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A CONTEXT VISION

Memory, resistance and female social empowerment for life and dignity. The process of transformation of the pain of the mothers of Soacha in the cases of false positives

*Memoria, resistencia y empoderamiento social femenino por la vida y la dignidad.
El proceso de transformación del dolor de las madres de Soacha en los casos de los
falsos positivos*

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“Before, when we all lived together, I worked mostly to help the family, because I felt my responsibility as the eldest of the siblings. My love for my family, and especially for our Mother, was immense. Mother is the dearest thing, the nearest thing, that anyone can have in this world.”

Vasili Grossman, *The Black Book*

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ABSTRACT

The “false positives” scandal known as extrajudicial killings of thousands of civilians by the military forces has been one of the chapter most painfulness in the Colombian conflict. According with the JEP, 6402 civilians, were systematically executed between 2002 and 2010 whose bodies were then passed off as rebels to present them as combat kills. This situation erupted in 2008 when a group of poor young men had been recruited from the slum of Soacha (Cundinamarca) promised well-paying jobs in Norte de Santander were afterwards murdered.

The victims, who were civilians outside the conflict and the illegal armed actors, were buried in mass graves, far from their places of origin and their families. The mobilization of their mothers to find their sons was not easy and only their love, resistance and their struggle for memory have allowed to know the truth, struggle because society knows what happened, demanding justice and guarantees of non-repetition.

RESUMEN

El escándalo de “falsos positivos” conocido como asesinatos extrajudiciales de miles de civiles por parte de las fuerzas militares ha sido uno de los capítulos más dolorosos en el conflicto colombiano. Según la JEP, 6402 civiles fueron ejecutados sistemáticamente entre 2002 y 2010, cuyos cuerpos fueron pasados a los guerrilleros para presentarlos como asesinatos de combate. Esta situación estalló y se hizo visible en 2008 cuando un grupo de jóvenes reclutados en los barrios periféricos de Soacha (Cundinamarca) fueron engañados y posteriormente asesinados a sangre fría.

Las víctimas, quienes eran civiles ajenos al conflicto y los actores armados ilegales, fueron enterradas en fosas comunes, lejos de sus lugares de origen y sus familias. La movilización de sus madres para encontrar a sus hijos no fue fácil y solo su amor, resistencia y su lucha por la memoria han permitido conocer la verdad, luchar porque la sociedad conozca lo sucedido, exigir justicia y garantías de no repetición.



Palabras clave:

Resistencia civil

Falsos positivos

Memoria histórica

Justicia

No-repetición

Construcción de paz

Empoderamiento social femenino

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1. Introduction

The “false positives” have marked a special chapter in Colombia’s armed conflict. The eagerness to show results in the fight against subversion meant that agents of the Armed Forces actively participated in crimes against young people taken from peripheral areas, who were later shown as “demobilized. The victims, who were mostly civilians outside the conflict and the illegal armed actors, were buried in mass graves, far from their places of origin and their families.

The figures for extrajudicial executions in Colombia are chilling. For the Attorney General’s Office “false positives” reached the figure of approximately 2200 cases by the end of 2014, however, Human Rights Watch noted that there have been around 3,500 reported cases, not counting the chilling figure of 10,000 cases exposed by two retired colonels of the National Police (Rojas & Benavides, 2017) [60]. In February 2021 the JEP (Special Justice for Peace) stirred up a great political debate by releasing the figure of 6,402 as the number of victims of false positives.

I will focus my case study on the events that occurred between 2006 and 2008, especially the one reported in the media as the “false positives” of Soacha. This case came to public light in September 2008, when a group of young people who had previously been reported missing in Soacha, were reported dead in the department of Norte de Santander in circumstances that would later be shown to be nothing more than cold-blooded murders.

I will emphasize the transformative power of memory on the part of the victims and their capacity to generate social empowerment as a valuable tool for the construction of peace education. As Juan Pablo Lederach has pointed out, women have a very important transforming role in societies in conflict when they are aware of their role as makers of life. It is here where the role of resistance played by the Mothers of the victims of homicides perpetrated by state agents becomes important.

2. The Democratic Security Policy and its effects

At the beginning of the 21st century, Colombia was emerging from one of the strongest escalations of violence experienced in the previous decade, framed in an armed conflict that exceeded fifty years. This

situation hit the country at all levels, but especially in rural areas where military confrontations between the different armed actors generated a series of violent situations. After the failure of the negotiations between the national government and the FARC guerrillas in the Caguán process that took place between 1999 and 2002, these hostilities increased and the confrontations between the Colombian Armed Forces, the guerrillas (FARC and ELN) and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) became more recurrent and aggressive.

With the implementation of Plan Colombia² during the administration of Andrés Pastrana, with which the U.S. government provided technical assistance, equipment and human resources, weapons and military intelligence to the Colombian Armed Forces, a turning point in the country’s new militaristic strategy was reached. In addition to this, after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, the world changed and the hardening of both national and international policy towards guerrilla movements was not long in coming. The US government of George W. Bush strengthened its military policy on the basis of the broad and indiscriminate application of the term terrorism, which encompassed real armed conflicts with political motivations all over the world. From then on, these conflicts were discredited and referred to as terrorist threats.

This meant a change of course in the national security strategy, since the model prior to September 11 was based on the security doctrine that confronted communism as a threat and effect derived from the post “Cold War” world polarization. Since 2002 and as a result of the new international order and the failure of the peace talks in El Caguán, the Colombian armed conflict intensified, almost to a “war without quarter”, where the deaths of members of armed groups were the priority for the State security forces, proposing policies such as those that led to the “false positives”.

In this context, the strategy of the Uribe Vélez administration (2002 - 2010) came into action. With the objective of providing a military solution to the armed conflict in Colombia, the administration initiated its democratic security policy against illegal armed groups,

² Plan Colombia was a bilateral agreement between the governments of Colombia and the United States, whose objective was focused on social and economic revitalization, the termination of the armed conflict in Colombia and the creation of a counter-narcotics strategy. The first phase of this program was called Plan Colombia and was developed in the administration of President Andrés Pastrana Arango from 1998 to 2002, and then its military line of action in Colombia was called Plan Patriota in the two administrations of Álvaro Uribe Vélez from 2002 to 2010.

seeking their demobilization or military surrender. (CNRR-GMH, 2011) [18].

The democratic security policy marked the shock strategy of President Uribe Vélez's government in its fight against the insurgency. This policy proposed a more active role for Colombian society and state security agencies in the face of the threat posed by guerrilla groups. It sought to strengthen the activities and presence of the security organs throughout the national territory and urged society to collaborate in order to achieve military success. To this end, networks of cooperators were created, rewards were offered to informants, desertions within subversive groups were encouraged, units of peasant soldiers were created and, above all, the national defense budget was increased³.

