experience in their own flesh to know what it truly signified to them. Luz Marina noted that she had to live the experience of losing a daughter to understand what was happening in her country. Astrid noted that, for her, it wasn’t the same to imagine an experience as it was to live it in her own flesh. In a sense, what an individual experiences is felt in a way that can only be learned through that very real direct experience. Further research about the impact of this type of traumatic loss on the body would provide supportive organizations more tools to work with victims of state crimes.

The gap between victims’ experience and that of non-victims brings up an additional important question: if garnering support to end impunity is in part based on public outcry to end state violence, what are some ways to bridge the gap between those who have experienced state violence and those who have not? How can the victim experience be understood by non-victims in a way that effectively activates them to also denounce state violence? How can the victim community provoke solidarity based on their “same pain” that invites true support from other non-victims?

The interviews revealed that belonging and exclusion are very much opposed but simultaneously present. Both of these experiences, exclusion and belonging, can be seen as assets to the victims’ movement. While exclusion appears to be a frustrating experience that reflects Colombia’s deeply rooted patterns of oppression, the fact that it is present and that organizations also have the possibility of fostering a sense of belonging means that these collective spaces could be places where social violence can be explored. By looking at how
social violence is present in the day-to-day patterns even at a organizational level, these collective spaces can examine social violence with the aim of understanding it in order to overcome it. In this sense, exclusionary patterns within organizations are assets that may open up spaces to explore larger phenomena of violence. While victim support organizations appear to primarily target political violence, they have the opportunity to be places where people can address multiple forms of violence. As noted in Chapter 2, from a psychological standpoint, it is important for victims of state crimes who are at risk of further victimization to have models for coping that include ways to further thwart violence in order to assure them the right to non-repetition of the abuses. This could be achieved by further analysis of power and violence that address multiple forms of violence, even those existing within organizational and collective spaces.

Lastly, I revisit the image of my theoretical framework to show how it is reflected in the data. The combination of theory and findings produces a more dynamic visual of how identity, agency, and subjectivity interact with the social context to create the self, which is mediating internal and external worlds for victims of state crimes in Colombia. The image below shows how aspects of the self and social are related, highlighting the dynamic relationship of the self as it adapts and influences an ever-changing social context.
The Social Context
Self-identified victims of state crimes in Colombia are navigating an external world that is defined by:
• Violence: political and social
• Trauma: social and individual
  → Specific experiences of traumatic loss: the state killing family members
• Social movements: collective meaning making spaces including victim organizations

Agency
Victims of state violence decide to take action based on their sense of obligation to:
• do something
• the dead
• the country
Their decision to take action is strengthened through a sense of belonging in collective spaces and lessened through feelings of exclusion.

For example, when exclusivity patterns are present, victims noted that they decided to take fewer collective actions which led them to have a weakened sense of belonging to the victim community. Distancing themselves from victim organizations then locates the self further away from social movements within the social context.

Conversely, when there is a strong sense of belonging to a unified victim identity the self is more closely located to social movements within the social context.

The Self
For Colombian victims of state crimes interviewed in this study the self is:
• mediating between internal and external worlds through their agency and subjectivity which in turn contributes to the creation of identity
• Dynamic and the process of engaging agency and subjectivity locates the self in relationship to Colombia’s social and political contexts
• continually moving in relationship to the social context depending on the actions that individual victims take (subjectivity) and how they make them feel about themselves (identity)

Subjectivity
Types of actions that victims took included:
• consciousness raising
• organizational meetings
• conferences
• historic memory materials and events
• denouncements
• planteos (strikes or protests)
• Other actions such as writing books and promoting petitions
All of these actions locate the self as “victims” with human rights within the Colombian social, political, and historic contexts.

Identity
Identity is shown through how victims see themselves within the social context. In regards to identity, the findings show that:
• a new self-narrative is created through action after experiences of traumatic loss
• agency and subjectivity create a victim identity that is based on the need to fulfill their sense of obligation
• by fulfilling their obligation to take action they connect with and create a common victim identity and a sense of belonging
**Recommendations**

Based on the findings from this study, there are several recommendations that may be useful in strengthening the web between victims, collective victim networks, and supportive organizations. The data shows that victims feel a need to fulfill a sense of obligation to act and that collective victim spaces provide a strong sense of belonging that fuels actions and a common victim identity. The challenge to the relationship between obligation and belonging is exclusion and, therefore, these recommendations focus on how organizations may want to consider tackling the issue of exclusion in order to strengthen the belonging that victims feel when working together. As shown in Chapter 2, supportive communities are important to dealing with trauma and therefore these recommendations are aimed at improving collective spaces where victims gather to help make them stronger.

These recommendations do not provide all-encompassing solutions, but instead suggest several questions and actions that could possibly strengthen collective victim spaces and make them more participatory so that discontent within organizations is an opportunity to grow instead of a reason to leave. This means asking the questions: how can victims feel more ownership over the organizations they are part of? How can they both support and be supported by organizations? In essence, how can organizations be spaces that liberate victims from the many historical patterns of exclusion? In a sense, how can victims be active agents in shaping the organizations instead of feeling as if they are excluded subjects? These recommendations include several steps that may make collective spaces more participatory in hopes of providing victims with a true voice in how victim organizations function. They are based on the understanding that patterns of exclusion within organizations are a form of social violence and, as such, these
recommendations focus on how organizations may be able to both understand and possibly overcome various forms of social violence.

These recommendations only explicitly focus on exclusion within the organizations. The reasoning here being that by first focusing on how people work together within collective spaces, specifically how to make them more participatory, the other forms of exclusion can then more adequately be addressed. For example, if there are more victim voices contributing to collective spaces, there will be more new and innovative ideas that may emerge to address the issues of impunity and personal and organizational financial challenges.

**Emphasize social violence in consciousness raising efforts.** For organizations to be liberatory, they must be truly participatory. Given that victims noted that they did not voice their criticisms of the organization within collective spaces, the organizations cannot truly be participatory while some are not comfortable voicing their opinions. Towards those ends, there needs to be a stronger understanding of the concept of social violence within victim spaces, specifically how it can be present amongst victims of political violence. Social violence refers to normalized violence carried out in relationships; therefore, organizational dynamics in which some are silenced and shut out and/or leave due to feelings of exclusion follow patterns of social violence. It is important that organizations look closely at the issue of social violence along with political violence - in a sense, a both/and approach to political and social violence instead of an either/or approach. The first step to doing this is for the victim community itself to better understand how social violence is felt, experienced, and maintained for victims of state crimes.

Steps should be taken to help victims and organizational leaders understand what social violence is, how it is experienced, and how it is maintained. Beginning conversations that address both political and social violence simultaneously adds depth to consciousness raising.
efforts. The contextualization of political violence along with social violence will likely strengthen collective spaces by expanding concepts of violence and hopefully fostering more victim voices in order to make organizations more participatory. Collectively understanding the myriads of violence in which the community exists and how violence can be maintained through their day-to-day interactions would hopefully begin to lay the groundwork to create communication patterns that may leave behind social violence.

