

## **Against Indifference. A Call for Civil Engagement in Postconflict in Colombia.**

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### **Abstract**

The peace accord of 2016 was received with substantial indifference by a large part of the Colombian population. This article suggests that indifference relates to fractures in Colombian Society. Four theses against indifference are put forward: (i) the limitations of the peace accord do not eliminate its potential for change; (ii) pressure from the civil society and the public can hold those in power accountable for the realisation of the peace accord; (iii) the civil society and the public can appropriate the peace process and influence peacebuilding; (iv) peacebuilding is the opportunity not only to build peace, but to newly shape a more diverse, inclusive, democratic, dignifying and environmentally-conscious Colombia.

### **Keywords**

Civil society, peacebuilding, post-conflict, Colombia.

*“Acaso el final de esta Guerra sea por fin el comienzo de ese país nuevo que tanto hemos esperado”* (William Ospina, ‘Pa que se acabe esta vaina’, p. 235)

### **The Anomaly of Indifference**

The peace accord (Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2016) “to end conflict and build a stable and long-lasting peace” that was signed in 2016 by the Colombian Government and the insurgent group *Fuerza Armada Revolucionaria de Colombia Ejercito del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) has been heartily welcomed internationally. The Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2016 “for his resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end” (Nobel Prize, 2016). The United Nations, through their Verification Mission, and the European Union, through its Trust Fund, among other international entities, have committed to supporting the implementation of the accord and are playing an active role in monitoring, funding or otherwise assisting the post-conflict peacebuilding effort. Furthermore, the innovative legal, political and practical solutions that led to the peace accord are lessons that give a glimmer of hope to other countries plagued by long, drawn-out wars (Herbolzheimer, 2016; Siegfried, 2016).

Among Colombians, the peace accord was met with more mixed feelings. The population has become polarised, as clearly shown by the results of the referendum that took place in October 2016: votes against (50.21%) slightly surpassed those in favour (49.78%) of the accord (El País, 2016, 03 October, online)<sup>1</sup>. As noted by many commentators, this polarisation had an important geographical dimension. By and large, regions more affected by the armed conflict voted in favour of the accord, whereas urban centres and regions less directly affected voted mostly against the agreement signed by the Colombian Government and FARC-EP.

Yet one aspect that was particularly surprising to many external observers, given the historic nature of the accord and consequently its potential impact on the country, was the low turnout: 62.52% of Colombians who were eligible to vote decided not to exercise this fundamental right. A minimum of 51.02% in the Department of Casanare, and peaks of over 80% in La Guajira and among Colombians living abroad, decided not to vote on this occasion.

Commentators have suggested that the spread of misinformation and the poor peace pedagogy may have contributed to low turnout in the referendum. Some people distrusted the actual negotiation process that led to the signing of the accord, which they found not to be transparent or agreeable for various reasons, including the notions of transitional justice that informed it (Nasi & Rettberg, 2016; Cárdenas Ruiz, 2013). It has also been argued that different and partly incompatible definitions of

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<sup>1</sup> A revised peace accord was subsequently approved by Congress vote (The Guardian, 2016, 24 November, online).

peace exist, and that they are reflected in diverging political objectives (Rettberg, 2003). However, most of the above factors seem more appropriately to explain the marked division between people in favour or against the peace accord than the level of disinterest in such an historical process in Colombian and world history.

Can this level of disengagement be attributed solely to a widespread disaffection with politics, not uncommon nowadays in other countries in Latin America and worldwide, perhaps compounded by high levels of corruption that put people off participation in the democratic process, as suggested by other commentators (Díaz, 2017)? Or perhaps Colombians were victims of post-truth politics (González, 2017) and therefore simply failed to appreciate the stakes of this vote? Was such disengagement an indicator of indifference? If so, why were so many people indifferent to the accord? What were the social, cultural and historical roots of this indifference? Will such disinterest undermine the peacebuilding effort? And if indifference is a threat to potentially historic change, what precisely are the reasons why Colombians should actively participate in the peacebuilding effort?