In the context of the Democratic Security policy, the pressure of the Uribe Vélez administration on the Armed Forces to provide results in their fight against the so-called terrorist groups was clear. A whole policy of investment of economic resources and human capital had to produce the expected effects, and if this required limitations to individual freedoms and the use of excessive force, there was no turning back.

2.1. False positives and results at all costs

The eagerness to seek positive results in the counterinsurgency generated human rights violations and breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and, consequently, countless fatalities. One of the most reprehensible violations and infractions are undoubtedly the so-called "false positives". The term "positive" is derived from military terminology and was coined to designate the result of a successful military operation, consisting of the killing or capture of combatants of illegal armed groups. The term "false positive" refers to a series of crimes that occurred in Colombia between 2002 and 2008, in which civilians were killed and registered as armed actors; thus, a supposedly successful military operation was justified, which turned out to be false.

The falsehood of the "positive" military action consisted in presenting civilians as guerrillas killed in combat, when in reality they were civilians killed by agents of the Colombian State. To date, the Colombian justice system has demonstrated that those civilians had

nothing to do with the armed conflict and did not belong to any of the illegal armed groups. (CNMH, 2013) [15].

At the end of 2008, the country learned of the disappearance of a group of young residents of the municipality of Soacha (Cundinamarca), who were later found murdered in the department of Norte de Santander. This event, which the media called "false positives", was one of the most serious cases of human rights violations in Colombia. The victims had common characteristics: they were young people from poor backgrounds, inhabitants of peripheral areas of the city, unemployed and mostly from single-parent families.

In these judicial proceedings it was proven that these were not combat casualties but rather homicides of protected persons, extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances. (Conviction in the case of Gabriel Rincón Amado and others, 2017) [64]. These judicial proceedings showed that these were acts of violence with a refined system of choosing the victims, whose objectives were to show military success at any cost and obtain consequent benefits.

The eagerness of the Military Forces to show results resulted in the instrumentalization of human life, creating for such purposes a machinery that made use of people it considered expendable, deceived the victims and extracted them from their communities to kill them later. (Uribe, 2008) [67]. This eagerness of the Armed Forces to show results responded both to the pressure of President Uribe's government to communicate to Colombian society that it was winning the war, and to a set of incentives given by the Ministry of Defense to motivate members of the Armed Forces to give "positive" results in their fight against illegal armed groups. Ministerial Directive 029 of 2005, signed by the Ministry of Defense on November 17, 2005, was aimed at regulating the payment of rewards for information leading to the capture of guerrillas, avoiding misunderstandings on the part of the Armed Forces and providing transparency to the incentive policy.

Based on Ministry of Defense Directive 029 of 2005, the Armed Forces could resort to mechanisms such as the payment of rewards without an exhaustive verification of the information or the results of the operations by the functional superiors of the troops, or the control bodies, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, or the general inspections of the Armed Forces. Operations with hypothetical information were allowed, and not validated beforehand, but after the fact. This

³ In 2006, 20,318 members of illegal armed groups demobilized, the year with the most demobilizations, as reported by the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (Agencia Colombiana para la Reincorporación y la Normalización).

made it possible for members of the military apparatus to build fictitious enemies, with an invented record and organization charts of criminal structures that turned out to be nonexistent. (FIDH, 2012) [31].

On the other hand, the interpretations given to the regulatory scheme for obtaining decorations and promotions within the Armed Forces, added to the pressure from President Uribe's government, led to the abuse of the legitimate exercise of authority to obtain results. Likewise, the regulatory structure that granted decorations to members of the Armed Forces who had made positive strikes and casualties against illegal armed groups and criminal groups, responded to the same logic of incentives. The awarding of decorations, added to the positive blows and the pressure for results, opened the door for members of the armed apparatus of the State to feel tempted to fabricate enemies and combats in which they were killed, falsifying the documents and intelligence reports that justified such operations (FIDH, 2012) [31].

According to Human Rights Watch, the execution of civilians by army brigades was a common practice throughout Colombia between 2002 and 2008. During this period was when most cases of "false positives" occurred throughout the national territory, representing 63 percent of the reported cases, with 2007 being the most critical year. Antioquia appears as the department with the most victims of "false positives" with (412) people, followed by Córdoba (214), Huila (119), Casanare (113), Meta (66), Norte de Santander (38), Quindío (56). The largest number of cases have been reported in Antioquia, for being a department with a large extension in the country and for concentrating a large number of military bases. (Human Rights Watch, 2015) [34-35].

2.2. The local context: the youth of Soacha and their itineraries of death

The socioeconomic context of the young people killed in Soacha and their families was characterized by their labor limitations, lack of educational opportunities and a bleak outlook for their immediate future. Added to this are the difficulties of a territory marked by the exclusion of a fragile State, which does not protect fundamental rights or encourage the exercise of citizenship. In this situation, survival becomes a consubstantial part of their way of life, making a living, working in what they can and in the few offers that appear.

For these communities, coexistence with different categories of violence has been normal, from structural violence characterized by limitations on access to citizenship and a dignified life, to direct violence by illegal armed actors and criminals operating in their neighborhoods and environments. Violence ends up becoming normalized, becoming part of everyday life, making its inhabitants accept this reality and coexist with it. This effect is achieved when the communities do not perceive the State as a guarantor of rights and therefore do not feel that they are citizens who are subjects of rights with mechanisms and tools for appropriation and defense. (CNRR-GMH, 2011) [18].

Now, there is a serious relationship between the socioeconomic context of inequality and exclusion in Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar and the violence experienced by the young people killed in what appeared to be a campaign with tints of social cleansing. In this type of violence, an actor external to the community and based on a belief of power and false moral superiority classifies who can live in a community and who cannot, under the always false and illegitimate pretext that he is ridding the population of someone considered undesirable. In the case of the Soacha youths, the recruitment mechanism was looking for easy "prey" to deceive and disappear without anyone missing them afterwards.

In "social cleansing" anyone can be a target, but with a common denominator: the victims of these actions are presented as "undesirable", "vicious", "lazy" or even invented as criminals (Torres Aranguren, 2011) [65]. This mechanism was present in the "false positives", although not immediately, since first the facts of selection, recruitment, deception for the purpose of trafficking, and finally the murder took place. With this, public opinion was misled by communicating that the deaths had been the result of the correct actions of the Military Forces and that due to the social origin of the victims "they had done something"; that is to say, that the victims could be classified within the profile of the armed actor.