Given the findings that organizations are places where people can find strength and belonging, organizations can be used to have difficult conversations about how different forms of violence are interwoven and at times maintained by the victims themselves. This approach is in line with Colombian social movements that are already making important and useful connections between various distinct but related struggles. For example it’s common for the victim community to support the struggles of internally displaced persons who have different, albeit related, demands for justice. These connections make both groups stronger. By expanding the connections to include various forms of violence, social and political violence can first be identified and understood in order to lay the groundwork to lessen social violence within the victim community. This is likely a necessary step to maintain victim participation over time and to create a truly participatory victims’ movement.

Building on this analysis of violence within organizations could also improve other issues that victims experience after taking actions. Focusing on strengthening the internal organizational dynamics would also possibly impact the exclusion felt by the state, in that the stronger the organization is, the harder it is for the state to ignore it, and, therefore, for the impunity to continue. This has been shown by several significant gains in the struggle for justice
in the cases of state crimes that have already been achieved that would not have otherwise been possible if not for the victims’ actions.

**Provide tools for decreasing social violence and increasing victim voice.** Social violence is maintained through everyday interactions and, as such, how people communicate with each other in collective spaces is of utmost importance in dissecting and overcoming social violence. If there is a better understanding of how different forms of violence are intermeshed and sustained by one another, work could be done to train victims and organizational leaders on how to engage in non-violent communication. As social violence is sustained through everyday interactions, so are minute levels of oppression and therefore, freedom from exclusion within the victim community is contingent on education about social violence and training on how to decrease it through daily interactions and communication.

The idea here is that non-violent communication would provide some tools to come closer to fostering a place where victims could gather together to talk about the issues and assets within their organizations and together seek out creative solutions. Because one of the points of tension has been that of individual and organizational finances, it would also be important that victims and organizations feel that they are on the same team, taking part in decision making, and creatively finding ways for the organizations and individuals to cope with difficult economic circumstances. Overall, improved communication amongst members will make the organizations stronger as a whole - it fosters new ideas and a stronger sense of community, thus strengthening the collective spaces of social movements. These steps would likely make victim spaces more participatory, hopefully laying the groundwork to understand social violence and lessen it within organizational settings. Victims may still come and go depending on other factors, but hopefully frustration due to the exclusion felt within the organizations would not be one of them.
To conclude, I revisit the words of Sara, who, in speaking about what it meant to take action regarding her father’s murder, eloquently said “I mean for me it is my essence, I am who I am through this.” Her fight for justice is at her core, it makes her who she is. This study aims to do just that - to decipher why people do what they do and how their actions influence how they feel about themselves. The findings reflect the richness, contradiction, and beauty of the human experience. Victims of state violence experiences are unique to their context, but at the same time carry reverberations for other situations where traumatic experiences lead people to action; by understanding what drives them to do what they do, we come closer to understanding how meaning is made when faced with a changed self after a traumatic experience. What victims do locates them in relationship to the social context and how they feel about their agency and subjectivity defines who they are. These research findings reflect the way that the self mediates between internal and external worlds and agency and subjectivity all work together to produce a dynamic victim identity that provides a new self-narrative after experiences of traumatic loss.
I. Appendixes

Informant Consent Form English

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

Meaning Making after Experiences of Trauma: Social Movement Participation as an Approach to Trauma

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Alison Paul a graduate student at DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA as a requirement to achieve her degree. This research project is under the guidance of Dr. Stephen Haymes. We are asking you because we are trying to learn more about how individual victims work with the collective movement for justice in Colombia. This study will take about two to four hours of your time. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by Alison Paul one to two times, but no more than three times. The interview will include questions about your life in general, your experience of losing a family member, and your participation with the victims’ movement. Some of these interview questions are related to the loss of a loved one and while this is not the focus of the study, there is a potential risk that uncomfortable memories will arise. If you choose to participate you may choose not to answer any of the interview questions at any point. We will record the interviews so that we can make accurate notes of what you have said. We will destroy the recordings once we transcribe them into written notes. You can choose not to participate in this study. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate now or change your mind later. Any information that you would choose to share that identifies you or others will be removed from the written notes so that what you tell us remains confidential. The research records will only be accessible to the researcher (Alison Paul) so that others will not have access to your interview responses.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Alison Paul at alisonjpaul@gmail.com or 001 734 904 9556 or Dr. Stephen Haymes at shaymes@depaul.edu or 001 773 325 1668. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Susan Loess-Perez, DePaul University’s Director of Research Protections at 001 312-362-7593 or by email at sloesspe@depaul.edu. The person at this number and email address may not be able to read or understand Spanish so it might be necessary for you to have someone you know who speaks English to help with the call or help translate your email.

You may keep this information for your records.
Informant Consent Form Spanish

INFORMACIÓN PARA PARTICIPACIÓN EN INVESTIGACIÓN

Identidad después de Experiencias de Trauma:
Participación con el Movimiento Social como una Propuesta a Trauma

Le estamos solicitando que participe en una investigación llevada a cabo bajo la dirección de Alison Paul, una estudiante posgrado de la Universidad DePaul Chicago, Illinois, USA como un requisito para cumplir su carrera. Esta investigación es supervisada por Dr. Stephen Haymes. Estamos solicitándole porque estamos tratando de conocer más acerca de cómo victimas como individuos trabajan con el movimiento colectivo para justicia en Colombia. El estudio le tomará mas o menos dos a cuatro horas de su tiempo. Si acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que sea entrevistado uno o dos veces por Alison Paul pero no mas que tres veces.

La entrevista va incluir preguntas sobre su vida general, su experiencia de perder un familiar, y su participación con el movimiento de victimas. Algunas de esas preguntas se tratan del perdido de un familiar y aunque no es el objetivo de este estudio, hay un riesgo potencial que memorias incómodas pueden parecer. Si usted decide participar se puede elegir no contestar cualquier de las preguntas de las entrevistas en cualquier momento. Vamos a grabar las entrevistas para que podamos ser preciso en las notas de que usted nos ha dicho. Vamos a destruir las grabaciones después de transcribirlas a notas escritas

Usted puede decidir no participar. No habrá consecuencias negativas si decide no participar o si cambia de opinión más tarde. Si usted decide participar se puede rechazar cualquier de las preguntas de la entrevista en cualquier momento. Información que decidieras compartir que pudiera identificarle con otras personas será cambiado para que toda la información sea anónimo. Las entrevistas estarán guardado en un servidor remoto que solo se puede acceder la investigadora para que otras personas no tengan acceso a su entrevista. Información que usted decidiera compartir que puede identificarle o otros va a ser quitado de las notas escritas para que lo que usted nos decir pertenece confidencial. Documentos de esta investigación solo van a ser accesible a la investigadora (Alison Paul) para que otros no tengan acceso a sus repuestas de las entrevistas.

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, por favor contacte a Alison Paul a alisonjpaul@gmail.com y 001 734 904 9556 o Dr. Stephen Haymes a shaymes@depaul.edu 001-773-325-1668. Si tiene preguntas respecto a sus derechos, puede contactar a Susan Loess-Perez, Directora de Protecciones en Investigación de la Universidad DePaul al 001 312-362-7593 o por correo electrónico asloesspe@depaul.edu. Puede ser que la persona que se encuentra a este numero telefónico y correo electrónico no puede leer ni entender Español, así que es posible que sea necesario que usted tiene alguien que habla Ingles que le puede ayudar llamar o traducir su correo electrónico.