This article is the attempt to provide an answer to these questions by making sense of conversations I have recently had with social and environmental activists, public servants, journalists, business and social leaders, farmers, and members of the public, within the framework of an ongoing project on peri-urban agriculture in Sogamoso, Department of Boyacá<sup>2</sup>. Those conversations with many *Sogamoseños* have uncovered, I believe, a range of issues that not only provide some insight into the low turnout at the October 2016 referendum, but also shed light on the challenges ahead for the peacebuilding effort. The aim of this article is to offer simultaneously an explanation of why so many people have been indifferent to this historic peace accord, a reflection on what this indifference means for the prospects of peacebuilding, and some arguments to counter such indifference. I want to suggest that this article speaks not only about Sogamoso or Boyacá, but about other areas that have not been epicentres of armed conflict in Colombia. My hope is that the ideas proposed here may help break through the indifference shared by so many Colombians and move them to be part of, and actually shape, a peaceful future for their country.

### **Explaining Indifference**

Are so many Colombians really indifferent to the peace accord? In fact, when talked about in general terms as a value or principle, hardly any person I spoke with expressed any opposition to peace. As it was often, and in quite general terms, put: ‘peace is better than war’. However, when thinking about *this* particular peace, which follows *this* particular conflict, most people felt the peace accord and the peacebuilding process matters little to their organisation, their community or

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<sup>2</sup> The project, funded by the Royal Geographical Society with IBG (United Kingdom), is a collaboration between the University of Reading and the local Fundación Jischana Huitaca. The project website is: <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/governing-sustainable-agri-food-systems-in-colombia/>

themselves as individuals. The vast majority of people I talked with had not read the peace accord, nor any of the simplified (and usefully shorter) information materials, such as those prepared by the Alto Comisionado para la Paz. More than that, the general attitude towards the peace accord, the peacebuilding process and its potential impact on Sogamoso was openly one of scepticism, perhaps even resignation, and substantial indifference. This clashes quite dramatically with the much more optimistic (albeit often critical) views that have dominated much of the international reporting on the Colombian peace process (The Guardian, 2016, 24 November, online). The peace accord and the developing peacebuilding process felt very distant from the everyday experience of the great majority of people I spoke with. Why? Why have so many people in Sogamoso—laymen and women as well as business and social leaders—held this view of the peace process? The explanations I collected can be grouped under two apparently opposite sets of arguments: ‘there has never been conflict in Sogamoso’, and ‘there will never be peace in Colombia’.

### **There Has Never Been Conflict in Sogamoso**

Undeniably, Sogamoso, like most of the Department of Boyacá, has been among the areas least affected by any form of violence during the armed conflict in the country (Rodríguez Morales, 2009; CNHM, 2015; Salas Salazar, 2015). People explicitly or implicitly referred to this fact when they played down the presence of armed conflict in Sogamoso and its surroundings. The conflict is thought of as a phenomenon that involved rural areas more than urban ones, and that affected Boyacá significantly less than other regions, such as for instance the oriental plains (*Llano Oriental*). Moreover, the widespread impression that the peacebuilding initiatives (e.g., in the housing or agricultural sectors) mostly, if not solely, target the areas that were directly affected by the war, and will therefore not be felt in Sogamoso, disincentives engagement with the peace accord and peacebuilding process. In sum, most *Sogamoseños* have not seen, and do not expect to see, any substantial change locally as an effect of the end of the armed conflict or of the ongoing peacebuilding process.