In the majority of the murdered youths, the recruiters had contacted them taking advantage of their economic deprivation or their unemployment situation. Knowing this situation, they mobilized the young people with false promises, in some cases of quick and well-paid jobs, or in other cases of opportunities to get to know other regions of the country. Once the deception was completed and the victims were captured, the civilian recruiters communicated with the military,

who provided them with tickets to take them to Ocaña (Norte de Santander). Once there, they would keep them isolated, supplying them with alcohol or hallucinogenic drugs, waiting for the call in which the military would tell them where and when to deliver the youths. Once the location was determined, a complex simulation was carried out by the military in which they fabricated intelligence reports, troop movements, radiograms of operations, orders of battle and operations, all of this with false information that showed the responsibility of the troops and command personnel.

The criminal acts were closed with the alteration of the scene of the executions, moving the bodies, placing weapons and simulating combat situations, in order to theoretically justify the operation against armed groups. Finally, the corpses were stripped of their documents to make it difficult or impossible to identify them and were transferred to the facilities of Medicina Legal, to be taken to mass graves and buried as NN, since they were not claimed by relatives or acquaintances.

2.3. Human Rights violations, breaches of International Humanitarian Law and impunity in the face of pain

As the Colombian justice system has shown, the Colombian Armed Forces constructed a strategy to obtain victims who were later declared as guerrillas who had been discharged. For this, it was necessary to make use of economic resources and military campaign equipment such as clothing, accessories and weapons, which made it possible to structure a real recruitment system. To achieve this, a search and selection plan for victims was constructed, so that it was not a fortuitous or random act, but rather a strategy and a previously determined infrastructure. The selection process structured profiles of young people who responded to the request; search zones were established, civilians were hired and deception scripts were designed.

The acts committed in the framework of the “false positives” have constituted human rights violations and serious breaches of international humanitarian law that may constitute crimes against humanity. These violations had patterns of systematization in that criminal plans were drawn up and orchestrated in detail, with the participation of civilians and members of the Armed Forces, and involved human trafficking, forced disappearance for the purpose of homicide and aggravated homicide of protected persons.

2.4. Human trafficking for profit in the military career

In reference to human trafficking, it is necessary to inquire about the principles and guidelines on the phenomenon and in particular what is referred to in the United Nations (UN) protocol. Article 3 establishes that trafficking in persons constitutes “*the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation*”. In the case of the “false positives” and the facts referred to by the investigations of the judicial authorities in Colombia, and confirmed through the corresponding convictions, it was established that there was an entire criminal infrastructure that responded to the crime of human trafficking. There, military and civilians agreed to look for the victims, establish contact, gain their trust, deceive them with false promises of work, and finally hand them over to the military to be killed.

The military and civilians involved in the “false positives” made illegal business deals. Thus, the civilians acted as recruiters, through an agreement of wills on the price and the object of the service, placing a value on each person who was delivered. The military made collections in order to pay the recruiters and provide the necessary logistical requirements, such as bus tickets for the transfer of the victims, travel and lodging expenses, food, alcohol and hallucinogenic drugs, which in several cases were provided to the victims. (Sentence of conviction in the case of Gabriel Rincón Amado and others, 2017) [64].

This category of human rights violations was not addressed in detail by the judges in charge of the criminal investigations against the criminals, although the facts were analyzed in order to determine whether they constituted crimes against humanity. In addition to the seriousness of the crime, the perpetrators of human trafficking had a special degree of responsibility and had the mission to protect the population as public servants. These facts were not judged by the military criminal jurisdiction, which very possibly considered them normal acts of service, giving an inadequate interpretation to the military jurisdiction. (Human Rights Watch, 2015) [34].

3. Enforced Disappearance for the purpose of homicide

There is an act that is profoundly atrocious from the human and from all the ethical dimensions of community life, and that is forced disappearance. This act is the total negation of humanity, because it denies not only life, but also the right of the living to mourn for their dead, to have a tomb and to keep their name, so that they are not buried as NN.

The bodies of the young men were taken between January and March of the same year to the headquarters of the Institute of Legal Medicine after being found in mass graves in the cemetery of the municipality of Abrego in Norte de Santander, more than 30 kilometers from Ocaña, where in a lonely spot they were killed by troops of the 15th Mobile Brigade of the National Army. That was the tragic fate of “Fair Leonardo Porras, 26 years old, Elkin Verano Hernández, 25 years old, Joaquín Castro Vásquez, 28 years old, Julio César Meza Vargas, 24 years old, Jonathan Soto, 17 years old, Daniel Pesca Olaya, 27 years old, who was taken to Medicina Legal on March 5, but had disappeared on February 26. Julián Oviedo Monroy, 19 years old, Eduardo Garzón Páez, 32 years old, Diego Alberto Tamayo, 25 years old, Víctor Gómez Romero, 23 years old, Andrés Palacio Bustamante, 22 years old.” (El Espectador, 2008) [25].

The families went through a painful process that led them to move hundreds of kilometers away from their homes, going through strong economic needs to be able to travel to pick up the bodies of their loved ones. The distance from Barrio Compartir in Soacha Cundinamarca in central Colombia to the municipality of Ocaña in Norte de Santander in the northeast of the country is 640 kilometers. This was the distance that the young men traveled from their homes to reach their rendezvous with their victimizers and the distance that their relatives also traveled in search of news of their loved ones, to claim their bodies.

Both the military and the recruiters and co-perpetrators resorted to the strategy of hiding the identity of their victims by removing their identity documents. The aim was to make the rapid identification of the corpses impossible, hindering the investigation work of the judicial police and the removal of the corpses so that the victims would remain as NN. The judicial investigations showed that the young men did carry their documents, as the recruiters finally acknowledged in their testimonies.

3.1. Aggravated homicide in protected person

The norms of IHL incorporated in Colombian legislation⁴ are categorical in indicating that unarmed civilians who are not part of the hostilities in a conflict are protected persons. Consequently, they must be specially protected by the State through the Military and Police Forces, in addition to the administrative and judicial authorities. However, exactly the opposite happened here: not only were they not protected, but they were deceived to lure them to camps or scenarios fabricated to be killed. A whole ruse was recreated to disguise them and spuriously convert them into combatants, which was a violation of IHL.

Aggravated homicide of a protected person is an act of denial of the other and his existence, of his rights and autonomy. It is particularly serious when this violence comes from the state apparatus. Consequently, the State can and must make legitimate use of its power, using force and legitimate violence if necessary, to protect its population. The obligation to respect humanitarian law is incumbent upon the State and the armed groups involved in internal armed conflicts. This mission rests mainly on the shoulders of the Armed Forces, with adequate control by the administrative authorities and the judiciary. (Valencia, 2013) [68].

4. From mothers' grief to social organization and political empowerment

The young victims of the extrajudicial executions lived in one of the areas of the city with serious problems of social exclusion: in the Ciudad Bolívar district of Bogotá, in the municipality of Soacha and in Altos de Cazuca, located on the border between Soacha and Bogotá. The largest number of displaced people in the country has arrived there, with almost 17,000 victims of the armed conflict fleeing from violence (El Espectador, 2014) [26]. These territories saw their population multiply during the period between 2000 and 2010, as a result of the escape of the rural population from the fighting, killings, forced disappearances and massacres in the regions where the conflict was much more marked.