Puede guardar esta información para sus archivos.
Interview Protocol:

Meaning Making after Experiences of Trauma: Social Movement Participation as an Approach to Trauma

I. Life before the loss.
   a. Tell me about where you were born and what your childhood was like (how many siblings you had, did you move around much as kid, what was your family life like, etc.).
   b. I’m curious to know more about your educational and career background, could you tell me a little bit about your experience at some of the places you’ve worked and/or studied?
   c. I’d like to know more about your life over the past ten years*. Where were you working, studying, living in the early 2000s?
   d. What kinds of things did you do for fun in those years? (2000-2005 or other years*)
   e. What was a typical day like for you around that time?
   f. Who did you spend most of your time with during that period?
   g. What kind of things did you do for fun?
   h. What was your family life like then?
   i. What is your favorite memory from your home life in YEAR**?
   j. What is your favorite memory of NAME?
   k. Would you feel comfortable describing your FAMILY MEMBER to me? What was he/she like?
   l. What’s one word that describes your relationship to FAMILY MEMBER then?

J. The Loss
   a. I understand that FAMILY MEMBER passed away in YEAR, can you tell me what that year was like for you?
      i. Possible probing question, if clarification is needed and the participant seems to want to talk about the actual event of the family member’s death: I understand that FAMILY MEMBER was killed, can you tell me what happened?
   b. What did it feel like to lose a family member?
a. How did other family members feel about XX’s death?

b. Can you describe in a few sentences what XX’s death meant to you then?

K. After the Loss.
a. Can you tell me a little bit about your life today?

b. What is a typical day like for you now in 2011? (If I note major differences from how they described their lives in the period 2000-2005 then I will follow up with questions focused on those stated differences)

c. Who do you hang out with now?

d. What is life like at home?

e. What things do you do for fun?

f. What’s one word or a few words that sum up your life today?

g. How do you think of FAMILY MEMBER today?

h. Are there ways in which your quality of life has improved (or not) since YEAR**? What is different?

L. Concepts of the State:
a. Do you remember who was the president in YEAR when your FAMILY MEMBER passed away? What did you think about his Administration?
   i. Possible probe: Were you politically active then?

b. What do you think about the current Administration?

c. What does “the Colombian State” mean to you?

d. Are there aspects of the State that you appreciate?

e. What is your idea of true justice? What would it look like? (looking for if it’s punitive, restorative, etc.)

f. Do you consider yourself politically active now?

g. If you had a chance to leave Colombia would you do it?

M. Social Movement Participation:
a. How did you become involved with the victims movement?

b. When did you first go to meetings, protests, and memory galleries?
c. Why did you choose to get involved?

d. Has the victims’ movement influenced how you think about FAMILY MEMBER?

e. What does a victim mean to you? What does being a victim mean to you?

f. What does it mean to seek justice in the case of FAMILY MEMBER? Do you feel that working with ORGANIZATION NAME supports you in seeking justice?

g. Has it been useful to you to be part of ORGANIZATION NAME?

h. Do you feel that you influence the direction of the victims’ movement? Are there times when you don’t agree with the direction of the victims’ movement?

i. What’s your vision for the victims’ movement? Where do you see yourself in creating that vision?

j. What is your favorite memory from working with ORGANIZATION NAME? What’s your least favorite memory of ORGANIZATION NAME?

N. Other:

a. Now that you have a better sense of the information this research is aimed at, do you have anything else you’d like to add?

b. Is there anything else you’d like to ask me?

*The years stated here are flexible depending on the dates particular to each research participant. The following questions assume the family member’s murder has happened around 2005 give or take a year.

**The year prior to family member’s murder.
Translation of Interview Protocol:

Meaning Making after Experiences of Trauma: Social Movement Participation as an Approach to Trauma

I. La vida antes de la pérdida

a. Quisiera saber dónde naciste y cómo fue tu niñez (cuántos hermanos/hermanas tenías, si fueron a vivir a muchos lados, cómo era la vida con tu familia, etc.)

b. Quisiera saber mas sobre tu formación educacional y tu trabajo/carrera. ¿Me puedes decir algo sobre dónde has trabajado o estudiado?

c. ¿Qué tipo de cosas hacías para divertirte en esos años?

d. ¿Cómo era un día típico para ti en ese entonces?

e. ¿Con quien pasaste la mayoría de tu tiempo durante estos años?

f. ¿Qué hacías para divertirte?

g. ¿Cómo fue la vida familiar entonces?

h. ¿Cuál es la memoria favorita de tu vida familiar en el AÑO?

i. ¿Cuál es tu memoria favorita de NOMBRE?

j. ¿Estarías cómodo describiendo a FAMILIAR para mi? ¿Cómo era el/ella?

k. ¿Hay una palabra que describe tu relación con FAMILIAR en este entonces?

II. La pérdida

a. Entiendo que FAMILIAR murió en el año XXX, ¿me puedes decir cómo fue este año para ti?

b. Entiendo que FAMILIAR fue asesinado, ¿me puedes decir qué paso?

b. ¿Cómo te sentiste al perder un familiar?

a. ¿Cómo se sintieron tus otros familiares ante la muerte de XX?

b. ¿Me puedes describir en algunas frases que significó la muerte de XX entonces?
K. Después de la pérdida

a. ¿Me puedes decir algo sobre tu vida actual?

b. ¿Cómo es para ti un día normal actualmente?

c. ¿Con quien pasas la mayor parte de tu tiempo ahora?

d. ¿Cómo es la vida de la casa?

e. ¿Qué haces para divertirte?

f. ¿Cuál es una palabra o algunas palabras que resumen tu vida de hoy?

g. ¿Cómo piensas sobre FAMILIAR hoy?

h. ¿En alguna manera ha tu vida mejorado (o desmejorado) desde AÑO?

L. Conceptos del Estado:

a. ¿Recuerdas quién era el presidente en AÑO cuando murió FAMILIAR? ¿Qué piensas sobre su gobierno? ¿Participabas en procesos políticos en este entonces?

b. ¿Qué piensas sobre el gobierno actual?

c. ¿Qué significa el “Estado Colombiano” para ti?

d. ¿Háy algunos aspectos del Estado que aprecias?

e. Cúal es tu idea de una justicia verdadera? ¿Cómo sería?

f. ¿Ahora consideras que estás activo/a políticamente?

g. Si tuvieras la oportunidad de salir de Colombia, ¿lo harías?

M. Participación en Movimientos Sociales

a. ¿Cómo empezaste a trabajar con el movimiento de víctimas?

b. ¿Cuándo empezaste participar en reuniones, manifestaciones, y en las galerías de la memoria?

c. ¿Por que decidiste involucrarte?
d. ¿El movimiento de víctimas ha influído en como piensas sobre FAMILIAR?

e. ORG llama a sus miembros “víctimas”, ¿qué significa una víctima para ti? ¿Qué significa ser víctima para ti?

f. ¿Qué significa buscar justicia en el caso de FAMILIAR? ¿Sientes que trabajar con ORG te apoya en la búsqueda de la justicia?

g. ¿Ha sido útil para ti ser parte de ORG?

h. ¿Tu crees que puedes influir en los objetivos del movimiento de víctimas? Hay veces en que no estás de acuerdo con los objetivos del movimiento?

i. ¿Cuál es tu visión para el movimiento de víctimas? ¿Dónde te ves en la creación de esta visión?

j. Cual es tu memoria favorita de trabajando con ORG? ¿Cual es tu peor memoria de ORG?