### **There Will Never Be Peace in Colombia**

Indifference towards the peace accord is also justified by magnifying the limitations of the accord and possible difficulties in its implementation. The Colombian Government has traditionally performed better in legislating policies—be they environmental, social or economic—than it has been in enforcing them. The presence of the Colombian State in conflict-ridden areas as well as in rural areas in general has been historically weak (e.g., Feola, 2017) and this has contributed to perpetuating and enlarging the urban-rural gap (Jaramillo, 2006; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Furthermore, the peace accord is multifaceted, and even though it still is in its early stages, the peacebuilding process is already encountering problems that may prove to be fatal barriers. For instance, the peace accord involves FARC-EP, but it does not involve other, still-active groups such as the *Ejército de*

*Liberación Nacional* (ELN). While initial talks have been taking place between the Colombian Government and the ELN regarding the start of a negotiation process analogous to that which led to the peace accord signed by the Government and FARC-EP, the success of this negotiation is uncertain at the moment of writing. In fact, some observers fear that the ELN and other groups, including formally dismantled but still active paramilitary formations, may fill the void left by FARC-EP, and thus take advantage of the current transition period in which the FARC-EP have demobilised and the State has not yet taken control of large regions formerly under FARC-EP control. It is also known that not all FARC-EP units have demobilised, and that dissident units exist and are still active in some parts of the country (El Espectador, 2017, 06 May, online). It is unclear what role illegal activities and criminal structures play in building, or undermining, a post-conflict order (Schultze-Kraft, 2017). Meanwhile, the lives of leaders of social and environmental groups are still under threat and at least 389 aggressions against human rights leaders (including 59 killings) were recorded in 2016 alone (Human Rights Council, 2017) – sadly one of the highest such rates in the world. Finally, many people fear that the cost of peacebuilding cannot be sustained by the Colombian state, and that when the interest and the financial support of international organisations fade out, the funds will fall short of the peace accord's ambitions. In sum, many people are very sceptical and pessimistic, even resigned, and tend to view the peace accord as a useless agreement, which is no different in its essence from other failed laws and policies, and which therefore does not stir much hope. In a parallel proposed by some people, the peace accord may turn out to be similar to other supposedly 'historic' documents, including the 1991 Constitution: after much preparation and celebration, people have not experienced significant and much awaited change and, rather, have largely seen their hopes frustrated. In what is perhaps a self-protection mechanism, these people are not prepared now to invest emotionally, let alone politically, in this peace accord.

### **The Roots of Indifference**

The downplaying of armed conflict in Sogamoso and the magnification of the prospect of a failing peace suggest that indifference to the peace accord may not only, and not necessarily, be related to a general disaffection with politics or to ignorance of the stakes of the peace process, though these factors may play a role. I would propose rather that this justification can be primarily explained by the fractures that run deep in Colombian society.

### **Colombians and the Conflict**

Indifference to the peace process has roots in a fracture between parts of Colombian society and in the armed conflict that has plagued the country, in different forms and through the action of different actors, for longer even than the five decades of the FARC-EP insurgency. One might expect that given the persistence of wars and conflicts in the country, their causes and effects would have

been processed in the national identity and social imaginary, and vindicated by most Colombians. Yet, despite truly outstanding initiatives (e.g., CHNM, 2015; <http://rutasdelconflicto.com>), many Colombians ignore the original causes of peasant as well as the FARC-EP insurgencies. As noted by Ospina (2013), for a long time the armed conflict with the FARC-EP was not recognised as a war by the Colombian Government: to acknowledge the existence of a war would have implicitly legitimated the enemy (FARC-EP) and its motivations, and in turn cast doubts on the legitimacy of the élites that have held political and economic power in Colombia since the country gained independence. Thus, for many in Colombia, the conflict with FARC-EP was a fight against delinquent and narco-trafficking groups, while the original causes of mobilisation—the starkly unequal distribution of land and resources, the lack of political representation for non-*criollo* populations, the marginalisation of minorities and peasant populations, the abandonment of rural areas by the state, the forcible appropriation of natural resources, and the ignorance of the cultural, socioeconomic history and value of diverse territories—are, sometimes deliberately, ignored. Indeed, those who object to the transitional justice measures in the peace accord usually share this reading of the armed conflict (Ospina, 2013; see also Cárdenas Ruiz, 2013).

