

The Personal and Socio-Economic Dynamics of Resilience and Transitional Justice in Colombia

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INTRODUCTION

Colombia is recovering from one of the world's longest internal armed conflicts, which has caused the deaths and forced disappearance of tens of thousands and the internal displacement of millions of people. In late 2016, a peace agreement was signed between the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC). Other armed groups had previously laid down arms, including smaller guerrilla movements in the 1990s and right-wing paramilitary groups from 2003 onwards. Nevertheless, the peace process with the remaining *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, ELN) guerrillas failed in 2019, while some dissident groups of the former FARC have rearmed and new paramilitary groups are active across the country, killing social leaders and FARC ex-combatants. The signing of the peace accords does not, therefore, make Colombia a peaceful country. This raises the question of how, in a context of long-term violence – both direct and structural – people manage to move on with their lives. How do they adapt to changing and often adverse conditions and create new possibilities to improve their own well-being and that of their families and communities? How does (or can) transitional justice aid such processes of individual and collective resilience?

In this chapter, I offer some answers to these questions, drawing on various periods of fieldwork undertaken between 2015 and 2019 in Colombia's

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Caribbean Coast as part of two research projects, one with former internally displaced persons (IDPs) and one with former FARC combatants. The first project's fieldwork took place in two communities of small-scale cattle farmers in the municipality of Chibolo, located in the centre of the Magdalena department. These communities were displaced by paramilitary forces in 1997, after which the villagers scattered throughout the Caribbean coast, some even crossing the border into Venezuela. After ten years of displacement, and after paramilitary demobilisation, they managed to return. They are currently involved in the process of claiming land restitution and reparations through the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law (known as the Victims' Law). This law is considered to be one of the most ambitious and complex reparation programmes worldwide (Sikkink et al., 2015). It created an intricate system composed of specifically trained land restitution judges and magistrates who decide on land restitution claims. Other institutions, including the Victims' Unit, provide humanitarian assistance, individual and collective reparations. Land restitution sentences, in addition to land titles, can include infrastructural and developmental measures. In this way, the Victims' Law aims to provide a holistic and transformative response to conflict survivors.

My research in Chibolo focused on the gendered dynamics of the Victims' Law and took the form of ethnographic and participatory visual research, in which community women photographed their lives and needs. These two communities were chosen as a pilot case for the Victims' Law as the state institutions involved had expected that land restitution would be simple here. The opposite was true. After a first fieldwork period from August 2015 to April 2016, I returned to the communities three times, in May 2017 and in May and October 2019. I undertook visual and non-visual interviews and focus groups with thirty-two participants from both communities and an additional fifteen semi-structured interviews with transitional justice stakeholders from state institutions and civil society. I had many more informal conversations. They were not audio recorded, but they provided an important source of additional information.

In this chapter, I compare the experiences of former IDPs in Chibolo with the situation of former FARC combatants. Having focused on the situation of survivors of the conflict, I was interested to learn more about the experiences of those considered to be perpetrators. This coincided with the FARC's reincorporation¹ process after the 2016 peace agreement. One of the many

¹ Although it is common to speak of reintegration, the FARC has insisted that the reintegration process should be called 'reincorporation', denoting its members' active role in negotiating their own reintegration. This distinguishes it from prior processes in the sense of being a collective process that predominantly takes place in rural areas, reflecting the fact that most FARC ex-combatants come from rural backgrounds (McFee and Rettberg, 2019).

zones in which the FARC was reincorporating collectively into civilian life was located in La Guajira. Most of the ex-combatants here belonged to the FARC's former *Bloque Caribe* (Caribbean Bloc). La Guajira is a marginalised department situated on Colombia's northern coast. Together with other departments, including Magdalena where Chibolo is located, La Guajira is part of *la Costa* (the Coast), a region whose inhabitants are often stereotyped as 'tropical, lazy and wild' (Tate, 2018: 422).

Studying the experiences of both survivors and perpetrators in *la Costa* therefore makes for an interesting comparison. In the FARC's reincorporation zone, I undertook ethnographic and visual research in May 2019 and from mid-August until November of the same year. Participant observation and numerous informal conversations were combined with semi-structured interviews with fifteen ex-combatants and five non-combatant community members. I held an additional thirteen interviews and many informal conversations with stakeholders in the wider reincorporation and peace process. Pseudonyms are used for all participants cited in this chapter.

In addition to the FARC's reincorporation, the peace agreement touched upon issues of victims' rights, the country's drug problem, political participation and comprehensive agrarian development. It also ordered the strengthening of the Victims' Law through a participatory process of consultations with survivors and other stakeholders, and the creation of a Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. This consists of a Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Reconciliation, a Unit for the Search of Disappeared Persons and a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), which will provide amnesties and alternative prison sentences for the perpetrators of political crimes among state and FARC actors. Through the JEP, the FARC will contribute resources for the reparation of the conflict's victims, also contributing with restorative and reparatory acts such as declarations to acknowledge its responsibility and projects to strengthen the social fabric of communities (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2020; Triana and Grace, 2019). This connects the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process with transitional justice, thus attempting to overcome tensions that commonly arise when support for ex-combatants is perceived as taking priority over support to conflict survivors (Sriram, 2013).