N.Otras

a. Ahora que tienes una mejor idea de esta investigación, ¿quisieras agregar algo mas?

b. ¿Hay algo que me quisieras preguntar?
# Translation Appendix

The original Spanish and English translations of research participants quotes from the interviews are listed in the order they appear in the final document. Any other quotes within the text that were originally in Spanish are also included here as well. All of the below was translated by the author, Alison Paul.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Spanish Original</th>
<th>Informant or Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I am the mother of the young man Diego Alberto Tamayo Bercerra. I lost my son on August 23rd and two days later, the 25th, he was killed by the army’s 15th Brigade from the Norte de Santander.</td>
<td>Yo soy la madre del joven Diego Alberto Tamayo Bercerra, perdi a mi hijo el 23 de agosto y ya a los dos dias, ya el 25, fue muerto por el ejercito, de la brigada 15 del Norte de Santander.</td>
<td>Soacha Mother, from Amnesty International Report: Colombia: Seeking justice: the mothers of Soacha</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopefully, we, the mothers of Soacha, are the ones taking on this sadness of losing our sons the way that we did. We have found that we aren’t the only ones, but that there are many others, wives and siblings, that are going through the same pain, plus the orphans, so we have a long fight, all of us who are going through this. We must lend a hand in this struggle […] the young men who are in heaven give us strength to continue fighting even though threats come our way.</td>
<td>Ojala que nosotras las madres de Soacha somos las que estamos cargando esta tristeza de perder nuestros hijos and la forma en que los perdimos. Nos hemos dado cuenta que no solo somos nosotras sino muchas madres, esposas, hermanos que estan pasando por este mismo dolor, y los huerfanos, entonces, tenemos una lucha muy larga, todas las personas que estamos pasando por esto. Que nos demos la mano que segamos en esta lucha, […] que los muchachos que estan en el cielo nos den cuenta para seguir luchando, aunque con las almenazas que vengan.</td>
<td>Soacha Mother, from Amnesty International Report: Colombia: Seeking justice: the mothers of Soacha</td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong></td>
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<td>The distrust and little credibility placed on the action between</td>
<td>La desconfianza y poca credibilidad en la</td>
<td>M.A. Urrego (cited in</td>
<td>14-</td>
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<tr>
<td>various social actors is a product of the destruction of the social fabric that is experienced with the accumulation of conflicts.</td>
<td>acción entre distintos actores sociales, producto de la destrucción del tejido social experimentado con la acumulación de conflictos.</td>
<td>Zulanga, 2009</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The social movement is situated between the radicalization of the right, the weakening of the left, and a strengthening of armed actors, all of which has contributed to the situation of a scaling up of the violence. As a result, the popular movement has been weakened.</td>
<td>[E]l movimiento social está situado entre la radicalización de la derecha, un debilitamiento de la izquierda y un fortalecimiento de los actores armados, todo lo cual ha contribuido a la situación de escalamiento de la violencia. Como resultado el movimiento popular se ha visto debilitado.</td>
<td>M.A. Urrego (cited in Zulanga, 2009)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Chapter 4 |
| The Actions: Individual and Collective |
| You begin to find out about so many things, so many things that you didn’t believe were like that, I mean, it’s as if you had lived in a little box, like you had been in a little box, in a little light bulb, like over there, isolated, on a little island and you hadn’t known what the world is like, so then I think that this opens your mind, I mean, it’s like you say: Look, turns out that things are not like that, they are like this. You can’t believe everything you hear on television. | Uno se empieza a dar cuenta de tantas cosas, de tantas cosas que vos no creías que eran así, ósea, como si hubieras vivido en una cajita, como si hubieras estado metido en una cajita, en una bombita, como por allá aislado, como en una isleta y no te dieras cuenta de como es el mundo, entonces yo si pienso que eso te abre la mente, ósea, eso si te dice: Mira, es que las cosas no son así, son así. No podes creerle todo lo que dice la television. | Daniela | 56 |
| It’s really gratifying and you feel good in these things, one feels good in the meetings because there one learns and grows, grows as a person, as a victim, and I believe that if one is dedicated to studying and moving themselves they can do good things for the victims because it’s not about making a meeting center and to just have meetings, it’s to be active. | Es bien gratificante y uno se siente bien en esas cosas se siente bien en la reunión del movimiento porque uno aprende y crece, crece como persona, como víctima y creo que si uno se dedicara a estudiar y a moverse se podrían hacer cosas buenas para las víctimas porque el hecho no es de crear un centro de reunirse y reunirse es ser activo. | Claudia | 64 |
| I remember being in many meetings where we spoke of organizing a registry of regional victims and of lands and displacements and all that, but I never saw results […] now I | Yo recuerdo que en unas varias reuniones en que yo estuve hablamos de organizar unos catastros de víctimas regionales y de tierras y | Jairo | 64 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sara</th>
<th>65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>don’t go back to those meetings. Because I see that it’s like, it’s a loss, that it’s a loss of time.</td>
<td>desplazamientos y todo esto, esto nunca vi resultados […] hoy en día no volví a estas reuniones. Por que veo que es como, que es como es perder, que es perder el tiempo.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Jairo</th>
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<tr>
<td>I remember, I mean, my coming together, I found out about the organizations work, but most of all the [organization name]. Because I remember I learned about the [organization name] there and I said “aaaaahh, this is it” and I remember many people, like around 1,200 victims, displaced people, family members of the disappeared, executions, well many families and I have never seen nor thought that there were so many people who were victims. So then everything that they worked on there, the movement strategies, well all these things that they did for those three days I think it was, I said, well, this is it. This has to be it.</td>
<td>Yo recuerdo, o sea, todos mis acercamientos, yo conozco el trabajo de las organizaciones pero todo lo que hecha ha sido en el movimiento. Por que yo recuerdo que yo conoci al movimiento alla y yo “aaaaahh”, esto es, y yo me acuerdo mucha gente pero como 1,200 víctimas, desplazados, familias de los desaparecidos, ejecuciones, bueno. Muchos familiares entonces yo nunca había visto y tampoco pensaba pues que era tanta gente victima pero entonces todo lo que se dedico alla las 8 estrategias del movimiento, bueno, todas estas cosas que se dieron durante estos tres dias creo que fue. Yo decia, pues esto es. Esto tiene que ser.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Claudia</th>
<th>67</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[My son] will continue to be alive inside of me and I want him to be alive for everyone so from there I began to learn about historic memory and I continued on in this struggle as much as I could. My son isn’t with us at home but I continue to wait for him, I’m still waiting, there are his things, his books, his clothes, so this is historic memory. Over time, I want over the years and centuries people remember a student who was cowardly assassinated in an act of state terrorism.</td>
<td>el seguirá vivo dentro de mí y quiero que él siga vivo entro de todas las personas, entonces de ahí que yo empecé a conocer lo que era la memoria histórica y seguí en esa lucha hasta donde más se pudo. Mi hijo no está con nosotros en casa pero lo sigo esperando, todavía lo estoy esperando ahí están sus cosas, sus libros, su ropa, entonces eso es la memoria histórica, yo quiero que a través del tiempo a través de los años y de los siglos pues la gente lo siga recordando de un estudiante asesinado cobardemente por los policías en un hecho de terrorismo estatal.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claudia</th>
<th>67</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The victim has rights and all, you learn that in those talks, in the marches that you go to, and you don’t go just to go but you go in representation of that person that now isn’t here and this is a symbol that we are telling the world about or telling the</td>
<td>Que esa víctima tiene derechos y todo eso, de lo que uno aprende en esas charlas, en las marches donde uno va, y no va por andar si no que uno va porque una va en representación</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people in our city about what is happening, and what happened and I feel good because what happened to us isn’t something that can be erased for us and I feel that in the moment that I am participating in order to keep my father’s memory alive.