Not knowing, and therefore not fully understanding the causes of conflict, makes many Colombians blind not only to the original motivations of FARC-EP and other groups, but also to the diversity of forms of violence in the conflict. The *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* (CHNM, 2015) has amply documented not only the attacks, the murders, the captures of hostages, the disruptions to the infrastructure and other infamous but highly visible and more frequently recorded events, but also the symbolic and immaterial impacts of violence which include emotional distress, humiliations, physical and symbolic isolation of communities and social groups (indigenous, peasant, minorities, women, young people), injustice and threats to human dignity, chronic lack of democratic institutions and restrictions on basic freedoms (see also Feola et al., 2015, for a review of the effects of armed conflict on the agricultural sector in Colombia). Ignorance makes it easier to put distance between oneself and the conflict, deliberately or not, and thus to reproduce the knowledge gap. Ignorance also hinders building collective memory of the conflict in Sogamoso and other cities and regions that were not, or not long, on the frontline: the assassinations, the arrival of forcibly displaced people from other regions, the role of urban centres as safe havens where rebels of different factions would rest or pass through to move to the frontlines, the restrictions on the freedom of movement in the region, the distress of living in the almost constant presence of violence, be it local or broadcast by the mass media from elsewhere in the country.

Thus, this knowledge gap among many Colombians about the historic reasons for armed conflict in the country justifies the explanations of indifference that I have summarised under the shorthand ‘there has never been conflict in Sogamoso’. I suggest that as this gap is widespread across the country, this finding may apply to other Colombian regions that, like Sogamoso, have not been on

the main frontline of the conflict. Furthermore, this knowledge gap has been at least partly produced and perpetuated by those social actors who most had to gain from it—a thesis put forward by various observers (e.g., Richani, 2012; Grajales, 2013)—those whose interests necessarily clash with any serious attempt to tackle the inequality, dispossession, and social, cultural and political exclusion that lie at the origin of armed conflict in Colombia. Consistently, this position also downplays the importance of addressing some of the root causes of the conflict through the rural and political reforms included in the peace accord.

### **A Divided Society**

Colombian society is starkly divided along multiple lines, in a way that makes it almost natural to separate some ‘us’ from some ‘others’ (Herrera Duque, 2016). These divisions have historical and geographical roots, as argued by historians who described Colombia as a ‘fragmented country, divided society’ (Safford & Palacios, 2001) and *nación a pesar de si misma* (Bushnell, 1997). Colombia is a ‘super-complex’ country (Carrizosa Umaña, 2014) where diversity—cultural, environmental, ethnic—between and within regions is enormous but has rarely been seen in terms of richness, with the exception, perhaps, of some rather recent narratives around biodiversity (Carrizosa Umaña, 2014). Instead of embracing difference to build an original national project, the Colombian elites have built a modern liberal state in form alone, one which has not acknowledged or appreciated diversity (Ospina, 2013). The Colombian State has been a centralising project in its essence, and has been remote from its citizens who have not been properly included in a shared national imaginary (Herrera Duque, 2016; Rueda Barrera, 2016). The rights of diverse populations (indigenous, afro-descendants, peasant) that inhabit the country have been seen as a barrier to a particular model of economic development, rather than its essential precondition (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2015), as evidenced by a culture of tolerance for the violent repression of opposition (e.g. during the recent *paro agrario*) (Cruz Rodríguez, 2015) and the physical elimination of progressive leaders and opponents, from Jorge Eliécer Gaitán to the contemporary assassinations of social movement leaders. Thus, the divisions have been perpetuated and, if possible, multiplied over the centuries, helped by the inaction of the political powers. This inaction is epitomised by the inability of successive Colombian governments to design and implement a proper rural reform, something that most Latin American governments have managed to do (although with contradictory results) (Oxfam, 2016; Rueda Barrera, 2016). Colombia retains one of the highest concentrations of land ownership in the world, which is explained, among other factors, by the distortion of local decision-making by the elites to benefit themselves (Grajales, 2011; Faguet et al., 2016). The gap between relatively wealthy urban centres and poor rural areas has been growing for decades (Jaramillo, 2006; Rodríguez et al., 2016), as has the distance between the wealthy and the poor within cities.