⁴ Some of the following normative provisions are part of the constitutional and legal framework that incorporates the rules on IHL in Colombia: Article 12 (prohibition of torture, cruel treatment and punishment in Colombia) of the Political Constitution and Articles 135 (homicide of a protected person), 137 (torture of a protected person) and 165 (forced disappearance).

In Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar, there is evidence of mechanisms of structural violence combined with forms of direct violence that have paved the way for influencing and increasing different conflicts. An example of this are the processes of forced displacement and social exclusion that led many people to settle there. These territories have suffered from phenomena derived from what Johan Galtung (Galtung, 2003) calls violent structures present through socioeconomic exclusion, which expose a large part of the population to misery, malnutrition, lack of educational opportunities and formal employment, thus causing them to suffer total marginalization [32].

However, despite the above, the communities of Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar have carried out an important trajectory in the field of social struggles. For decades, they have strongly resisted to achieve the vindication of their fundamental rights to life, health, work, democracy, to be heard, to have an adequate provision of public utilities, to decent housing, and consequently to be able to have a peaceful life for themselves and their families. Now, these collective spaces are what have made it possible for groups such as the Mothers of Soacha to form a form of resistance from their condition as mothers and victims, united by solidarity and mutual pain.

4.1. Solidarity and organization as spaces for transforming pain

María, Luz Marina, Esperanza, Luz Edilia, Luz Nidia, Jacqueline, María Doris, Gloria Astrid were neighbors in the Compartir and Ducales neighborhoods in Soacha and shared many elements in common: women who struggled to provide for their families and children and obtain their daily sustenance. Many of them came from families of peasant origins in different regions of the country; women who settled with their families in the territories where they were able to settle in search of work and new opportunities. Over time, their children arrived and the dynamics of their environment changed. However, they simply assumed the day to day and concentrated on taking care of their families, without giving much thought to the social, economic and political context in which they had to live. In 2008 tragedy sought them out, and a machinery of cruelty and death raged against them and their families, selecting for its ends the most beloved. Their children and relatives.

After several months, and following the media explosion of the “false positives” phenomenon, as well as the denunciations of the ombudsman of the municipality of Soacha and the Secretary of Government of Bogotá, police and judicial officials reflected on the seriousness of the facts, and the search became more rigorous. This coincided with the appearance of unclaimed bodies, labeled and buried as unidentified in mass graves, located in municipalities or villages in the department of Norte de Santander. This is how the whereabouts of most of the young people became known. Initially there were 11 cases, but over time, this number increased, to the point that in 2017 the Attorney General’s Office spoke of more than 3,500 cases of “false positives” throughout the country.

The beginnings of the organization of mothers of Soacha took place from the very process of recognition of the corpses of their children and the relationships of solidarity that arose among them. Some of the Mothers coincided in the acts of exhumation of the corpses of their children, in the headquarters of the Prosecutor’s Office and the Ombudsman’s Office, generating in this way networks of feminine solidarity. A moving example of this network was when María Ubilerma Sanabria, not feeling able to go to recognize the body of her son Jaime Estiven, was accompanied by Luz Marina, mother of Fair Leonardo, who accompanied her and gave her the courage to face this ordeal. She made her feel that she was no longer alone (Cardona, 2013) [11].

They introduce themselves, begin to exchange telephone numbers, to narrate their experiences and share them, taking into account the magnitude of the tragedy they are suffering. As they accompany each other, they realize that several of them are even neighbors of the neighborhood, even of the street where they live and that they had not seen because of the effect of invisibility that daily life has brought, where the neighborhood has been disappearing. In the origins of this movement we see an effect of solidarity, otherness and empathy very similar to those that occurred in the genesis of movements such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of May in Argentina, which had its origins between 1976 and 1977. There, from the bond of familiarity that united the victims in search of their loved ones, collective action was initiated, transcending the particular and entering the public sphere, forming, in terms of E. Jelin (1986), a family group that had such an impact that it managed to make a strong echo in the news agenda of the Colombian media that spread the news [37].

This activism is based on the elaboration of grief itself, which has two dimensions: intimate and public. Grief for loss has an intimate scenario that is processed within one's own home and with the other loved ones of the family, and the elaboration of public grief is managed by recognizing it and sharing it collectively, which is only possible through activism with the community. (Jimeno, Varela, & Castillo, 2015) [39]. Here there is a process of reflection on their role as women and citizens and a path of recovery of agency capacity begins, where they must exercise their citizenship to claim to the institutions and society as a whole for the death of their children. It is necessary to face an essentially male and macho institutionalism: the National Government and the Military Forces. In this sense, the image of a group of Mothers confronting the President of the Republic in 2009 is very powerful, beginning to undermine his popularity and the prestige of his democratic security policy, whose successes are beginning to be questioned.

4.2. Resistance to impunity: origin of the social organizations of the Mothers of Soacha

The judicial processes were a great challenge for each of the Mothers of Soacha; on the one hand, facing an unknown, cold and not very close scenario that characterizes a hearing, and on the other hand, and no less challenging, facing the perpetrators face to face. This situation is not a constant in this type of investigations, since the victims, due to different circumstances, but mainly due to fear and misinformation, remain on the sidelines of the judicial processes.

María Cecilia Jaimes, Deputy Prosecutor of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Unit of the Attorney General's Office, points out that *"the initial process of the Mothers in facing the trials was surrounded by feelings of uncertainty, fear and anxiety. However, little by little they began their empowerment as victims. It was the need to clear their children's names that triggered this process"* (M. Jaimes, personal communication, 2018) [36]. The construction of memory by the Mothers here is appreciated as an exercise that seeks to unveil the judicial truth and clear the good name of their children.

Another challenge that the Mothers of Soacha have had to face, very visible in other groups of victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, is that of undertaking compensation actions in judicial processes, even though it is clear to them that the payment of a sum of money will never repair their loss, nor will it exhaust their

demand for justice, which is centered on the search for truth. For many victims this is a major challenge as they perceive or feel that they are putting a price on the life of their loved ones.

The process that has just begun in the JEP has allowed the Mothers to look back and consider much more intimate and moral issues such as forgiveness. Probably in this scenario, what Margareth Walker (2006) points out when she proposes that reparation, in the moral sphere, occurs only when relationships between moral subjects are truly reestablished, recognizing that the victims should never have suffered the harm [73]. Here it is possible to achieve an approach that places the victimizer in a scenario where he/she recognizes the immorality of the violence he/she has exercised, understanding that this was an unjust act that deserves condemnation but not the human dimension of the person who committed it.