But in summary, nothing came out of it, nothing worked. Ah, one thing did, historic memory. Maybe a few people are going to keep the memory of all that Alvaro’s father did, a march, a movie, a song, some parks, some murales…

because to me the denouncement is very important, the denouncement is more important for me than a meeting.

Right now I’m not sure that the country’s situation can change. But I am sure that you have to denounce, that you have to bring to light what happens, it can’t stay hidden, this is the only thing I know. Is this going to help? I don’t know, if it’s going to get worse, I wouldn’t know. But come what may, whatever happens, if the situation gets better or worse, the human rights violations in Colombia, whatever happens, I am sure that what has to happen is that people have to make these types of crimes visible. They can’t remain forgotten, they can’t remain quiet so that these things keep happening, this is the only sure thing I’ve got.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>de aquella persona que ya no esta y eso es como un símbolo estamos contándole al mundo o contándoles a las demás personas en nuestra ciudad que es lo que esta pasando o que fue lo que sucedió y me siento bien porque pues lo que a nosotros nos pasó no es algo que se nos vaya a borrar y siento que en momento yo estoy participando para mantener esa memoria viva de mi padre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pero resumiendo no se dio nada, de nada servio. Ah, quedo algo, memoria histórica. Que de pronto para algunos pocos va a quedar en recuerdo todo que hizo el papa de Alvaro, una marcha, una película, una canción, unos parques, unos murales…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo no estoy en eso momento no estoy segura si la situación en el país puede cambiar. Pero estoy segura de que se debe denunciar, que se debe dar a conocer que lo que pasa no puede seguir quedando oculto, es la única seguridad que tengo. Que eso va a servir? yo no se, si esto va a empeorar, no sabría. Pero se a lo que sea que pase si empeora o mejora la situación, de violaciones de los ddhh en Colombia, cualquiera que sea la cosa que pasa de que yo si estoy segura que tiene que suceder es que la gente tiene que hacer visible este tipo de crímenes. No se puede quedar en el olvido, que no puede quedar calladitos a seguir pasando estas cosas, como la única seguridad que tengo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that it’s necessary to do it, that it’s necessary not only for a process or so that there’s a judicial process but that it’s necessary to do it because simply we have to vindicate in some way, I mean those human beings that these crimes were committed against, I mean to vindicate their names, to revive what they wanted to do, what they were, as a way to tell, like to be reminding what it is to kill someone and that this someone wasn’t just whatever, like reminding also the state, the state itself, telling it: Look, see, you committed this murder and the state is responsible too in some form, I think that this helps a lot in these types of things, I think that’s why.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have wanted to make, like a Plaza de Mayo, where all of us mothers would meet up, all the families, this is my dream, to make a Plaza de Mayo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The plantones are important, they should be sacred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When there aren’t plantones I even get sad, when there are plantones for me it’s like a party that I’m going to denounce…I’m not afraid to denounce, for me it’s incredible at a planton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve done plantones alone. I go to the [name of] plaza and those who want to accompany me can, of course [name of organization] never accompanies me, I have invited them and no, nope, so I have gone, for example, sometimes [a friend] goes and we bring our photographs there […] I denounce on my own because what else can I do?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Obligation to do Something</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s really painful to hear the stories, it makes you sad but at the same time you want to accompany them. Because you go along accompanying, you accompany them, it makes you depressed but at the same time you have to accompany them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that when one deals with saying: Well, my father’s name has to be defended because my father wasn’t what those people say. I believe that there’s something there from childhood, in their upbringing from when they were little that stuck with them from their parents, what they are taught when they are young, like ‘my daughter, you have to do this in this way because this isn’t done well like that or you have to be honest because or you have to be responsible because, I believe that these things come from within and when all that happened with my dad I believe they arise because you, well, its like I have these values so I can’t leave it that…or that they would make fun of someone or like that my dad’s name be left like that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was this rush, I think that there was this rush then because we had to do it and to go out and denounce right there because if not he would be forgotten and all that, and this was also a way to not think about the reality I think</td>
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because you left and arrived at home worn out and fell asleep, so it was a way to also think in the case that my dad had died.

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<tr>
<th>He cambiado. Yo no se si haya cambiada para bien o para mal, pero pues me toco, esta palabra es que no se, obligatorio.</th>
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<td>Sara</td>
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If I received that money I would hang myself, immediately, no way. That would be zero, I mean for me it is my essence, I am who I am through this.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yo ya como tantos años sin decir vivo, o sea pues vivir no es levantarse, vestirse, salir esto no es vivir o sea vivir es disfrutar la vida o sea vivir la vida eso es vivir, entonces digamos también como en esta ser de vivir pues estan estas cosas pero pues..muy terrible.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
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Sara
75

I've changed […] I’m not sure if I’ve changed for better or for worse, but I had to, the word is, I don’t know, obligatory.

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<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
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</table>

Sara
75

For many years now I haven’t lived, I mean living isn’t getting up, getting dressed, leaving - no, this isn’t living. To live is to enjoy life, I mean to live your life, this is living. well then we also say that this being, living, well those things are there too…very terrible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yo ya como tantos años sin decir vivo, o sea pues vivir no es levantarse, vestirse, salir esto no es vivir o sea vivir es disfrutar la vida o sea vivir la vida eso es vivir, entonces digamos también como en esta ser de vivir pues estan estas cosas pero pues..muy terrible.</th>
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<td>Sara</td>
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Sara
75

Obligation to the Dead

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<tr>
<th>I’m not thinking about money, what I need is for there to be justice and that my brother’s good name is restored because he wasn’t a guerrilla, this is what bothers me the most at times, to pass on his good name.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daisi</td>
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Daisi
77

I think in my own case […] there was

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Antes de todo que digan lo que hacían y que así como los dieron como guerrilleros que digan que los asesinaron, que los llevaron con engaños y los asesinaron.</th>
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<td>Daisi</td>
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Daisi
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very difficult pain

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<th>dolor muy duro</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daisi</td>
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Daisi
77

Most importantly that they say what they did and how they went about saying they were guerrillas, that they say that they killed them, that they took them away with lies and killed them.