Against the backdrop of these multiple social fractures, it may in fact not be surprising to realise that many people in Sogamoso and other cities relatively less involved in the armed conflict

may perceive that the peace accord is something in which they do not have a significant stake. It is perhaps too easy and quite socially acceptable in such a divided country to come to think that even potentially historic events like the peace accord and the unfolding peacebuilding effort does not interest ‘us’, but some ‘other’ subject on the opposite side of the multiple social and geographical fractures, or to think that the peace accord is simply a noble façade, behind which those in power can maintain the status quo.

#### **Four Theses Against Indifference**

In this article I have used the insights gained from conversations with Colombians in Sogamoso to provide an explanation, tentative and incomplete as it may be, for what appears to be indifference to the peace accord in Colombia. I have summarised the explanation of indifference in two sets of arguments (‘there has never been conflict in Sogamoso’, and ‘there will never be peace in Colombia’), and suggested that these ideas point us toward the persistence of deep social, political, geographical and cultural fractures in Colombia. One immediate reflection that emerges from this material is that in this light it would be too simplistic to hastily explain indifference and disengagement by invoking a general distrust in politics. Deeper and structural issues are at play.

A second point for reflection concerns the peacebuilding effort. It is a fact that a considerable number of Colombians have not engaged with the peace accord or peacebuilding. Will such disinterest undermine the peacebuilding effort? And if indifference is a threat to potentially historic change, what are the precise reasons why Colombians should instead actively participate in the peacebuilding effort?

In short, my argument is the following: despite all its limitations, the peace accord and the peacebuilding process are enormous opportunities to catalyse change in Colombia, not only towards a ‘stable and long lasting peace’ but towards making the country more inclusive, and thereby also transforming some of the structural causes of conflict. However, this can only happen if Colombians, not only some organised activists but large parts of the population, embrace this opportunity and actively participate in a public, civil peacebuilding effort. Active participation does not only mean supporting the Government and its agencies and the FARC-EP, but actually appropriating this Colombian peace, shaping it through major as well as everyday political acts. The peace accord is an opportunity (perhaps limited and flawed, surely challenging and difficult) not only to overcome decades of conflict, but to shape the identity and structures of the country in a new, inclusive, diverse, democratic, dignifying and environmentally-conscious manner.

Here, by way of a conclusion, I develop this argument through four theses against indifference.



### **First Thesis: The Limitations of the Peace Accord Do Not Eliminate Its Potential for Change**

The peace accord is imperfect, and building peace is surely an enormously challenging endeavour, which may induce many Colombians to think that ‘there will never be peace in Colombia’. Yet it is hard to deny that the peace accord also contains, at least potentially, the seeds of many structural and radical reforms that are much needed and that would address in positive, even if perhaps incomplete ways, some of those structural issues that have characterised Colombia for too long now, and which originally moved FARC-EP and other groups to insurgency. For example, the Integral Rural Reform addresses some of the problems that have historically plagued agriculture and rural areas, including access to land, formalisation of land property titles, access to credit, technical support and training, infrastructure, recognition of peasant, family and community agriculture, and sustainable development. The Political Participation Reform promises to open up democracy and to provide representation for minorities in the country, while the Truth Commission can produce the evidence needed to build not only a shared memory, but a climate of reconciliation. Furthermore, the peace process has already had effects on the political life of the country. It has renewed the national debate on the great challenges Colombia is facing; it has strengthened the role and reaffirmed the value of peaceful, respectful political debate between former enemies; it has contributed to thinking about social justice in a territorial perspective; and it has allowed for recovering memory of the war (Rueda Barrera, 2016).