The search for justice has allowed the mothers to reflect on the processes of forgiveness, as they have been able to see the perpetrators in their human dimension, as part of a family and even as children, parents or siblings. This recalls the proposal made by Martha Nussbaum in her dialogues with Eva Kitay, where she proposes a new view of the human being, in order to build new relationships of justice, based on the understanding that a human being is any child of a mother. (Nussbaum, 2007) [49].

The Mothers have been integrating the search for justice, reparation and the construction of memories. The latter is a fundamental element that allows them to generate and strengthen empowerment processes. Felipe Gómez Isa (Gómez, 2007) points out the importance of the construction of memory policies by the State in cases of atrocities and serious human rights violations such as the case of Soacha [33]. It is necessary for the truth to go much further and be publicly acknowledged by the State, since the perpetrators were agents at its service.

4.3. The social organization of the mothers of Soacha: from empowerment to the construction of memory and peace

The sudden trauma of the disappearance and death of their children, who were branded as guerrillas, the context in which they were taken from them and the revictimization to which they were exposed when they were viewed with suspicion when claiming their bodies, generated in the mothers a set of tensions and

frustrations that gradually transformed. Overcoming the shame and reflecting on the versions that affirmed that their children were criminals, thus revictimizing the indirect victims, implied a process that brought to the fore the need to recognize themselves as women and mothers who could defend the name of their children and empower themselves as subjects of rights.

Even when the media echoed the scandal and denounced the criminal actions of the Armed Forces in the case of the “false positives”, the name of the young men from Soacha was disgraced. The relatives, when going through the judicial offices, found the outrageous version that branded their sons as criminals. To this were added the versions of the military leadership and the former president Uribe Vélez himself, who said that the young men “were not going to pick coffee, and on the contrary, they were going for criminal purposes”. Faced with this situation that scorned their children, the mothers understood that the only way to restore their honor and good name was through activism for their memory. It is here where we can find what Elizabeth Jelin (1986) locates as the genesis of social movements [37].

The struggle of the Mothers has not been minor, given that they confronted the Military Forces, an institution that has enjoyed prominence and power in the Colombian public scene, especially in the period between 2002 and 2008⁵. During this period they enjoyed high levels of popularity both by the government and the citizenry, becoming a very important actor. Hence, it was not well seen to be their contradictor or to urge to question the ethics of their military procedures, as well as the inequity of the struggle that the Mothers have had to endure.

In this way, a deep reflection on their low level of empowerment in terms of condition and position was initiated. Condition is understood as the unfavorable situations in material terms faced by the Mothers and their families, such as unemployment, precarious work, minimal access to essential rights such as education and social security. Likewise, the low level of empowerment in terms of position is evidenced by the difference in their economic and social status compared to the rest of society. (Blatiwala, 1997) [8].

⁵ The Gallup Poll on public opinion and approval and disapproval indexes conducted in January 2008 showed a popularity index of the Military Forces close to 80%. At the end of President Uribe's administration, its popularity rating was close to 90%, which then declined to 60% by 2016. Taken from *Diario El Colombiano*. 05 May 2016.

The process of empowerment is described as a spiral action, which alters awareness, identifies areas of change, allowing the creation of strategies to promote change, through the analysis of actions and results. This seeks to achieve higher levels of awareness and strategies more in line with needs and with actions that could be better executed (Batliwala, 1997) [8]. The empowerment process must be oriented in a comprehensive manner, in such a way that it involves not only the activists, but also the collectives and communities. This is why this process cannot be vertical or unilateral, but rather broad, involving as many actors as possible.

Empowerment for mothers has become not jurisdiction or competence over their goods and material resources, but authority over their environment, over the exercise of their rights in order to gain agency and social power, to confront victimization, transform it and make their denunciation visible. It is a great challenge to make themselves heard from their peripheral position and in their condition as victimized women, traditionally considered invalid interlocutors.

The Mothers began their empowerment processes from the collective, seeking to strengthen their position in society, not from an economic approach, but from their social visibility. S. Blatiwala (1997) indicates that the most robust empowerment processes are those focused on position, and not on condition, since the former are not restricted to the women's own consciousness, but to that of their community as a whole [8]. The Mothers' resistance to obtain justice for themselves and their children became a strategic reference point on their path to empowerment, acquiring tools to be heard before the institutions and judicial authorities.

The Mothers as victims have joined efforts to mobilize and integrate other groups and social movements to achieve greater activism to press for the truth about what happened to their children and to demand justice. To achieve this, mobilization has not been enough, but they have also transcended into a true collective movement that has had two moments: the beginning of a social process and its link to social movements of human rights and victims of the armed conflict. Likewise, it is worth highlighting the partisan independence of the Mothers, which has allowed them to maintain an ethical and elevated position in society. This has protected them from attempts of co-optation and dilution of the empowerment process by hegemonic forces (Batliwala, 1997) [8].

The construction of memory of the case is fundamental to the exercise of political activism and empowerment. It plays a connecting role between the past, which involves painful and unjust events, and the present, which is configured as a dimension of empowerment and struggle for truth and justice. Memory allows indirect victims to know what happened, demand justice and continue their struggle for comprehensive reparation and guarantees of non-repetition (good name, compensation and symbolic reparation). It has a role that makes the institutions uncomfortable, as it reminds them of the human rights violations committed and the injustice that still weighs on these cases. Gonzalo Sánchez points out that “memory is an expression of rebellion against violence and impunity. It has become an instrument to assume or confront the conflict or to ventilate it in the public arena.” (CNMH, 2013, p. 13) [15].

The struggle to construct memory on the part of the victims of the case occurs in opposition to the construction of the hegemonic and institutional history that assumes understanding the case simply as an isolated and peripheral event among the many that have occurred within the armed conflict in Colombia. This process of construction of memory on the part of the Mothers refers to what Pilar Calveiro (Calveiro, 2006) has called an “intentional memory, insofar as there is a conscious decision by a group that opposes forgetting and exercises an activism that wishes to achieve an understanding of the case as an ethical demand and as resistance to comfortable narratives [9].” This intentional memory has numerous consequences, among others: unveiling the abuse of authority, the failure of the State to comply with its human rights obligations, and civil society setting limits to the exercise of State power.

The Mothers have been building their memories in an individual and collective process that seeks the consolidation of an inclusive historical discourse. This process has not been carried out linearly or unilaterally, but has been built on the basis of the multiple memories and perspectives that can be contributed by those who have something to say in this case. In a context such as the Colombian one, where crimes against human rights defenders are trivialized in the context of a post-conflict process, it is more than necessary to listen to the different sectors that, like the Mothers, have much to say about the clarification of the truth and the construction of memories.