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<tr>
<th>Antes de todo que digan lo que hacían y que así como los dieron como guerrilleros que digan que los asesinaron, que los llevaron con engaños y los asesinaron.</th>
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Daisi
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Daisi
77

I think in my own case […] there was

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<th>Yo creo que en mi caso particular […]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so much rage, so much rage there because they had killed my father […]</td>
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<tr>
<td>because you have to do something, this can’t remain this way, it’s like this indignation, like this indignation about what happened and that it would stay that way and if we’re quiet and then sure my dad is going to keep this title that they gave him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My father worked so much, so hard, he sacrificed so much during his life and one day they came and killed him and did all that they did to him, and he never enjoyed his life, he didn’t enjoy it. And I understood this, I mean I understand his sacrifice a lot… and that why, that’s why sometimes I have tried to give him a little peace, of the soul, for example, some retribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me it would have been impossible, no, to have forgotten, I mean, this pain that in the end… because it is the pain, so then I’m saying it loudly, I mean I am defending his name, that’s to say my moral and ethical commitment with him, with my dad […], I am saying for example, I couldn’t have his photo there, to stand up, to be leaving and I stand up and I see him, I wouldn’t be able to look at him in the eyes knowing that I didn’t do anything or that they accused him, what they did to him, what they said, and that I was afraid.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I don’t have a way to explain it, I don’t</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m not going to let Laura stay like that, not while I’m alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My daughter was right […] I had to live it with my own flesh to be able to understand that everything that my daughter said was the truth about what is happening here in Colombia, about the false positives, the displaced, about all the injustices that are committed here in Colombia with everyone, how the people are trampled, in order for me to see, they had to kill my daughter for me to see and to say: yes, Laura was right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reason I always go to these marches, what I yell, what I protest and all of that, I feel that she is saying to me, “that’s it Mom, do it Mom!” Since that’s how she was and so I say, yeah, I’m doing what she would have done, right? What she would do because if the same thing had happened to me maybe she would have done the same you see? So I say, no, I have to fight so that there is justice for her because she was very important for me and for many people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m there because Laura is there, because she would be there, Laura would be in a plantón like this where everyone is hand in hand, I went with her to this, for all of it, I was there with her, that’s why I want to go, to be there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with Laura there because I know that she is going to be there.</td>
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</table>
| I dream of her and she says to me: Mother, for all of life I will be with you, you don’t see me but I am at your side she says and I’ll only go away when you forget me, she says, if you forget me I’ll go, but I’m there with you and you aren’t going to see me and I’m at your side, that’s how she says it, she says to me: Mom, this was going to happen, this was going to happen, I had to go, that’s how she is in my dreams, she appears to me and she says: As long as you don’t forget me, I’m at your side. | Yo me he soñado con ella, y ella me dice: Madre, yo toda la vida voy a estar contigo, tú no me ves pero yo estoy a tu lado, me dice, y solo me voy cuando usted me olvide, me dice, si usted me olvida me voy pero ahí estoy con usted y usted no me va a ver y estoy a su lado, así ella diciéndome, me dice: Mami, esto iba a pasar, esto iba a pasar, yo me tenía que ir así me dice en sueños, se me presenta y me dice: Mientras que usted no me olvide estoy a su lado. | Luz Marina | 80  
| Look, this is something that I learned, it’s how I felt, it’s something that was born from a feeling and when [Alvaro] dies, he…I said my son has gone away from here, from the earth, but not for me, no. He will continue to be alive inside of me and I want him to be alive for everyone so from there I began to learn about historic memory and I continued on in this struggle as much as I could. My son isn’t with us at home but I continue to wait for him, I’m still waiting, there are his things, his books, his clothes, so this is historic memory. | Bueno, mire ahí, esto sino lo he aprendido, yo así lo sentí, fue algo que nació de un sentimiento y cuando muere, él…yo dije, mi hijo se ha ido de aquí de la tierra pero para mí no, él seguirá vivo dentro de mí y quiero que él siga vivo entro de todas las personas, entonces de ahí que yo empecé a conocer lo que era la memoria histórica y seguí en esa lucha hasta donde más se pudo. Mi hijo no está con nosotros en casa pero lo sigo esperando, todavía lo estoy esperando ahí están sus cosas, sus libros, su ropa, entonces eso es la memoria histórica. | Jario | 80-81  
| What I aim for now is that his image is never forgotten. That he is present here and in every corner of the world. That he reminds the criminals, the people who are in charge of repression, that this shouldn’t be. And as a person Alvaro will never be forgotten for me, | Yo hoy en día lo que yo siempre pretendí es que la imagen no se olvide. Este presente aquí y en cualquier rincón del mundo. Que se recuerde a los criminales, a las personas que lideran las represiones, de que esto no deber ser. Que como persona, Alvaro, nunca a mi nunca se le olvida. Por | Jairo | 81 |
because he is my son and he is here even though he has died, for me he alive.

Obligation to *La Patria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If we want a different country, if we are constructing this differently and that those of us who are victims, who have birthed this pain, really, no, it’s like no one wants another to go through this and that in this want that no one goes through the same thing is, is this, it is to denounce the crimes.</th>
<th>Si nosotros queremos un país diferente, si estamos en la construcción de esto diferente y que nosotros que somos víctimas, que hemos parecido este dolor, realmente no como que uno no quiere que otro pase por eso y que en este querer que otro no pase por eso es, es eso, es denunciar los crímenes.</th>
<th>Sara 84</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I took it on as my moral commitment, to clean his name, that’s it. I have to do this. This is it, as a daughter, but like I told them the other day, it’s a commitment as a citizen. My civil duty and my moral duty, I mean, as a citizen to denounce, the same way everyone has to, and as a daughter because I couldn’t do any less, it is to fulfill what I have to do…</td>
<td>Por que yo lo asumi como mi compromiso moral, esto es para limpiar su nombre, esta es. A mi me toca esto. Esto es como hija, como, además yo les decía en estos días es un compromiso como ciudadana. Me deber civil y me deber moral o sea como ciudadana denunciar, o sea esto toca a todo el mundo, y como hija no podía hacer menos, es cumplir con lo que me tocaba hacer…</td>
<td>Sara 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now I’m not sure that the country’s situation can change. But I am sure that you have to denounce, that you have to bring to light what happens, it can’t stay hidden, this is the only thing I know. Is this going to help? I don’t know, if it’s going to get worse, I wouldn’t know. But come what may, whatever happens, if the situation gets better or worse, the human rights violations in Colombia, whatever happens, I am sure that what has to happen is that people have to make these types of crimes visible. They can’t</td>
<td>Yo no estoy en ese momento no estoy segura si la situación en el país puede cambiar. Pero estoy segura de que se debe denunciar, que se debe dar a conocer que lo que pasa no puede seguir quedando oculto, es la única seguridad que tengo. Que eso va a servir? yo no se, si esto va a empeorar, no sabría. Pero se a lo que sea que pase si empeora o mejora la situación, de violaciones de los ddhh en Colombia, cualquiera que sea la cosa que pasa de que yo si estoy segura que tiene que suceder es que la gente tiene que hacer visible este tipo de crímenes. No se puede quedar en el</td>
<td>Sara 84</td>
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remain forgotten, they can’t remain quiet so that these things keep happening, this is the only sure thing I’ve got.

Well, because I like it, I mean, I like these things a lot. I think that in one way or another this helps, like, so that they recognize you, or are at least recognized as a victim. I think to be in these places helps keep clear who are the victims because if no one gets together, maybe they would disappear, I mean, no one would know that this had happened to a group of people.

I have to identify myself with these people, I mean these situations create victim identification.