This chapter proceeds by first exploring individual aspects of resilience, specifically focusing on the psychological effects of conflict and on how research participants had overcome these. These individual elements, however, cannot be seen separately from collective experiences of resilience, which, to a large degree, are defined by the socio-economic conditions in

which the participants found themselves. I will therefore show how social relations and organisational processes have proved important factors for resilience in the past, and how the social sphere is critical for connecting individual psychological well-being with wider socio-economic questions. I then demonstrate why transitional justice in Colombia has so far failed to promote resilience, having been unable to make the connection between these different levels of concern. I will examine how it has prioritised individual-focused responses to the effects of conflict over the need to address the collective and structural consequences of conflict, which has crucial implications for resilience. The chapter finishes with suggestions for how to bridge this gap, by focusing on strengthening social resilience as a means to improve individual well-being; and it links this, in turn, to the concept of adaptive peacebuilding.

INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE: REFLECTIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH

In both contexts where I undertook research, mental health is not something that is regularly discussed. Nevertheless, conflict experiences had clearly had emotional impacts. In Chibolo, this was especially apparent among those who had lost family members, like Marta: 'We used to dance, but now I no longer dance because I am in mourning. I don't go to parties' (author interview, 26 February 2016). Others mentioned how they themselves or their family members fell ill because of the stress, hypervigilance and sadness caused by displacement. Pedro separated from his wife because the fear and anxiety had produced too many tensions between them, while Germán's wife did not want to return to the family's land because of the painful memories associated with it. Like her, other women too preferred to stay in the urban environments where they had sought refuge. This dovetails with a more general trend of displacement leading to family breakups among Colombian IDPs (Wiig and García-Godos, 2015).

These anecdotes suggest that, for many people, displacement was a traumatic experience that disrupted their emotional and physical sense of belonging and identity, and fragmented their routines and relationships. This often resulted in feelings of loss and longing, depressive feelings and a sense of helplessness and loss of control (Herman, 2001). Post-conflict return and recovery have not been easy either. They involved a long process of initially physical and then legal struggles to return to the land and obtain land titles, and incredibly hard work to prepare the land for cattle farming again, without basic services or infrastructure like roads, electricity or running water. These struggles had emotional impacts on both men and women. Some women

expressed feelings of doubt and guilt for having brought their children into a situation where opportunities to study or work were limited compared to the cities. Similarly, Germán, who returned without his wife and children, said he felt lonely and depressed, struggling to rebuild his farm all by himself (Weber, 2020: 14).

Satisfaction measures, including psychosocial support, tend to form part of reparations for survivors of violence. In Colombia, a programme called *Entrelazando* ('weaving together') aims to offer psychosocial support and re-establish broken social ties. This was implemented in only one of the two communities where I undertook my research, although even here group support sessions became ever less frequent. Beyond some commemorative activities, people did not seem to value or to notice the programme's impact (author focus groups, 18 and 19 March 2016). Several factors help to explain this. For example, some male community members complained about the methodologies used in the psychosocial support sessions, claiming that they were asked to hug each other or to tell others they loved them. According to them, this was not something 'real' men did, especially men in a *machista*² culture. Gender roles, in turn, help to explain why women appreciated the psychosocial support sessions more. They valued the opportunity to talk to others about their experiences, and considered the meetings a distraction from their daily concerns and a break from their feelings of isolation performing household tasks. These meetings therefore also formed a 'respectable social outlet for women' (Helms, 2013: 110), whose expected gender role of taking care of the household could only be interrupted for legitimate reasons, like going to church, engaging in family activities or seeing the psychologist as part of the reparation process.

The ambiguity about psychosocial support can also be explained by the common Latin American perception that a psychologist only attends to the needs of 'crazy' people. As far as Juana was concerned, people here 'aren't that crazy in the end' (author conversation, 3 September 2015). This resonates with other contexts (Helms, 2013; Weine, 2006), where survivors are often reluctant to seek mental health support as they do not consider themselves to be psychiatric patients. This dynamic can also be seen among former FARC combatants. In fact, the reincorporation package offered to them, comprising economic and food support, education and housing assistance, does not include psychosocial support. A representative of an international lawyers'

² *Machismo* is the hegemonic form of masculinity in Latin America. According to this ideal of masculinity, it is not acceptable for men to talk about their feelings as this contradicts their image of strength.

organisation that works with female ex-combatants explained that psychosocial support is a contentious issue. It was never foreseen during the peace negotiations, and currently the government proposes an individual mental health strategy. The FARC, in contrast, insists on the need for a collective strategy, thus producing a deadlock that leaves the ex-combatants without mental health services (author interview, 23 August 2019).