There is no complete agreement on the principles on which the reforms included in the peace accord are based (Carmona Sanchez, 2015). Moreover, some elements of these reforms are not totally new; they were already included in earlier pieces of legislation that have not been successfully implemented or enforced. Nevertheless, the peace accord reiterates the need to enact these reforms, and when translated into legislation it will provide a legal basis for their implementation. This is not insignificant, as the case of the Ecuadorian constitution of 2008 illustrates.

Ecuador welcomed a new constitution in 2008. This constitution was celebrated nationally and internationally as an innovative formalisation of a shift to a post-neoliberal understanding of development. The new constitution was expected to support the social, cultural, institutional and economic change needed to realise that alternative vision. It formalised a model of a plurinational and intercultural state that takes into consideration a differentiated citizenry and the historical claims of first nations (Radcliffe, 2012). The 2008 Constitution established social rights as a constitutional right, recognised over 100 rights for citizens, and overhauled the justice system with the aim of ensuring that all new rights are protected via the courts. Notably, Ecuador’s Constitution of 2008 is also innovative in terms of its recognition of the rights of nature.

However, with much frustration within and outside the country, the Ecuadorian Government has repeatedly legislated and acted against constitutional principles, for example in the themes of

natural resource extraction (oil) and management (water) (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014). Yet, the new constitution cannot be discarded as a failure. The very approval of such an innovative and ambitious charter has changed the discourse and created political spaces to rethink development not only in Ecuador, but internationally. The symbolic power of the constitution has inspired indigenous groups, critical scholars and politicians, and social movements in Ecuador and internationally to challenge neoliberal models of development and explore alternative visions and practices such as ‘buen vivir’ and ‘sumak kawsay’ (Gudynas, 2011). Furthermore, the constitution has provided a legal basis to resist the exploitation and violent appropriation of resources and disruption of sustainable livelihoods by neoliberalism, as in the case of struggles to defend sacred territories against extractivism (Harris & Roa-García, 2013). While the socio-legal shift enshrined in the new constitution is surely not sufficient to overturn neoliberal development models, it offers a legal tool with which to resist the influence of the international financial institutions and transnational corporations, and the prevarications of the national government when it does not act in accordance with the constitution (Radcliffe, 2012; Harris & Roa-García, 2013).

Thus, the case of Ecuador shows how ‘historic’ policies, no matter how imperfect, flawed and subject to hijacking from vested interests they may be, can help support the fight for equality, social justice, democracy, participation and sustainability. These documents not only inspire but, importantly, provide the legal basis for challenges to any diversion from core principles. The case of the Ecuadorian constitution also shows that one essential condition for realising the potential for change that is latent in these documents is their active appropriation by the civil society (Becker, 2011). Precisely because these documents and the political constellation are imperfect, it is essential that the civil society does not expect the institutional process to take care of itself, but appropriates the document and actively defends its principles against any threat of dilution or disruption.

### **Second Thesis: Pressure From the Civil Society and the Public Can Hold Those in Power Accountable for the Realisation of the Peace Accord**

Even acknowledging that the peace accord is surrounded by rhetoric, it is difficult to ignore the fact that both the Colombian Government and FARC-EP have invested very substantial symbolic and financial capital by committing to the peace accord. They have the primary and direct responsibility for the implementation of the accord, and they are the ones whose actions will be scrutinised more closely and who will be judged by the results of the peace process.

Nevertheless, there is indeed the concrete risk that the peace accord will not be fully implemented, due (among other dangers) to fading motivation among the parties involved, dwindling financial resources, or lack of political will and/or technical capacity. However, one factor has a proven influence on all these potential causes of failure: public pressure. The Colombian public, civil society and the mass media have a role to play to pressure all parties involved to fully realise the

accord by prioritising it on the political agenda and devoting the necessary financial, technical and political resources to it. The civil society and the mass media can hold those directly responsible for the implementation of the accord accountable. They can demand implementation and transparency.

