***Documentality and Display: Archiving and curating the violent past in contemporary Argentina, Chile and Colombia.***

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**I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Institution: **Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, Carrera 7 # 27, Bogotá, Colombia**

Name and position:

* **Gonzalo Sánchez, former Director of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica**

Interviewers: Oriana Bernasconi, Cecilia Sosa, Jaime Hernández-García and Vikki Bell

Location: interview conducted via Zoom

Date: 24th April 2020

Duration: 93:09

**II. TRANSCRIPTION**

Vikki: Oriana, can you ask about recording and can you allow us to record if that’s possible.

Oriana: Yes, it is recording.

Vikki: Ok, but you need to ask for permission.

Oriana: Yes. Of course. Hi!

Gonzalo: Hi [He laughs].

Oriana: Great.

Jaime: Hi, good morning. It is nice to meet you.

Oriana: Nice to meet you.

Gonzalo: Nice to meet you too, thanks a lot.

Oriana: Gonzalo, let me introduce you to my colleagues. My name is Oriana and I’m from Chile, but I’m currently living here in London. I work with Elizabeth at the Universidad Alberto Hurtado in Santiago. I work in the Sociology department. You can also see Vikki Bell in the screen. She is from the Universidad de Londres, she also works in the Sociology department, and she is the one who leads this project.

Vikki: Hi Gonzalo.

Gonzalo: Hi Vikki, how are you?

Vikki: Fine, thank you.

Oriana: And also Jaime Hernández is over there. He is a professor at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. He is closer to you.

Gonzalo: Ah, how are you neighbour? I’m living in solitude here; we live very close to each other.

Jaime: Exactly, we are not that far away.

Gonzalo: Nice to meet you.

Oriana: And soon another colleague from the project is going to join us. Her name is Cecilia Sosa and she is from Argentina, but she is also living in England. Oh, look, there she comes. She is coming. In the meantime, we’d like to ask you for your permission to record this interview.

Gonzalo: Of course you can.

Oriana: Thanks a lot. Here is Ceci.

Cecilia: Hi, I am sorry for being a little late. How are you Gonzalo? Thanks a lot.

Gonzalo: Hi Cecilia, good morning, how are you?

Cecilia: It is nice to meet you!

Gonzalo: Where are you? Are you in London? Is Vikki in London?

Cecilia: I’m in Nottingham, England.

Gonzalo: Ok, sure. So, Jaime and me are the only ones here in Colombia, in Bogotá.

Oriana: Ok. So, should I tell him?

Vikki: Yes, please.

Oriana: Ok. Let’s see. We are conducting this project called Documentality and Display [in English], it’s like documentality and exhibition, something like that. And we have had work meetings and conducting interviews in Bogotá, Argentina and Chile, visiting archives that have documented the state terrorism in Argentina and Chile, and the armed conflict in the case of Colombia.

We have also met with people and organizations that have been gathering information about the human rights violations committed and violence in general, but for this project, we have been focused in one particular archive in each country. In Chile, we chose the Archivo FUNVISOL, that was created with the work done by the Comité ProPaz and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad. FUNVISOL was the foundation that kept the archive after the Vicaría closed.

In Argentina, we chose Memoria Abierta, because it gathers several archives from civil society organizations that have been collecting and copying documents, but also survivors' testimonies.

In Colombia, we choose the archive of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. So, when we visited Bogotá, we spoke to Andrés Suarez, Luis Carlos Sánchez, Paula Ila. And when we spoke to Paula, she was also with some of the people, who at that time, were directors or managers of some of the centre’s divisions, related to archive, pedagogic work and museographic work. We also spoke to Margot…

Gonzalo: You’ve already spoken to Margot. I was going to ask you that.

Jaime: And we spoke to Luis Jaime.

Oriana: And we wanted to talk to you because everybody says that you were a key person during the creation of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica in 2017, and that you also helped to institutionalize the group through the creation of the centre.

So, in this interview we want to… we already know part of the story through the voices that I mentioned earlier, but we’d like to hear your personal testimony, to your own version of how the Centro was created and the relationship it had with the peace process. We know that there is an issue with the state and that there are political discussions.

We are a research group, so we would appreciate if you can tell us about that and the current situation. And also about you leaving the Centro and the closing of that cycle. What happened over there? What did you do after leaving the Centro?

Cecilia: Considering all the work that was done.

Jaime: What happens now?