The expression of the need for such support was not uniform among the ex-combatants who participated in my research. Andrea, for example, said she believed that psychosocial support was needed because of the emotional impact of the loss of so many FARC comrades during the armed conflict. For her, the close ties between comrades had resembled family relations. Many people had also been emotionally affected by pre-conflict experiences of poverty and violence. In Andrea's case, the violent death of her father still affects her (author conversation, 19 October 2019). She also said that she would like to receive emotional support to address the impacts of the transition process itself: 'Every person has had to adapt to this life. But it has been difficult because, as I told you, one comes [to civilian life] without knowing anything, like coming from a cloud to the world, to earth, without knowing where to go, what to do and how to do it. Therefore this experience has been quite complicated' (author interview, 5 November 2019).

A psychologist who worked for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) explained that many ex-combatants with whom she had worked experienced depression, although because of the taboos surrounding mental health issues among the FARC they would never describe it as such. She said it was especially present among both younger and older men, without families, who lost their life projects through demobilisation and are now idle in their houses (author conversation, 13 November 2019). I recognised this among some of the men in the reincorporation zone where I worked. It shows again the gendered dynamics of mental health impacts; for men, losing their authority and hegemonic masculinity as combatants is likely to have a strong emotional impact, whereas women's commitment to their children often gives them a new life project – albeit one that reproduces traditional gender norms.

Norms of hegemonic masculinity, which expect men to be strong and not show emotions, play a part in the sensitivity surrounding mental health issues. Pablo, for example, explained that as *guerrilleros* they had seen so many comrades die that their hearts had hardened; at least he himself felt that stories of death no longer affected him so much. The only times that had been really difficult for him, and when he 'sometimes even cried', was when they were unable to bury their dead comrades (author conversation, 19 October 2019). Other male participants did not express a need for psychosocial support either.

Edilberto said he had ‘maintained his morale’ by analysing the things that affect him and by being strong (author interview, 24 September 2019). This also shows how people often find their own ways of dealing with trauma. A member of the gender committee of the FARC political party, not an ex-combatant herself, explained: ‘I am a psychologist, but I have the theory that in the end the people themselves solve their problems. [...] In the end, the accompaniment that your friend, your partner, your former comrade can give you is what is available and the people aren’t going to wait for a special programme’ (author interview, 1 October 2019).

Social relations and connections between people are therefore important tools for overcoming painful memories. Other everyday strategies are also present in both fieldwork locations. One striking aspect of the culture in *la Costa* is the tendency to make jokes about things, including difficult experiences. This has been used as a resilience tactic in other contexts, highlighting a refusal of the expectation to suffer (Scheper-Hughes, 2008). Two ex-combatants, for example, explained that making jokes was a way for them not to become desperate from the disappointment they felt with the peace process (author conversation, 30 August 2019). People in Chibolo also frequently made jokes. A former land restitution official who became very close to the communities pointed out their ‘aha mode’, referring to the expression which people there commonly used, signifying a sense of resignation with not controlling the outcome of events while at the same time also denoting indignation (author interview, 21 December 2015). These everyday practices and attitudes can be seen as forms of resilience. Nevertheless, although resilience can be performed in this way, either individually or collectively, it is not disconnected from wider socio-economic dynamics.

COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC OBSTACLES

Several socio-economic aspects impacted on the resilience of the participants in my research. These were related to the natural, built and social environment. Land was an issue that came up frequently in both contexts, perhaps unsurprisingly given that land is also one of the aspects of inequality that led to the conflict in Colombia, producing one of the highest numbers of IDPs worldwide.

Land was especially important in the case of Chibolo, where the communities are involved in a land restitution process. As I have explained elsewhere (Weber, 2020: 9), land constitutes a part of the *campesino* (farmer) identity that the research participants were strongly attached to, and it guarantees their socio-economic survival. Formally receiving their land titles allowed the



FIGURE 8.1 The need for clean drinking water. Photographed by Julia, December 2015.³

participants to obtain credits and other support needed for their socio-economic recovery. It also enabled them psychologically to start over again on their land, feeling less exposed to risks of displacement. Unfortunately, through the years in which I visited the communities, climate conditions presented an obstacle to the new start that people had hoped for.

Although drought in 2015 and 2016 was intense, causing desperation and fear of losing one's hard work and investments (Weber, 2020: 12), many people later said that it had been nothing compared to the drought in 2019, which made them lose many heads of cattle and meant that they were hardly able to milk the remaining, undernourished cattle. In addition, harvests of yucca and corn failed, and people did not have sufficient water to drink, forcing them to drink ditch and other insalubrious water out of desperation (author conversations, May and October 2019). This has meant that, despite regaining their land, people's income and alimentation are not guaranteed (see Figure 8.1). This socio-economic insecurity has generated considerable stress and anxiety, on top of the already difficult process of rebuilding lives. To this day, there is no running water in these communities, and the only support to prevent the

³ This photograph was taken as part of the participatory visual research process described earlier. The image is used here with the participant's permission.

impact of droughts has been some training by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) on how to prepare and store enough hay for future droughts.