It is inspiring to see that some initiatives have already been set in motion with the exact purpose of monitoring the progress of the peace accord's implementation. For example, the *Fundación paz y reconciliación* developed a traffic light colour system to monitor progress in the implementation, an easy and media-friendly tool that complements the Foundation's research reports. Initiatives such as this gain strength when they are supported, online and offline, by other organisations and the public.

Clearly, the opposite of public pressure—indifference—will not motivate the government and FARC-EP, nor the international organisations, to keep to their commitment. Indifference to the peace accord does not remove the peace accord from existence, but it does silence the citizens who are, whether they like it or not, affected by the consequences of a successful or failed implementation of the accord. It is not through indifference, but through public engagement and mutual support among those who believe that 'peace is better than war', that a large front of public pressure can be maintained and the chances of realising the promise of peace can be increased.

### **Third Thesis: The Civil Society and the Public Can Appropriate the Peace Process and Influence Peacebuilding**

Holding accountable those directly responsible for the implementation of the peace accord is only one function of the organised civil society and the general public. In fact they can go beyond this: they can influence the direction, speed and concrete realisation of the peacebuilding process. The civil society can make peacebuilding 'its own' project if it appropriates peace rather than passively observing its contradictory and shaky progress (or lack thereof) from the outside. Where vested interests have the capacity to hijack the peace process at institutional levels, the civil society can respond through counter-hijacking the public sphere. One of the lessons that can be drawn from the experience of grassroots peace initiatives in Colombia in recent decades is that interconnections across civil society organisations can increase the probability of success, while also deepening and strengthening collective awareness and reflections on peace (Hernandez Delgado, 2009). For example, a civil peace process can support the implementation of a maximalist, rather than a minimalist peace (Rettberg, 2003; Ramos Muslera, 2016): a peace that generates the conditions for economic, political and social development, and does so with respect for diversity, human rights and the environment.

It is important to recognise and stress that there are many concrete experiences of civic activism, often led by women and indigenous groups in Colombia, to draw from and build upon (e.g., Hernandez Delgado, 2009; Mera Sotelo, 2013; Sánchez Mora & Rodríguez Lara, 2015; CIASE &

Consiliation Resources, 2017; Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad, 2017). It is in these concrete experiences that peace is already being built in Colombia not only by the state, but from the bottom up in many civil society initiatives of resistance and everyday acts for the “*convivencia pacífica, la gestión y resolución no violenta de conflictos*” (Hernandez Delgado, 2009, p. 132). “*La construcción de paz no solo encuentra su origen en el Estado y los procesos de negociación de paz. En este país la paz también se construye en niveles de base social y en una dimensión de abajo hacia arriba*” (Hernandez Delgado, 2009, p 132, see also Moriconi, 2011). Major political acts (protests, strikes) can be important, but history has shown the equal if not greater importance of apparently minor everyday acts of awareness and recognition in building a culture of inclusion, peace and democracy, in adverse institutional and political contexts (Snyder, 2017). Minor acts of peaceful living can materialise the imaginary of peace and multiply its discourses and practices (Parra, 2013): “[I]a paz es una construcción subjetiva y social de la gente que la vive y la experimenta cotidianamente” (Herrera Duque, 2016, p. 53). They represent a politics as (civic) polis, rather than as (technical) policy-making (Moriconi, 2011).

Importantly, an appropriation of peacebuilding in Colombia is also an appropriation of a share of the responsibility for the outcome of this process. It therefore calls for a move away from indifference and a widespread exercise of full citizenship (Parrado, 2013), which means becoming aware of and reclaiming the role of citizens, not as passive objects but active agents of social change, a process well exemplified in the existing initiatives of bottom-up construction of peace in the country. Yet this cannot be limited to a few, albeit outstanding and hopeful, initiatives; it cannot leave aside the Colombian public at large—Colombian citizens—as this would perpetuate the fracture between the elites and the rest of society (Urrego & Betancour, 2016). In the words of William Ospina: “*Tenemos que olvidar el viejo error de pensar que unos cuantos elegidos se encargarán de transformar el país y salvarnos de la adversidad. Colombia necesita un pueblo entero comprometido en su transformación. Necesita creer profundamente que el poder no está en una silla lejos del mundo, que el poder está en cada lugar*” (Ospina, 2013, p 235).