4.4. *Individual empowerment and collective empowerment of mothers: from pain to nonviolent civil resistance.*

The processes of empowerment to build their denunciation and the political act of opposition to injustice began in the internal scenario of the home and then went out into the public arena, breaking the imaginary that women are only in charge of private and domestic family matters. Once this assumption was broken, but with the sensitivity and courage that motherhood provides, they took to the streets first to look for their children, and later to denounce when they discovered the crimes committed. Thus, the transformation of their dynamics, which started from the private and ignorance of the political context of the country, towards the vindication of their identities and rights (truth, justice and reparation).

Parents or siblings have not taken an active part in the movement, although they have suffered equally from the loss of their loved ones. They have preferred to marginalize themselves from activism and only in very specific cases have accompanied public demonstrations. The absence of the male component in this case, as in other scenarios of political activism involving victims in Colombia, is due to their possibility of taking refuge in their work and in the idea of moving forward, giving in to fear because of the challenge of mobilization and denunciation.

“No more false positives, truth and justice” is a demand that does not originate in an abstract elaboration, as Jelin analyzes in the case of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo movement, but arises from the affections and particular needs to overcome impunity and, therefore, to do justice for their loved ones (Jelin, Calderón et al. 1986) [37]. This activism, as well as the political use of memory around the case, does nothing more than highlight the fact that Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar have been territories of high conflict and violence that have not been adequately intervened by the State. The presence of the Mothers gives strength and identity to the social movement, since there is a very close relationship between what is being claimed, who is claiming and the victims.

5. **MAFAPO: In Search of Collective Power**

It is in this context of solidarity and social struggles that MAFAPPO (Mothers of False Positives),

an organization of victims of the armed conflict made up of mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of young victims of extrajudicial executions, emerged. For 10 years they have traveled a difficult road since the phenomenon became visible in Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar, seeking the truth in the scenarios of transitional justice, claiming the memory and the construction of peace.

MAFAPO has made it possible to weave bonds of solidarity between women, neighbors and mothers who had to travel halfway across the country to find their children, relieving each other and understanding the importance of remembering and building memory. This has led them to undertake their struggle for justice, truth and guarantees of non-repetition. The narrative has allowed them to overcome the prostration of trauma, and to move on to organize and undertake collective memory actions as a political decision through which to confront violence and the abuse of state power (Jimeno, 2017) [39].

The empowerment of the Mothers can be evidenced in the possibility they now have to face the affronts and insults against the memory of their children that on certain occasions they have had to hear and to which they have responded with dignity and demanding respect. When Senator Maria Fernanda Cabal of the Democratic Center party stated that the young people of Soacha were delinquents in the area, the voice of protest from the mothers, headed by Luz Marina Bernal, was not long in coming. This generated such controversy that the media later interviewed Mrs. Bernal who asked for respect for the memory of the victims, stating that it was not true that her son was a delinquent.

Reflection on their citizenship and their capacity for agency, both for each of the mothers and for the collective, led them to question themselves about what their power consisted of and how they would oppose the Military Forces and an institutionality that was aggressive towards them. The empowerment of the Mothers has challenged their relations with the institutional framework in the public sphere and their subordinate relations as women in the private sphere. (Blatiwala, 1997) [8]. This has occurred especially through confrontation in judicial processes, in acts of denunciation and vindication of their rights.

In MAFAPPO's journey, one of the fundamental elements are the processes of memory building and the therapeutic effects of working with other mothers. Gloria Astrid Martínez defined herself as a shy person

and after the loss of her son Daniel, her grief caused her to become very self-absorbed which, as she herself says, "made her irascible, especially with her family and in her home circle. However, the arrival of her grandchildren in her life transformed her, and the reunion with her neighbors from Soacha, now activist Mothers, helped her to open up, telling others about her pain, beginning without knowing it, her own process of forgiveness and healing". (Personal communication. G Martínez, 2018) [44].

The elaboration of memory is not a linear process; on the contrary, it is a complex scenario of tensions in which major social forces struggle to find their place and position themselves. This dialogue creates encounters, disagreements and fractures derived from human activity, perceptions and opinions about the leadership of the movement. This process of memory construction is unfinished and is in permanent decantation and maturity.

In the hearings of the Special Justice for Peace (JEP), the importance of the collective power of the Mothers in activism and in the search for their rights has become evident. A group of five Mothers was initially summoned by the SJP, and MAFAPPO requested that they be heard as a collective. In the framework of the first hearing held on August 10, 2018, they were heard, the report that the group of Mothers delivered to the magistrates was received, making it clear that they understand themselves as a collective that claims not individual but group rights.

The process of empowerment continues to move forward, even though access to the effective enjoyment of rights in Colombia is a difficult road. However, the process of transformation and growth in the capacity for agency of each of the Mothers and the group is immense. The struggle to be heard before the administrative and judicial institutions is still active, and the Mothers are focused on staying strong, united and trying to stay the course towards their goals.

5.1. Memory building and peace building: what has been built, the challenges and what is expected

For the Mothers, the construction of Memory of the case arises as a need to oppose the abuse of State power, the impunity of justice and violence, which is in itself a testimony against life. The first categorical imperative for the Mothers of Soacha is to vindicate memory as a defender of life and dignity.

However, the processes of memory construction generate multiple tensions and disputes: what is remembered and what is forgotten is part of a discussion among the victims. Elizabeth Jelin (2002) proposes to think about the axes that structure memory as a reflective exercise in terms of what is remembered and what is forgotten, being an exercise that confronts the individual and the groups or collectives [38]. This exercise integrates the discussion about the way in which and when it is remembered. There is a biased and manipulated memory such as the one made by the States; especially when they are perpetrators or in cases of abuses of authority; and the resistant and vindicating memory of the victims.

The act of remembering, in the case of the Mothers, can have two meanings: the first is the act of remembering as a way of mourning towards overcoming the trauma and the second is the elaboration of the memory with an echo that transcends the intimate and is directed towards the public with the aim of denouncing violence (Jimeno, 2015) [39]. The Mothers faced that same challenge: to remember or to forget. The narration of what happened is fundamental, inasmuch as it is the first exercise of memory construction that implies an ethical decision and a political action of renouncing to forgetting by the one who remembers and remembers. The path of forgetting was immediately discarded by the Mothers, since this implied accepting impunity, fear and the domination of the abusive power of the State. The pain of loss did not allow to fall into oblivion and became a bridge to resist; to fall into it would be like accepting as true the lie about the criminal and terrorist nature of their children.

The testimonial narration as the first exercise of memory is the beginning of a process that seeks to demand justice for the crimes committed and the rights violated. Memory has the effect of giving life to those who are no longer here, so that their memory brings them back to the public arena and allows them to recount their suffering and denounce it. This is reaffirmed through the proposal of Hannah Arendt (1993) who points out that “narrating is a constructive act through which the victim becomes present, without remaining tied to the past” [4].