Access to land also played a role in the historical struggle of the ex-FARC guerrillas, and in their reincorporation process in La Guajira. Although the 2016 peace agreement provides for a land fund which will allocate three million hectares of unused lands and other lands obtained by the state to landless agrarian workers, victims' associations opposed the idea that FARC ex-combatants should benefit from this fund (Carranza-Franco, 2019). This leaves the ex-combatants, mostly from rural backgrounds, without access to land. In order to rent the land needed to develop agricultural and other collective productive projects, ex-combatants therefore have to invest part of their monthly monetary support. The profit made from these projects, including a collective farm, tailoring workshop and community ecotourism project, is in turn largely invested in sustaining the projects, instead of paying wages to the ex-combatants. Furthermore, several of the plots of land on which the reincorporation zones are located are facing issues that put their sustainability at risk. For example, Indigenous people lay claim to the land in another reincorporation zone in the Caribbean Coast (which is very closely connected to the zone where I worked), even threatening to expropriate the FARC. The same might happen to the zone in La Guajira, since it too is located on Indigenous land, according to a UN representative who linked these problems to the hastiness with which the peace process was completed and implemented (author interview, 7 November 2019).

A member of a think tank working on peace explained that the peace negotiations had been dragging along for years and the public demanded to see results. Since reincorporation was among the last topics to be discussed, the issue of land for the FARC itself was not negotiated (author interview 8 May 2019; Fattal, 2018). This has led to evident frustration among ex-combatants about the uncertain future and suspicion of the state. In addition, La Guajira is one of the driest departments in Colombia, making the success of agricultural activities unpredictable here too. For example, the first harvest of the plantain project implemented by the ex-combatants was lost as a result of drought, making the new farmers lose a year of work. Again, the only tangible support in this regard has come from the UNFAO, which was finalising the building of an irrigation system by the end of my fieldwork in November 2019. Without such international support, maintaining a level of resilience that enables people to sow another harvest of plantains in spite of the earlier failure would have been much harder.

Decent housing was also crucial for participants in both locations. Having access to adequate housing gives a basic sense of security that is needed for family life and for being able to make a life plan. As described elsewhere (Weber, 2020: 9), several participants in Chibolo expressed the need for a house, especially after being forced to rebuild everything from scratch upon return from displacement. Most people were living in very basic wooden houses or, in some cases, in temporary emergency houses provided by a religious organisation that were still being used years after their supposed end date. This meant that many families were huddled together in very small spaces that had no security and did not stay dry during rainfall. Given the above-described socio-economic conditions, most people did not have the financial means to improve their housing situation. Although housing is included in the land restitution sentences, it is not available to those who did not possess land prior to displacement, including those who were children when they were displaced. Moreover, the houses provided as part of the restitution sentences are small and badly constructed, and few had been built during my first fieldwork period, as described in more detail in the next section.

Housing is also a concern for FARC ex-combatants. The houses they currently live in were meant as an emergency solution for the first six months of the reincorporation phase, but more than two years later they are still living in them due to the lack of alternatives. These temporary houses are made of asbestos (see Figure 8.2), making some people refuse to live in them, whereas others, especially families, have no other option, exposing themselves and their children to health risks. These houses are 'pure evil' according to one participant (author conversation, 26 September 2019), echoing the indignation and suspicion that were common among research participants. These houses do not stay dry during heavy rain, as I experienced myself. The leaders of the two FARC reincorporation zones on the Caribbean Coast have designed a housing project by pooling the individual lump sums promised to them by the government, complemented with European Union support.

Many participants expressed the importance of owning a house, which would give them more stability as a family and also enable economic opportunities, such as starting a shop or restaurant in their houses, or renting out the house if they were to live elsewhere. Nevertheless, the construction of these houses in the neighbouring town has not started because of the abovementioned lack of land to build them on. This situation has led to an overwhelming feeling, continuously reiterated by most people living in the reincorporation zone, that the government is not complying with the peace agreement and is not genuinely interested in peace.



FIGURE 8.2 The asbestos houses in the FARC reincorporation zone. Photograph by the author.

Living in asbestos houses was often given as one of the reasons for the offence that research participants felt, expressed mockingly by a female leader who described ex-combatants as being ‘laboratory rats for the government’ (author conversation, 31 August 2019). This is reminiscent of the feeling expressed by participants in Chibolo about their position and value in society: ‘the government is not interested in the *campesino*’ (author conversation, 21 September 2015). Three years after my first fieldwork period ended, people still largely felt this way. This illustrates how the lack of access to land, decent and safe housing and other basic services, such as quality health care and education, makes participants in both locations feel like second-class rather than full citizens. This perception of unequal treatment, in turn, has emotional effects. As I have discussed elsewhere (Weber, 2020: 16), one of Chibolo’s community leaders explained that, although the government offered them psychosocial support in the form of the earlier described *Entrelazando*

programme, such support would not be needed if the government were to provide them with the elements that could facilitate a better life, such as land titles, paved access roads, electricity and running water.