#### **Fourth Thesis: Peacebuilding is the Opportunity to Build Not Only a Peaceful, but a More Inclusive, Diverse, Democratic, Dignifying and Environmentally-Conscious Colombia**

The most serious problem with indifference is that it condemns one to invisibility. A public that is indifferent effectively declines the rights and duties of full citizenship, and becomes invisible to those in power. And an invisible public is a perfect counterpart for any elites who want to pursue their own rather than the public interest, which is exactly what many of the people I talked to in Sogamoso feared. In a very divided country like Colombia, in which the elites have historically perpetuated and taken advantage of ethnical, geographical and social divisions, and where divisions have caused and justified violence, dispossession, exploitation, exclusion and inequality, indifference to the peace accord would, in other words, negate the idea that there is any possibility to challenge and recompose

the fractures of this divided country, and thereby resolve some of the most fundamental structural causes of conflict.

The quote from Ospina that opened this article is not only a call for civil engagement, but an exhortation to think about the peace accord as an opportunity not ‘only’ to build peace. It is an invitation to ‘use’ peacebuilding to tackle long-standing social, political, environmental and development issues that may not have been put into connection in the common narrative of the conflict, but that have affected the country and limited its democratic consolidation, social inclusion and the emergence of endogenous forms of development. This may appear to be an even more ambitious objective, and therefore one fraught with ambiguity and dangers. Are there not even more reasons to be pessimistic and sceptical if the goal is to transform Colombia, not ‘only’ to build peace?

And yet, what if it were exactly that peace which created a chance to join forces for the higher goal? What if the peace accord created the momentum that many initiatives for peace and social transformation have so far lacked? What if peace were the common ground on which different groups and interests could converge and coalesce? What if the elites themselves had in fact offered to the people, perhaps unwillingly, a narrative that connects social, environmental, cultural and political issues that have so far remained apart from each other? What if this were a moment in which the entire system of vested interests were more vulnerable to transformation?

Many social movements in Colombia are already advancing their struggles, experimenting and proposing local democratic transformations across particular interests. As the *Congreso de los Pueblos* illustrates, fractures can be overcome, collective identities can be created and diversity can be a source of dignity; it does not need to generate violence. These movements have set the basis for a ‘politics of civilization’ (Moriconi, 2011), which is a politics that does not aim at increasing well-being, but a good life, and to support peaceful and socially integrative models. Internationally, various observers have called for similar intersectional interconnections and collaborations to be forged among environmental, social, feminist and indigenous movements, among others (e.g., Klein, 2015, 2017). Current examples of such ‘movements of movements’ are encouraging (Klein, 2017), but still often limited by the lack of support and active participation of the larger public. What may be missing or weakening in Colombia, is the ability of citizens to overcome differences and alterity to build a collective identity (Herrera Duque, 2016).

I want to suggest that the peace accord is a further catalyser of initiatives, energies and visions. Peace can provide an intersectional imaginary, a narrative and an everyday practice around which not only social movements but every Colombian can come together in envisioning and realising a peaceful and new country. Peace (not a minimal peace, intended as the absence of armed conflict with one insurgent group, but a multidimensional peace) offers the historic opportunity to recompose fractures, and thereby transform Colombian society.

My conversations with *Sogamoseños* have shown that even those Colombians who have been substantially indifferent to the peace accord in fact agree with it at least in part or in principle. This latent level of agreement, however, will remain invisible as long as the public disengages from the peace process. Indifference is not a neutral position of equidistance between a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’. Indifference condemns citizens to invisibility and therefore lends implicit, and perhaps inadvertent, support to those who are against peace. As such, indifference risks turning the failure of the peace process into a self-fulfilling prophecy. To avoid this, I hope the Colombian people will answer the call from history by engaging in peacebuilding in Colombia.

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