Cecilia: What happens now when the government doesn’t seem to be interested in protecting all those archives and all that data that has been gathered?

Gonzalo: I suggest we proceed as it follows. I can start talking and you can stop me if you have any questions, so this can be more like a conversation. In that way you can also tell me what you want me to talk about.

Oriana: That’s perfect.

Gonzalo: So, should I begin? Ok. I didn’t know that [inaudible 00:11:05:00] over there, too far back. But it’s ok, a little exercise [inaudible 00:11:13:00] Is it everything ok?

Cecilia: Jaime, I think that there is some background noise, maybe from…?

Gonzalo: We need to turn off our microphones, to mute them.

Cecilia: What can we do?

Jaime: Let’s turn off the microphones. Yes. [inaudible 00:11:32:00].

Gonzalo: Exactly.

Cecilia: Yes, that’s perfect.

Gonzalo: Now it sounds much better. Ok, let me see, if you want I can begin by telling you about the process that lead to the establishment of the group, and the subsequent creation of the Centro.

In 2007 the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación, was regulated by a law that was very different to the current one. That law was called Ley de Justicia y Paz, and it was created to regulate the process of entry of the paramilitaries into politics and life in general.

This law was widely criticized by all the human rights organizations, and at some point it had to be modified by the Institutional Court in order to really protect the victim’s rights and the access to the truth. The way in which was structured at the beginning was very disappointing for the victims, because only the voices of the perpetrators were represented. However, gradually, the possibilities of challenging those voices began to increase.

So, the group was created as a unit within the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación. And, what were the constituent components that we proposed? Given that, people tended to associate the Comisión to the peace process, and considering that the human rights organizations saw the Comisión as an institution built to support the paramilitaries, we decided to work on the basis of three important points.

The first point was to give full autonomy to the Director, in this case me, to choose the members of his team. That meant that I could choose any type of people to be part of the group, even those that were known for being critical of the Justicia y Paz and the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación. Therefore, we incorporated emblematic figures that belonged to very important human rights defence organizations, such as CINEP, which was widely considered as a critical voice in that context. So, father Fernán González from CINEP joined us at that time.

Rodrigo Uprimny from the Justice field also joined us. He was well-known on a Latin American level for his work done in the human rights field, and also known in the institutional world as an anti-state character and a victims’ representative voice. And there was also León Valencia who was a former guerrilla, which then became a very important ELN political analyst. So the first step was to have autonomy to be able to build the research group.

The second point was to have autonomy to develop the project itself. In other words, we didn’t need the authorization of the Comisión to choose the people that we talked to. And I remember that in the first interview that I gave to a newspaper from Bogotá, I deliberately said something that sounded provocative at the time. I said: ‘To do our historical memory work, I want to speak to the head of the FARC, Marulanda Vélez’. So, we put all our efforts into reaffirm our autonomy.

The third point was very significant, we demanded to have it written down and to be formally approved by the Comisión Nacional de Reparación. We demanded to have complete autonomy in the construction of the final product. And that final product was meant to be a report about the origin and development of the illegal armed groups in Colombia.

So what happened to this? The first thing that I have to say is that, although there were some minor complications, the autonomy of the group was always respected. We became a strong group with national recognition**.** And at the time when the group was created, the historical memory task and the truth task, weren't perceived as important responsibilities by the public opinion or by the same government. I think that the president Uribe didn’t even know that we existed. So they allowed us to work as a world of academics who did their jobs, that sometimes were annoying, but who needed to be allowed to do their job.However, we had a significant advantage, and we had the support of the international cooperation, and that support arrived from the very beginning and became an expression of our autonomy. So you have to consider all those details.

We stated that the director, Gonzalo Sánchez, should not be paid by the state. Instead, we asked for this position to be funded by international cooperation. So I received my payment from Switzerland. Switzerland was seen as a symbol of independence by our troubled world. So the choice of that country was also a key factor.

So it was a very diverse group. It was clearly a group that was seen as a critical one, with financial autonomy, and autonomy of action. However, …

Cecilia: I’m sorry, Can I interrupt you for a moment?

Gonzalo: Yes, please.