Jorge, an ex-combatant in La Guajira, had a similar opinion. In his words, 'I believe that psychologically the people are fine. The problem is the insecurity, which you can't solve with psychologists but with projects [...]. People go over there towards the hill to grow crops, and every time they lose them. [...] So that demotivates them, losing it every time, and also because of the climate problem' (author interview, 16 October 2019). People like Jorge pointed out that psychosocial resilience is related not only to people's experiences during conflict but also to their current situation. The latter is characterised by a lack of state support, either through basic services or specific projects to help people recover from their conflict experiences, which is additionally compounded by climate change.

SOCIAL RELATIONS AND ORGANISATION AS CRUCIAL FOR COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

In light of the difficult conditions discussed above, what explains the fact that people are still continuing the struggle to rebuild their lives? What positive elements outweigh the absence of the basic socio-economic components of resilience? Social relations and organisation go a long way towards explaining this in both contexts. Organisation has been at the heart of the historical struggle for land in the communities in Chibolo. These communities were formed in the 1980s as part of land occupation campaigns, often accompanied by the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), in an attempt to claim the 'land for those who work on it' (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2010: 202). The organisation that arose from the struggle to defend the land and build up the communities played an important role in the process of returning to the land after displacement. Community members organised themselves for a so-called 'voluntary return' in 2007, without state support in relation to security or transportation. This return did not go without a struggle, and involved various violent evictions by the police throughout 2008, until people's right to be on the land was finally recognised (Planeta Paz, 2012). These actions, in which organisation among people was key, can be seen as forms of 'radical citizenship', or spaces and actions which originate as a result of popular mobilisation around common goals (McEwan, 2005: 980).

The same point can be made apropos of organisation among the FARC combatants, notwithstanding that it had a more violent 'edge'. The FARC originated in the early 1960s from peasant self-defence groups set up to protect

zones of peasant ‘colonisation’ and fight for a solution to the issue of agrarian inequality and marginalisation. Starting off with about 300 men in the 1960s – women were not yet allowed as members – the FARC gradually grew to around 18,000 combatants at its peak in the early 2000s, with strong internal cohesion and discipline (Ugarriza and Quishpe, 2019). This strength in numbers, organisational capacity and unity did not allow the FARC to win the conflict, but did prevent it from being defeated, while also giving it the power to negotiate its members’ own conditions for reincorporation.

One of the FARC’s key demands in relation to the reincorporation process was that this should be a collective process; members feared that the individually oriented process preferred by the government, and used in prior DDR processes, would fracture their collective revolutionary project and organisational structure (Carranza-Franco, 2019). Indeed, the collective process has to a certain degree maintained the strength of the FARC as an actor capable of negotiating with the government and other stakeholders. In the reincorporation zone in La Guajira, for example, the FARC was able to attract international funding for housing and agricultural projects. I witnessed how the leaders there – both male and female – negotiated the conditions of this support, something that was also highlighted by the FARC party’s gender commissioner (author interview, 1 October 2019).

This suggests that unity, organisation and the forms of active citizenship that they enable are crucial aspects of the social resilience outlined by Ungar in Chapter 1. Social resilience enables individuals and communities to navigate and negotiate access to the resources they need, such as land and financial support. Unfortunately, transitional justice and related peacebuilding processes in Colombia have not contributed to strengthening social resilience. In the next section, I will demonstrate how they have in fact led to the deterioration of organisational capacity and social relations in both research locations, while also failing to respond to socio-economic aspects of collective resilience – and, more generally, causing distrust and frustration.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN COLOMBIA

As explained in the introduction, transitional justice in Colombia is currently implemented through the 2011 Victims’ Law, which provides humanitarian assistance, individual and collective reparations and land restitution to the conflict’s survivors, and through the more recent ‘Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition’.

Promoting Resilience: What Can Reparations Do?

In terms of addressing the aspects of resilience outlined earlier, reparations seem to be best placed; they have a potential socio-economic impact and survivors of conflict often prioritise the fulfilment of their economic needs over retributive justice (Durbach, 2008; Gready and Robins, 2014; Robins, 2013). This makes the Victims' Law the most likely instrument to promote resilience. The JEP may also have a role to play, as its sanctions are supposed to combine retributive and restorative justice aspects (Triana and Grace, 2010). However, the JEP is still far from the stage of reaching verdicts or issuing sanctions (International Center for Transitional Justice, 2020), and therefore little can be said about its reparative potential.