Now, the act of narrating the violence is performative, since it is not only about verbalizing or writing the pain suffered, but also transcends to a reflection on the construction of memory. This has led the Mothers to generate multiple manifestations from different artistic

practices that involve the individual and the collective, such as: tattoos on the body, theater plays, exhibitions in different parts of the city and weaving activities in the framework of what has been called the sewing of memory.

Doris Tejada, mother of Oscar Alexander Morales Tejada decided to make her body one of the first memorials, tattooing her son’s face. The use of her body is the place Doris used so that her son (still disappeared and whose body has not been handed over to her) would live on in her memory. The tattoo in this case has had two meanings: to give a resting place to her son through the body and to whom she has not been able to give a burial, and to make an intimate memorial where her image, her presence and her claim for justice are preserved. The pain of the tattoo brought out the pain that was deeper. As she herself points out: “We finished after five hours and, since then, I talk to him, I caress him, I bathe with him. I tell him that I always carry him in my heart, that we are going to make it.” (CMH, 2018) [14].

Another manifestation, no longer individual but collective, of great symbolic value has been the exhibition “Madres Terra” held at the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation in Bogotá by photographer Carlos Saavedra. This photographic exhibition portrays mothers buried up to their necks, generating a symbolic narrative that seeks to show what the language of photography can say about the pain suffered by them. The interaction between the earth and the mother is proposed, as both give rise to life. In mother earth everything begins and it is the mothers who give light and life. Buried as their own children may have been in mass graves, the exhibition proposes a metaphor in which it is in the earth where everything is born and where we end up when everything dies. Life, earth and mothers are the protagonists of an exhibition that seeks to generate reflections on how artistic practices and rituals are a means of expression that are part of a process of empowerment and transformation of pain, allowing not only to make it visible, but also to generate a process of catharsis in the Mothers.

Another artistic manifestation as an exercise of memory of the Mothers of Soacha is the play “Antígonas Tribunal de mujeres”. With the participation of professional actresses and victims of violence, this play allowed to denounce through dramatic art, the tragedy that represented the loss of their children, becoming an opportunity for the national and

international community to know the case. In their acting interpretation, Maria Ubilerma Sanabria and Luz Marina Bernal opened their hearts showing objects belonging to their children, treasures that became patrimony that have re-signified and safeguarded the memory of their loved ones. In this work the symbolic has had the possibility of empowering the Mothers, since each one parades on stage with an object with which they find the bodily security that allows them to resize the suffering allowing them to denounce and transmit feelings of pain, rage, filial love and tenderness, to turn them into strength.

Another memory-building experience that has been for the Mothers one of their most emblematic artistic manifestations is the sewing of memory. This initiative was born in 2014 and has linked different groups of victims for whom knitting has allowed them to re-signify their memories and life processes. The experience of weaving was new for the Mothers as a mechanism to elaborate the memory of their children. Even though some of them knew the technique, they reworked the meaning of this action, to build through weaving a possibility to fight against injustice, oblivion and indifference, generating processes of collective construction around mourning. Through the looms, the Mothers have begun to heal wounds, fight for truth and transform pain into exercises of reflection.

El Costurero de la Memoria has been a space for collective mourning where the Mothers have knitted together with other victims of violence from different parts of the country, such as the genocide of the Patriotic Union and the holocaust of the Palace of Justice, carrying out a therapeutic healing exercise. As Lilia Yaya points out “weaving has allowed us to elaborate mourning, coping with pain, and as a way of expressing what words could not achieve” (L. Yaya, personal communication, 2018). [1]

The weavings have become performative testimony, where the Mothers tell the story of their children and how they lost them, evoking the past, but also projecting a future where crimes like the ones that took their children away from them no longer occur (Pacifista, 2016) [51]. With these looms the mothers and the other collectives that make them have made performative practices against impunity and for the rescue of memory. In 2017 the sewing machine surrounded with looms the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and in 2018 it did it again in the facilities of the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation.

Another language that has allowed the Mothers of Soacha to carry out memory exercises is the film-documentary. The Mothers have been the protagonists of several documentaries that have been made based on the story of their children, which has helped to further disseminate their story and the construction of the collective memory of the case. The documentary “Family Portraits” made in 2013, under the direction of Alexandra Cardona Restrepo, directly involved the mothers of Soacha, showing their daily lives and those of their children. Its focus was on showing the intimate stories of the murdered youths and the path taken by the mothers in their process of empowerment and search for the truth.

As part of the mothers’ memory development exercises, there have been training processes with a pedagogical and awareness-raising approach that seeks to reach different social groups. An example of this is the educational accompaniment in schools in the municipality of Soacha in the framework of the campaign “Prevention of armed recruitment and information on “false positives” developed during 2009 together with local entities such as the municipal office, the Foundation for Development and Education FEDES...” (Saray, 2013) [63]. With this activity, the mothers generated a pedagogical space in which they clearly stated the need to make the case visible and to teach about peace.

Another exercise of great importance in this pedagogy for peace has been the workshops and meetings held with the families of disappeared members of the Armed Forces at the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation. With these spaces the Mothers have been able to weave bonds of solidarity and empathy with other women victims of violence, understanding that the pain of the disappearance or loss of loved ones is ineffable and causes the same pain. As Ana Páez, Mother of Eduardo Garzón, put it, “the pain of one and the other is the same.” (Semana Magazine, 2018) [57]. This exercise also helped them to be in solidarity with other victims, including those close to the members of the institution that was responsible for the loss of their children. Through this experience, they understood that there is no collective guilt and that on the side of the Military Forces there are also nuances.

From all this we can see how the struggle to build memory in the case of the Mothers of Soacha is configured in two times: towards the past to rescue and preserve the memory of their loved ones and direct victims, and

towards the future to recognize themselves in their human dignity, as agents and defenders of Human Rights. This allows initiating processes of construction and education for peace, as a point of arrival and beacon of reference to the society that demands non-repetition (Jelin, Calderón et al., 1986) [37].

With this active and empowered participation that raises the voice, a clear claim is inserted to the Colombian society that lives a conjunctural moment, both politically and socially. The group of Mothers manages to leave a clear message to society, which in the words of Manuel Reyes-Mate (Reyes Mate, 2003) allows the exercises of memory building to leave a reference point for future generations, so that the atrocious past will not be repeated [58]. The Mothers demand justice and the right to truth from the State so that memory exercises are generated and society knows what happened. In what Gómez Isa (2007) has pointed out as a right of society to know its history, since truth is a cultural heritage of societies [33].