Yeah, well, you, it hurts a lot but at the same time since all the people that are there are victims, well you, you feel that these people understand you. Not like other people because they haven’t had the same experiences so they don’t understand what you feel. So when you’re with people who have had the same experiences you identify with them more.

It’s beautiful to see how the people go out and scream the name of the person that isn’t here anymore, to yell their

<table>
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<th>Belonging</th>
<th>Identification through Participation</th>
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<td>I have to identify myself with these people, I mean these situations create victim identification.</td>
<td>Tengo que identificarme con esas personas ósea esas situaciones crean como identificación de la víctima como tal.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Participation Feels Good</th>
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<tr>
<th>Claudia</th>
<th>85</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrid</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
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</table>
slogan and to also demand that those who have killed know that there are people that are the voice of the people who have died. I feel good when I have accompanied [events] for example there have been few [events], the situations where the people in their commemorations of their family members because you identify with the person, […] I feel good, I feel good at that moment, you feel good because there is someone helping you because it isn’t an easy situation, it’s a very difficult situation in many cases […] it’s really gratifying and you feel good in these things, one feels good in the meetings because there one learns and grows, grows as a person, as a victim […] when I have been in those places I feel good […] and I also have identified a lot due to the fact I have and that I am relating to these people, I mean, that’s why I think I feel good.

I felt like really integrated, very united, like I had the support of the organizations […] they were such dear people and I felt at home, like I could express my things to them, everything, right? They have gone to the cemetary with me, to the lighting, they are there with me, there, even for the lighting in December.

The Same Pain

You feel identified because the person feels the same pain that you feel. Well, también que aquellas personas que han matado sepan que hay personas que son la voz de aquellas personas que han fallecido, yo me he sentido bien cuando he acompañado por ejemplo que han sido pocas también las situaciones donde a las personas en sus conmemoraciones a sus familiares, porque siento que uno se identifica con esa persona […] me siento bien, siento que en ese momento esa persona se siente bien porque esta uno hay apoyándola porque no es una situación fácil, es una situación muy difícil muchas veces […]cuando yo he asistido y he estado en esos lugares me he sentido bien[…] es bien gratificante y uno se siente bien en esas cosas se siente bien en la reunión del movimiento porque uno aprende y crece, crece como persona, como víctima […] Y además me he identificado mucho partiendo del hecho de que yo tengo y estoy relacionada con esas personas, ósea, por eso creo que me siento bien.

Me sentía como muy integrada, como muy unida, como que tenía apoyo de las organizaciones, […] yo me sentía como en mi casa, como que podía expresarle mis cosas, de todo, ¿Cierto?, ellos han ido con migo al cementerio, al alumbrado, ellos están con migo ahí, ahí, pues hasta ahora hasta el alumbrado de diciembre ellos lo acompañan a uno.

Luz Mari 89

Astrid 90
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<tr>
<th>First Encounter</th>
<th>Stories Heard</th>
<th>Family Feelings</th>
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<tr>
<td>it’s not the same to imagine the suffering, to imagine what if they assassinated my son. Ah, it’s already happened. So you feel identified because these people understand the pain that you have. It’s like, like they accompany you in the sorrow, as they say, so you…these people do understand the pain each of them. Many people say I’m sorry, I lament it, but it’s only when one really has experienced it is when they really feel it. You can imagine it but it’s not the same. It’s not the same…when you feel it with your own flesh and blood, then you understand what is happening with these people.</td>
<td>Entonces no es lo mismo uno imaginarse un sufrimiento, imaginarse si mi hijo me lo asasinaron. Ah, queya ha sucedido. Entonces uno se siente identificado porque estas personas si entienden el dolor que uno tiene. Entonces es como, como uno se acompanan el la pena, como se dicen, entonces uno…estas personas si entienden el dolor por cada uno. Muchas personas dice yo lo siento, yo lo lamento, pero solo cuando a uno le pasa realmente es que uno lo siente. Uno se lo imagina pero no es igual. No es igual… cuando uno lo siente con su propio carne, entonces ya uno entiende que esta sucediendo con estas personas.</td>
<td>Luz Marina</td>
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<tr>
<td>This was the first encounter I had, I mean of listening to the stories. You are converted into one family because all of us have the same pain so we accompany each other and then we go along learning about the stories from other families to know that we are not the only ones, we are many and that if we are together we can generate better things.</td>
<td>Ese era el primer encuentro que tenía, ósea, y de escuchar las historias uno se va convirtiendo como en una sola familia porque todos tenemos el mismo dolor entoncesos acompañamos y ya entonces vamos conociendo las historias de las otras familias de no saber que no somos los únicos, que somos muchos y que si estamos juntos nos pueden generar cosas mejores.</td>
<td>Daisi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Now I feel that I have one family with everyone, that we are all one family, we meet up and see each other, we talk, and well I know their cases and they know</td>
<td>Entonces pues ahora yo siento que tengo una familia con todos que somos todos una familia, nos encontramos y si nos vemos hablamos y pues yo conozco el caso de</td>
<td>Daisi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belonging Produces Strength</td>
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<td>I’m not afraid anymore because I know that if they are going to something against me they are going to have to do it against all of us because there are lots of us, lots and lots.</td>
<td>A mí no me da miedo porque yo se que si van a hacer algo contra mí van a tener que hacerlo contra todos porque somos muchos, somos muchos.</td>
<td>Daisi 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[the organization] has taught me and well that we aren’t the only ones that we are many people that have had this experience so now we know we aren’t the only ones …now the days are getting better, yes.</td>
<td>[organization] pues me ha hecho conocer y pues que no somos los únicos y que somos muchas personas que han pasado por eso entonces ya como que uno sabe que no somos los únicos y que ahora nos apoyamos pues los unos a los otros entonces ya los días van como mejorando.</td>
<td>Daisi 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The situation which we lived through didn’t just happen to us, at that time we were the only ones, but bringing to memory the things that we had heard and also when one feels related you begin to see that there are many people that have had the same experience.</td>
<td>Se también que la situación por la que nosotros pasamos no nos ocurrió nada más solamente a nosotros, pensamos en ese momento que éramos las únicas pero después truyendo a memoria cosas que habíamos oído y también cuando ya uno se relaciona uno ya comienza a ver que es mucha gente a la que le ha pasado lo mismo.</td>
<td>Claudia 92</td>
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<td>I think that it’s true that in these situations - the events and marches - do help maybe also as a way to not lose like this...like so that the person doesn’t</td>
<td>Yo creo que si, que todo va como ligado, yo digo que si se dan esas situaciones de eventos, de marchas a ayudan si de pronto también como para que no se pierda como</td>
<td>Claudia 92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>No identifiable information is used in this section to protect research participants</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Patterns of Exclusion within Organizations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I don’t want them to look at me with the eyes of a money grabbing merchant.</td>
<td>Es que no quiere que me miren con ojos de negociante de comercial no. -- 97</td>
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<tr>
<td>The victim is there as if to be shown off, like to show them off and then through this person we can get resources and through this person we can do this.</td>
<td>La víctima sino que es como el mostrarlo, como lo de mostrar y entonces a través de esta persona podemos captar recursos y a través de esta persona podemos hacer esto. -- 97</td>
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<tr>
<td>They put you up there like a clown, like a puppet over there, over here, so no, I say no. No, no more of this, not with me. This is what deceived me about the organizations.</td>
<td>Lo ponen a uno es de payaso como marioneta que para allá que para acá, entonces no, entonces yo digo: No, eso ya no, ya no más, ya no más con migo. Eso me decepcionó mucho de las organizaciones. -- 97</td>
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<tr>
<td>I don’t want to be a victim of the victims.</td>
<td>No quiero ser mas victima de las victimas.</td>
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<td>I stay quiet, I don’t exist. Because I can’t, I don’t want more problems.</td>
<td>Me quedo callado no existe. Por que yo no pueda, yo no quiero problemas. -- 98</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I have time, I go. Sometimes, I’m not going to deny it, I’ve been disheartened because I think all these things are the same, there is always like a self benefiting whereever you go and things are never going to function well, they way they should, but instead for one’s own benefit…</td>
<td>Si yo tengo el tiempo yo voy, a veces no lo voy a negar, he tenido mucho desaliento porque pienso que todas las cosas es lo mismo siempre hay como un beneficio propio donde usted va y nunca va a ver el buen funcionamiento de las cosas como deberían ser, sino como en beneficio propio… -- 98</td>
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<td>…they divided, there were difficulties,</td>
<td>…se dividieron, que dificultades hubo -- 99</td>
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right? And then I felt like I was over there, adrift.  