The Development Programmes with a Territorial Focus (PDETs), which were introduced by the 2016 peace accord and will incorporate collective reparation plans, are a final possible mechanism to address the socio-economic aspects of resilience. These PDETs will not, however, be implemented throughout the country. Locations were selected based on the level of victimisation and intensity of conflict. The department of Magdalena, where Chibolo is located, was not elected; La Guajira was. Nevertheless, although the PDET planning stage has finished, implementation has not yet started (Rodeemos el Diálogo, 2020). For this reason, most of the following discussion will focus on the reparations and restitution provided by the Victims' Law in Chibolo, although I will also make some reference to La Guajira.

In terms of reparations, the biggest progress has been made with monetary compensation, which most people have received. However, some are still waiting, including elderly people – even though they are supposed to be prioritised. That compensation is the form of reparation that has advanced the most might be explained by the fact that compensation, in contrast to other forms of reparation, is directly provided by the Victims' Unit. It also responds to a more general global trend to prioritise monetary compensation, which has several motivations. For example, compensation is easier to implement and less economically and politically costly than more far-reaching measures (O'Rourke, 2013; Viaene, 2010). In addition, compensation can be more straightforwardly quantified than social and infrastructural measures, making it easier to show results. Quantified results can be used to present an image of the benefits offered to survivors, thus creating a 'mirage of substance' (Purdeková, 2015: 155), while saying little about the actual experience of these benefits and the extent to which they have changed survivors' lives (Buchely, 2015).

In fact, participants in Chibolo agreed that, although compensation had helped them to solve some short-term problems, it did little to alleviate their structural problems of socio-economic marginalisation. Collective reparations could perhaps play a larger role in this regard. Unfortunately, the implementation of the collective reparation plans in the communities in Chibolo, which included measures like the reconstruction of communal wells and schools, the recovery of organisational structures and commemorative activities, was virtually non-existent. Community leader Diego explained to me that the Victims' Unit said that some of the measures in the collective reparation plans were impossible to implement (author conversation, 11 May 2019). This raises the question of why they were included in the first place, creating expectations that the state knew it would not be able to fulfil.

Transitional Justice's Unintended Consequences: Weakening Social Ties

As I have described elsewhere (Weber, 2020), land restitution through the Victims' Law has been a slow process. In spite of promises of quick results, the actual provision of land titles took several years. Land titles were to be accompanied by productive projects focused on cattle farming and the provision of housing, as well as wider infrastructural support, including access to electricity, running water and the paving of access roads. Most of this infrastructural support was never delivered or was very delayed. It was not until 2019 that I could finally see some progress; the village centres had been connected to the electricity network in December 2018, while parts of the road that connects one of the communities to the municipality of Chibolo had been paved by May 2019. The access roads to the other community remained unpaved, practically disconnecting this village in the rainy season, thus making it harder for people to commercialise their milk and creating dangerous situations during medical emergencies since these villages do not have medical centres. The problem with the provision of such social and infrastructure services is that they depend on local governments, which are historically known for their corruption in *la Costa* (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2010; Tate, 2018). This means that the Victims' Unit cannot guarantee the provision of the reparations it promises.

The aforementioned poor quality of the provided houses can also be explained by corruption, underscoring the fact that cheap and inadequate materials were used. The land restitution judge ordered one of the building companies to halt their construction, and this was never resumed. Houses in the other community, built by a different company, were soon showing cracks or had roofs flying off during strong winds. When I visited

in 2019, female leader Josefa exclaimed that she ‘wasn’t going to live in the graveyard they built her’ (author conversation, 25 October 2019). One neighbourhood in these communities experienced particular problems. It was among the last to receive its land restitution sentence, which, moreover, contained mistakes that were never officially clarified. As a result, this neighbourhood never received any productive projects or housing support.

The slowness and inequality of this reparation and restitution process led to the weakening of the communities’ organisational structures. As described previously (de Waardt and Weber, 2019: 222), the time investment that was required to participate in this process caused people to feel disillusioned and exhausted, and to lose interest in attending the monthly meetings of the farmers’ association in one of these communities, while the other community’s attempts to recover their pre-displacement farmers’ association were fruitless. While community tensions and suspicions towards community leaders were already evident in 2017 (see de Waardt and Weber, 2019), by 2019 these had intensified, especially in relation to the neighbourhood that never received the promised support.

Cecilia, whose family owns land in this neighbourhood, said that she believes it is better to work for one’s own interests and family, rather than waiting for projects to arrive. According to her, when the leaders need help with cleaning the communal spaces or other things, they always expect community support, but in the meantime the projects they promise never materialise. She believed that the leaders did not make enough effort for the land restitution in her neighbourhood; they just travelled and took selfies on the beach instead of speaking up for people’s rights (author conversation, 23 October 2019). Francisco, who does not live in this neighbourhood, explained that in fact the people there caused their own problems, since they started selling their land without having the titles and therefore confused and delayed the process of allocating these titles (author conversation, 23 October 2019). This shows the problems, tensions and divisions that uneven distribution of reparations and a lack of clarity and information about this can cause. Other community members explained that these tensions and suspicions had further weakened the community association. Whereas, in 2017, membership had already almost halved from over sixty to under thirty-five, in 2019, these numbers had further reduced to about twenty, as people blamed their leaders for being ineffective.