The construction of memory is therefore an obligation of the State and a resistance of the victims to society as a whole, because the violations constituted crimes against humanity. Memory is a right of both victims and society and allows all citizens to reflect on their past and project themselves into the future, involving as many social actors as possible. Fighting for the memory of their children implies not only rescuing their names, but also fighting for the rights of society as a whole. As Luz Marina Bernal stated in her hearing before the JEP “the Memory of our children is no longer ours, it belongs to the whole country, to the whole world”.

6. Ten years later: Challenges and the future

After commemorating 10 years since the disappearance and death of their children, during 2018 different events prepared by the Mothers of Soacha took place, which have shown Colombian society the path they have had to go through in their processes of memory building, empowerment and search for the truth.

This commemoration began in the main park of Soacha on September 30, 2018, where through a Eucharist the mothers were able to congregate and perform a collective prayer. In the framework of this commemoration they achieved the participation of the Municipal Mayor's Office of Soacha, the Unit for

Attention and Reparation to Victims of Violence, and the Office of Attention to Victims of the Armed Conflict of the Government of Cundinamarca. An agreement was signed between these entities and MAFAPO in order to build a memorial in honor of its victims that will serve as a reference for society to remember the unfortunate events, and stand as a cry for a never again.

However, it is important to note that the event did not count with the massive participation of the population of Soacha. This demonstrates the lack of awareness and education processes on conflict and victim issues in Colombia. A good part of the passersby that day did not know what was being commemorated and sadly the low participation of the community of the municipality of Soacha evidences the lack of otherness and empathy with an issue that as a society should generate all possible solidarity. This continues to be one of the main challenges of the Mothers' movement, and of the victimizers in the country.

After a decade of struggle, tensions have been generated, which has led to internal divisions that, although they are typical of collective processes, could eventually weaken the movement. In the event commemorating the 10 years in Soacha, the families of all the murdered youths were not present, which shows the fractures and divisions in the ways of advancing activism and leadership in the processes developed.

The cycle of commemoration for the ten years since the murders of the Soacha youths closed in Ocaña (Norte de Santander) with the Mothers' trip to that city, where their tragedy and struggle began. Returning to Ocaña and making the journey that their sons and brothers made, following false promises of work, was painful, but it allowed them to reaffirm that, despite the obstacles, they are still alive in search of the truth. This trip meant reconnecting with their struggle, with the people and movements that have surrounded them, and above all for the memory and remembrance of their children.

During the commemoration, the mothers took over the central square of Ocaña and with the collaboration of the local government, social organizations, educational institutions, activists, artists and students, spoke publicly about their stories, demanding truth and justice for the crimes committed against their children. They were joined by other relatives of victims of extrajudicial executions in Meta, La Guajira and Norte de Santander, thus generating exchanges and solidarity to broaden the movement.

As in Soacha, they were also confronted by the indifference or ignorance of some inhabitants of that municipality about the “positive incidents”. There, as in many places in the country, the official version of the facts was accepted, justifying the crimes as a fight against criminals, terrorists and subversives. This experience moved the Mothers gathered in MAFAPO, who observed that the problem has affected many families who have not been able to claim the bodies of their loved ones, or who have not even been able to learn of their whereabouts. Their responsibility to these victims becomes one of their greatest challenges, (personal communication, G. Martinez, 2018) [44].

Doing justice and building memory so that a phenomenon such as the “false positives” does not happen again implies helping to find the family of those buried as NN in Ocaña as well as in the rest of the country. Their commitment is fundamental and makes them think that their organization should expand its radius of action, generating possibilities of articulation that go beyond Soacha and Bogotá, working hand in hand with the victims of “false positives” in the rest of the country.

However, for MAFAPO, the current judicial investigation of the crimes before the JEP represents a special challenge. This transitional justice tribunal has approached the chapter on State crimes based on cases that have already been convicted. This implies that it is not hearing all the Mothers in their entirety, but only those who have obtained a sentence against the perpetrators and where they have been specifically recognized as victims. In view of this situation, MAFAPO submitted an application as an organization to the JEP, requesting that their case be dealt with collectively. The aim is to create an adequate space for the Mothers to intervene, to be heard and thus achieve a recognition of the truth, allowing the construction of justice in restorative terms. This will allow overcoming the feeling of impotence that currently exists due to the impunity of the case.

However, the members of the military linked to the “false positives” case have sought to apply to the JEP, arguing that the acts for which they are being tried are part of the armed conflict in Colombia. The Mothers and family members of MAFAPO consider that the crime of their loved ones is not part of the armed conflict, since their sons were civilians who did not participate or were not members of any armed group. This argument has been used by the military to avoid the heavier sentences that they are exposed to within the legal framework of

the ordinary justice system, with sentences that can range from 40 to 60 years, very different from those provided for in the JEP, which ranged from 5 to 20 years.

According to the JEP, as of March 2018, 1,792 military personnel had signed the acts of commitment. As a result, the trials and sentences they were facing before the ordinary justice system were suspended and they were granted the benefit of provisional release. This is the case of Colonel Publio Hernán Mejía, who had already been convicted in the first instance by the 6th Specialized Criminal Court of Bogotá, and whose sentence and arrest and detention order were suspended by order of the Criminal Chamber of the Superior Court of Bogotá as a result of the willingness of this soldier to avail himself of the transitional justice mechanism.

All of the above allows us to observe that one of the great objectives and challenges of the Mothers is to achieve that the different judicial instances give real speed to their processes and that these are no longer delayed in time. The Mothers have had to face a real predicament of 10 years in offices and courts in search of a minimum of justice that allows them to feel that their task has been accomplished.

The Mothers are categorically opposed to the crimes of their loved ones being heard before the SJP, because of their conviction that these events are not part of the armed conflict in Colombia, being a case of an attack on unarmed civilians with a clear desire to obtain benefits. Likewise, and no less important, because these are crimes against humanity that cannot be judged by the transitional justice system but by the ordinary justice system.

Another challenge faced by the movement is the need to receive psychosocial support and to have adequate tools to accompany victims. MAFAPO needs to gain recognition of their rights as victims before the institutions, in terms of attention and accompaniment, so that they can be effectively attended to. Adequate psychosocial support, as well as the effective payment of the amounts corresponding to economic reparations through administrative channels is one of the most pressing demands.

7. Conclusions

The way in the elaboration of memory by the group of mothers is allowing Colombian society to reflect on

the magnitude of the violence it has suffered and that has victimized people, forcing us to rethink the value of life and the commitment we must have with it. This courageous and determined exercise continues to be carried out by a group of women who understand the power of what they do and who know that they cannot give up, even more so in the transitional post-agreement process that Colombia is currently undergoing.

The participation of women in the new forms of justice marks a new sense in its application as a moral reference so that crimes like these do not happen again. Their memory building processes have generated a high sense of otherness that can lead to build important social changes, becoming a valuable contribution in terms of construction and education for peace.

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