Cecilia: In relation to the financial autonomy. It seems to be that it’s something very important that I haven't realized before. There must be a tension between being a group that emerges from the state, but at the same time is funded by international cooperation. Was that ever seen internally as a paradox? Because, as you were saying, is clearly something that can provide autonomy, but, where there any tensions between the state and the international funding? Or did you see it as…

Gonzalo: No, we didn’t have any problem with the international funding. Mainly because Switzerland was a leading voice in international funding. The fact that Switzerland was the country that was providing the funding was extremely important. The situation would have been different if the funding had come from the United States, or another country such as France. Maybe they are not that different, but the fact that Switzerland was recognized as the ‘country of the human rights’, the ‘International Red Cross country’, or as a country with experience in civilized conflict management, was extremely important. Yes, actually that wasn’t an issue.

Cecilia: No. I’m saying it because it was an experience of real autonomy, a very strong one in relation to…

Gonzalo: [Our autonomy] became very important and not just because the funding was coming from Switzerland, but also because something happened when the work began to be done. Once, we started to work and the first products began to appear the autonomy of our work was demonstrated, so more international funding began to arrive. And this increasing support from international cooperation became a wall of protection against any government intervention in our work.

Moreover, since the beginning, an international advisory board was created, and we tried to show it on a national level as a protective element of our autonomy. That advisory board was made up of experts of recognised prestige such as Mô Bleeker from Switzerland. She worked in the Swiss department of Foreign Affairs and she joined us until the end. There were also academics of international renown such as Daniel [¿Pecó? inaudible 00:21:16:05] who is a recognized ‘colombianista’ here in Colombia. There were also 5 or 6 other people in the committee. There was also Julián Artacho who was Spanish, Catalan. Who else was there? I forgot the names.

The international advisory board was also an element of international presence that provided international surveillance to the process. It was very important, and is the reason why I can say today that during the whole time that the Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación lasted, there were no major problems. There was only a small one, with the first report that we did.

I’m sorry. Allow me to go back to another issue. We were told to do a report about the development of the illegal armed groups. But we were a group that started our work in a complex scenario, where we had to produce truth and memory in an institutional and governmental context that people linked to paramilitaries. So, we decided that we needed to show that we were an independent organism and allow the Colombian society to be believed from the beginning of the process. Hence, we were going to transform the mission of building a report, into a process of construction of historical memory.

To me, the outcome was one of the most particular experiences that a group that works in truth commissions or clarification commissions has ever had, and it was a very long process. I mean, you know that at the end the centre, if we link it to [inaudible 00:23:25:09] a group and the centre, made more than 100 or 150 reports, plus the general report (‘Basta Ya’ report) that we needed to publish at some point because it was required by the law. But that mission of transforming a report into a historical memory process of construction was accomplished at the end, because after 2 or 3 reports were published, the public opinion, the society and the institutions were convinced that we were serious about being autonomous.

The first case that we addressed was a very challenging one, sort of like a proof of how much autonomy they would allow us to have. It was a very complicated case were the state was responsible. It is called the Masacre de Trujillo, and it was one of the biggest massacres that has ever happened in Colombia, in which more than 300 people died. Organizations like the OAS or the Inter-American Commission had already condemned it and built a report, but the case was still open and needed truth and reparation. Even today is still an extremely complex case.

So, the fact that our first case was one in which there was state responsibility, was also a proof for us of our own autonomy. And it was a huge surprise for the NGOs world. Because they saw us as a very complicated institution that protected the paramilitaries, but we ended up producing a report like that one.

The second case in which we worked on, that also became an emblematic case was the Masacre del Salado. It was coordinated by Andrés Suarez and it had a big impact in society because it occurred in the middle of the town’s public square. People were assaulted, beheaded and several other unthinkable acts of violence were committed. Before the report was built, that case was presented to the public opinion as the result of a combat. Hence, the fact that we showed that it has been a massacre and not a combat, gave a new meaning to what had happened in that place, new responsibilities were stablished and there were new impacts.

Those reports had a profound impact on society, because the other thing that we did was, in symbolic terms, [to deliver? inaudible 00:26:39:00] the reports, so we had some disagreements with the Comisión Nacional de Reparación. We decided to present the reports before the affected communities first. So, in the case of Trujillo, we firstly went to the town of Trujillo and secondly we went to a place of national symbolism, that in this case was the Museo Nacional de Colombia. And we did the same with El Salado report, we firstly presented the report in front of the El Salado community, afterwards we went to other places and other regions to present it, and at the end we went to a place of national importance. In this last place, we presented the report in front of Francisco Santos, who at that time was the Vice-president of Álvaro Uribe.