Although the collective reparation plans in these communities included the recovery and strengthening of organisational spaces, it was actually the UNFAO that contributed to this, by supporting the formation of a cooperative among

four farming communities, including the two communities where my research took place. As a cooperative, the communities could sell their milk collectively, thus obtaining better prices. The formation of this cooperative was not easy. Already in 2016, it was dealt a near-fatal blow because of an incident related to the promise by former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos that the communities would receive electricity by Christmas.

The Land Restitution Unit had decided that it would be better to provide solar panels, since electricity was one of the components of the land restitution sentences and thus was to be provided anyway. Solar panels would go to those farmers living farthest away from the village centres, as they would be the last to be connected to electricity. Meanwhile, all members of both communities were asked to pay a contribution for the upcoming connection to the electricity network. The lack of information about the relation between the need to pay this contribution and the provision of solar panels to only a limited number of households sparked intense suspicion, distrust and outrage among many people, even leading to threats of burning the truck that would deliver the solar panels.

According to a UNFAO employee, this incident almost made the newly formed cooperative collapse, since people from both communities started blaming their leaders and suspecting them of corruption (author conversation, 9 May 2017). Although the cooperative continued to exist at the time of my 2019 visit, it was seen as an economic tool rather than a space for community organisation – or social resilience – as Paola explained to me with regret (author conversation, 10 May 2019). Francisco said that, of the eighty people who deliver milk to the cooperative, only thirty or forty go to the meetings (author conversation, 23 October 2019). The lack of effective information and communication, together with frustration and disappointment about unmet expectations of support, can thus cause a reduction in social resilience by damaging social relations. Currently, hopes for the completion of collective reparations or the provision of land restitution support are even lower, since most of the state's attention is no longer focused on the Victims' Law – a subject receiving intense media attention in 2015 and 2016 – but on the FARC's reincorporation and related transitional justice activities.

As alluded to earlier, similar frustrations can be noticed among the FARC ex-combatants, especially in relation to the lack of progress with the purchase of land for their housing project. This slowness is blamed on the government by the leaders and therefore also by their rank and file, although in reality the FARC negotiating team was also to blame for the vagueness about land in the peace accord. Another source of frustration for many ex-combatants is the lack of government support for agricultural projects. This complaint, too, cannot

be entirely blamed on the government, at least not in La Guajira. Each demobilised ex-combatant has the right to a lump sum for an individual productive project. The FARC has decided to pool these so that the resulting collective projects enable individuals to start agricultural and other businesses. As explained, in the two reincorporation zones in *la Costa*, the FARC leadership decided to invest these collective funds not in an agricultural project but in a housing project. Ex-combatants' complaints about the government's failure to provide an agricultural project are therefore unwarranted. They do, however, highlight the importance of communication and expectation management in relation to the building of trust in the state, transitional justice and other post-conflict processes. Furthermore, two years after the start of the demobilisation process, other collective reincorporation zones had not received the lump sums for their collective projects either (Carranza-Franco, 2019), thus confirming ex-combatants' lack of trust in the government.

As a result, ex-combatants' commitment to the collective reincorporation process is waning. Many have left the collective reincorporation zones for the cities; and by 2018, 2,400 FARC ex-combatants had even relapsed into violent activities (Carranza-Franco, 2019). In the reincorporation zone in La Guajira, the loss of a collective spirit was also noticeable. Collective practices such as communal eating initiated here at the start of the reincorporation process were gradually lost. Several people explained that after some time everyone started buying their own stoves, leaving the communal kitchen unused. They also lamented that the FARC's famous daily cultural activities – crucial for building social cohesion in the past (Ugarriza and Quishpe, 2019) – or commemorations of deceased comrades were no longer celebrated (author conversations, 30 August and 7 October 2019). Others decided to reintegrate individually in the cities, rented agricultural land or worked as sharecroppers, only coming back to the reincorporation zone for medical or other support or reincorporation bureaucracy. Eventually, individualisation of this process will reduce the ex-combatants' negotiating and lobbying power.

SALIR ADELANTE: ORGANISING TO CONNECT INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

The examples discussed in this chapter show the risks that occur when transitional justice or other post-conflict and peacebuilding mechanisms raise high expectations, which, ultimately, go unrealised. Unmet expectations and disappointment make people lose trust not only in these processes but often also in their leaders, making it seem better to focus energy on protecting

one's own interests – as Cecilia explained in the citation earlier – than to invest time in struggles for the greater good. This eventually makes it harder to overcome the structural marginalisation and lack of access to basic social and infrastructural services that communities like Chibolo face in Colombia.