…when there began to be a division in which everyone went this way and that, this - this is what I didn’t like and I felt sort of alone, thrown out, […] it made me really sad, really sad to see everyone go their own way, all this made me so sad because while we continue on this way we aren’t going to do anything, nothing. That’s what’s of interest to the government.

State Exclusionary Patterns

There was a lot of denouncing, there was a lot of accompaniment, and I thought that doing all this was going to quickly find it, to quickly find justice. But those were lies.

words in the wind

So it’s an embarassment. Hopes that Colombia, that its people move forward, I don’t see it coming soon […] So, simply, I’m one more victim. And I know that I’m going to die awaiting justice.

This has been going on for I don’t even know how long and I think that for a lot of people they get to the point where they get depressed and they come back and it’s like they come up again because it’s exhausting with so much waiting.

Maybe sometimes I don’t know if it’s because I say I don’t have time, it’s like, sometimes the hopelessness gets to you and you say: No, why? Look things happen that one doesn’t like and you

<table>
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<th>English</th>
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<td>right? And then I felt like I was over there, adrift.</td>
<td>¿Ciert?, y entonces yo ya me siento como por ahí así, a la deriva.</td>
<td>149</td>
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<tr>
<td>…when there began to be a division in which everyone went this way and that, this - this is what I didn’t like and I felt sort of alone, thrown out, […] it made me really sad, really sad to see everyone go their own way, all this made me so sad because while we continue on this way we aren’t going to do anything, nothing. That’s what’s of interest to the government.</td>
<td>…cuando comenzó a haber como una división que cada uno que para allá, que para acá, que esto, eso fue lo que no me gustó a mí y ahí yo me sentí como sola, como tirada […] me daba mucha, mucha tristeza de ver a todo el mundo por su lado, me daba mucha tristeza eso, porque mientras que sigamos así no vamos a hacer nada, nada. Al gobierno le interesa.</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Exclusionary Patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>There was a lot of denouncing, there was a lot of accompaniment, and I thought that doing all this was going to quickly find it, to quickly find justice. But those were lies.</td>
<td>Había mucha denuncia, había mucha acompañamiento, y yo pensaba que haciendo todo esto iba a encontrar rápido, buscar rápido la justicia. Pero esto fue mentiras.</td>
<td>101</td>
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<td>words in the wind</td>
<td>palabras al viento</td>
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<tr>
<td>So it’s an embarassment. Hopes that Colombia, that its people move forward, I don’t see it coming soon […] So, simply, I’m one more victim. And I know that I’m going to die awaiting justice.</td>
<td>Entonces es una vergüenza. Esperanzas que Colombia, que su pueblo saque adelante, no la veo próxima. […]Pues, sencillamente, yo soy una víctima mas. Y yo se que yo voy a morir esperando justicia.</td>
<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>This has been going on for I don’t even know how long and I think that for a lot of people they get to the point where they get depressed and they come back and it’s like they come up again because it’s exhausting with so much waiting.</td>
<td>Eso lleva no se cuantos años y yo creo que para las personas llegan a un momento que sufren un bajón y vuelven y como que se les sube otra vez porque es tanto el desgaste y es tanto el esperar.</td>
<td>102</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maybe sometimes I don’t know if it’s because I say I don’t have time, it’s like, sometimes the hopelessness gets to you and you say: No, why? Look things happen that one doesn’t like and you</td>
<td>De pronto a veces no sí es porque digo que no tengo el tiempo, que una cosa o a veces uno mismo como que le llega como la desesperanza y dice: No, para que, ve también cosas que no le gustan y dice: No,</td>
<td>102</td>
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say: no, it’s the same, nothing changes and the situations always remain the same, or I’m tired and I don’t want to go to any meeting.

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<th>Economic Barriers to Participation</th>
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<td>almost all of us are in some part people of few resources.</td>
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<td>nosotros casi todos en algunas partes gentes de bajos recursos.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…this lady, one day she began to get up, to stand up, to look for work, starts working and in addition to this she began to come to the marches, for example the March 10th march - one year after joining the [organization] she shows up with ten people. So this lady paid for her work day for example, this day she was off, she worked in a clinic, she did cleaning or something. Everyday she knew that March 10th was the mobilization, everyday this lady worked more, she worked one hour extra and so they gave her March 10th off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…esta senora un día ya empieza a pararse, levantarse, buscar trabajo, empieza trabajar y adicionar a esto empieza ya llega a una marcha por ejemplo como el 10 de marzo después de un año de estar en [organizacion] llegue con 10 personas. Entonces esta senora pago su día de trabajo por ejemplo, esta día tuvo libre, ella trabajaba en una clinica, ella es como de limpieza. Todos los dias que ya sabia que el 10 de marzo era la movilización, todos los dias esta senora pago una hora de trabajo, trabajo una hora mas y el 10 de marzo y la gente le dio libre.</td>
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<td>So I tell you, the dignity, the thing is that the victim, for example, I have seen at times that people don’t even have enough to be able to eat. There are international organizations that send good resources. But they don’t give the money to the victims, for a lunch, for the market goods, for just the minimum. Or even pay one of the bills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ya te digo, la dignidad, es que la victima por ejemplo, eh eh yo he visto tantas que gente que no tiene ni para comer. Hay organizaciones internacionales que mandan buenos recursos. Hombre, no le dan la plata a las victimas, de le un almuerzo, para el mercado, para como al mínimo. O paguen si quiera el recibo.</td>
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<td>I say it, but it shouldn’t be this way, one of the big big obstacles is money, money to go to where the people are because it’s a need, I mean there are lots of people for example that want to</td>
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<td>Digo que no debería ser pero uno de los obstáculos grandes es el dinero, dinero para ir donde la gente por que se necesita o sea hay mucha gente por ejemplo que quiere movilizar, para ir a una</td>
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travel, to go to a march, but there’s not way for them to come from the region, from their town to the march.
marcha pero no hay forma que vengan de la region, del municipio para la marcha.
Reference List