To address this, transitional justice must better respond to what those affected by conflict most need. In the case of the communities in Chibolo, and those of ex-combatants in La Guajira, people's desire is expressed in the commonly used term '*salir adelante*' or moving forward. Over and over again, people stressed their desire for a piece of land to work on, decent housing and access to basic social services, such as health care and education. Individual compensation will not enable them to obtain these resources, and therefore more structural measures are needed, closer to the transformative justice mechanisms proposed by critical transitional justice scholars (see, e.g., Evans, 2016; Gready and Robins, 2014; Lambourne, 2009). Other scholars, however, have pointed to the limits of transitional justice in terms of its mechanisms – which traditionally do not include development-oriented measures – and timeframe (Roht-Arriaza and Orlovsky, 2009; Waldorf, 2012). In Colombia, another obstacle might be sheer numbers; there are millions of survivors of internal displacement and other crimes, which makes compensating all of them an almost impossible task within the current budget (Sikkink et al., 2015). Since most efforts are focused on compensation, it is obvious that even less can be expected of promises of other, more collective reparations, in spite of the discourse on transformative reparations within the Victims' Law (Weber, 2020).

To overcome this dilemma, transitional justice should promote social resilience, or the capacity of survivors to organise themselves – as communities or groups of survivors – to protect and promote their own well-being. This would allow them to collectively navigate the structures and power relations that prevent them from accessing the resources they need, and to negotiate access to these. Increasing survivors' and communities' skills to negotiate on the basis of their own needs is essential because reparation needs vary among people who experienced conflict in different ways and among people in different locations. Rural and urban Colombians, for example, face different problems (Buchely, 2015; Rettberg, 2008). Furthermore, survivors' priorities are not fixed; they depend on the particular context and are likely to change over time (Shaw and Waldorf, 2010). Therefore, as others have argued, transitional justice should not offer a 'one-size-fits-all' approach across different countries, nor within one country (Butti and McGonigle Leyh, 2019; Sharp, 2013). Instead, it should strengthen self-organisation, enabling survivors to define and implement

their own demands and negotiation strategies. Such self-organisation can build on the previously described organisational processes of communities, thus harnessing their own endogenous strengths.

This is in line with the principles of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning, 2018). Instead of imposing externally defined but often inadequate mechanisms, strengthening the role that communities can play in demanding their own rights and steering their own reconstruction processes will enable transitional justice and other peacebuilding approaches to provide responses that are better attuned to the needs of communities. This, in turn, will potentially enable communities themselves to play a larger role in the implementation, evaluation and adaptation of such responses. Increasing social resilience, by strengthening organisational and lobbying skills among people, and promoting a collective identity and unity, can thus help to produce more adequate and sustainable results than the short-term impact of a compensation cheque, or the counterproductive effect of unmet promises of transformation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have analysed how individual and collective resilience are present and hampered in two post-conflict communities in Colombia. In so doing, I have illustrated the importance of organisational processes and social resilience, evidenced in practices of active citizenship which have enabled processes of rights claims. Unity and social relations among people have also helped survivors to overcome the trauma resulting from conflict. Transitional justice in Colombia, however, has damaged rather than strengthened such collective assets, causing frustration which has made participants lose faith in the power of organisation, making some of them decide to focus on their own situation instead. The socio-economic elements needed to enable these communities to *salir adelante* can hardly be expected to be delivered by transitional justice, as they go beyond its commonly assumed timeframe, mechanisms and generally available budget. Instead, transitional justice could play a role in promoting social resilience – as a dimension of adaptive peacebuilding – by shifting its focus towards improving social relations and promoting collective and organisational processes. Social resilience will help communities to take more control over their future through active practices of citizenship. This enables rights claims, which, eventually, can facilitate other, closely connected socio-economic aspects of resilience.

Re-focusing transitional justice on the promotion of social resilience provides several insights into the current transitional justice process in Colombia. The Truth Commission, for example, can play a role in

identifying prior social resilience strategies among survivors and their communities. This is in line with its professed goal of not only uncovering the conflict's crimes but also acknowledging survivors as political agents (De Gamboa Tapias and Díaz Pabón, 2018). Restorative justice sentences issued by the JEP could contribute to strengthening social resilience through technical and financial support for organisational processes. If sanctions include the implementation of restorative justice projects for communities, the participation of survivors and their communities in the definition of these sanctions could guarantee that these processes contribute to improving the access to resources that communities need, such as the construction of roads, housing or other infrastructure. Such a participatory process, corresponding to the principles of adaptive peacebuilding, can itself strengthen communities' sense of being respected and listened to by the government, thus countering previous feelings of marginalisation. Strengthened social resilience will prevent survivors from waiting for the government to deliver upon unrealistic promises, instead allowing them to take back control of their own lives and actively negotiate for the resources and services they need, thereby bringing back previous practices of active citizenship.

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