At that time, Santos played a completely different role than the one he played after in politics. I was surprised to see him as a president when I presented the group’s project in front of the commission’s plenary. When I said what we thought about autonomy, he reacted in a very informal way and told me: [inaudible 00:27:46:00] ‘Oh, sure, this thing of autonomy must be done in that way or it does not make sense. It’s clear that it must be an autonomous organization’. When the ‘Basta Ya’ report was released, I did not want to hear what he said. And even until today, I have not heard the recording of his interview because I was told that he just said horrible things about the work that we did. But it is fine, those things and changes can happen during the process.

I need to tell you another thing that was also important, because this story is full of details that become important as time goes by. The president of the commission was Eduardo Pizarro who is a well-known academic [inaudible 00:28:47:00], with whom, among others, I developed the Comisión de los Violentólogos, which I also coordinated in 1987. And that group, were Pizarro and I worked together, was a newly-formed institute, that was also the first meaningful product of the Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales, IEPRI, of the Universidad Nacional. Álvaro Camacho was also in there, and the anthropologist Jaime Arocho, among other people from the IEPRI, who had been part of the Grupo de los Violentólogos that released the report ‘Colombia, Violencia y Democracia: 1987’. We put together the initial group of Memoria Histórica.

This was very important because Eduardo Pizarro was a controversial figure. Everybody knew that some of Eduardo’s brothers were in the guerrilla, so he was at the same time having influence on the decisions and being affected by the different scenarios in which he was operating. He was an academic but also my friend. People always wanted to see us fighting and they suspected about our relationship, but I have to say that he was always very respectful with me. We both knew that we had different ways of addressing issues, different styles and ways of relating to people, but we showed respect at each other. And that mutual respect still exists, we still keep that intellectual friendship despite our differences. So the fact that the director of the Comisión Nacional or the Vice-president was an academic with whom I have worked before in issues related to the violence scenario in the country was a key element.

I believe that one of the most interesting things of the memory building process in Colombia was that, at the beginning, the team that was thought as a group to create and build a specific product, became a process. And this allowed more communities and organizations to be involved.

And we established a general set of actions that were very hard to accomplish considering the scale of the Colombian conflict. We said: ‘We want to find all the perpetrators, all the actors, all the victims in all the regions’. But our goal as a program was too wide, knowing that it was too complicated to meet the demands of the Colombian society. And once you start this type of project, you also raise many expectations.

I remember that when we published the second report, El Salado, one of the first complaints that we received from the communities was: ‘Look professor, El Salado is not the only community were a massacre occurred. Half an hour from here, there is another town where another massacre took place, and also next to that town, and next to the other one’. So we realized that there have always been massacres, and there still many hidden truths and many unfulfilled expectations. We always tried to show to the victims that even though we didn’t have the real power [to address all the cases], we still wanted to respond to everybody’s needs.

I think that it also depended on the way in which we presented the cases. When we were working on a case we didn’t feel that we were focused only in one town. By using the ‘casos emblemáticos’, we wanted to show that a concrete event of human rights violations on a regional level could be the symbol of what was happening on a national level. So when we worked on Trujillo, we didn’t focus only in that particular massacre but also in how the case was managed by the ordinary justice, on how was addressed by the Inter-American Commission, and the fact that it was still an important source of complaints and impunity. So through this particular case, we wanted to disclose the impunity issue that it was relevant not only because of what happened in Trujillo, but also because it was a problem that affected the Colombian society as a whole. And when we worked the case of the horrible massacre occurred in El Salado, we did it, because we wanted to show what happened to civilians when they are in the midst of an armed conflict. We wanted to reveal all the difficulties experienced by civilians caught in the cross-fire between the different actors.

And that is how we developed a new socio-political significance in which a case was more than just one case. The case was not simply just one regional case, or a thematic case or a violation case, on the contrary, it represented a national case. And I think that over time it was understood by the people, and that is the reason why every report that we launched had a strong impact. Do you want to ask me something? You can do it if you want.

Oriana: Gonzalo, I think that it is very interesting to choose to tell this story through the use of ‘casos emblemáticos’. Maybe you can tell us a little bit why you decided to do that. I mean, you just told us about the logic that’s behind the way in which you work, but…

Gonzalo: What?

Oriana: The logic behind working in that way, that it was not just to present a case, but to show through a specific local case a cross-cutting issue.

Gonzalo: Exactly.

Oriana: So, if I understand correctly, what you are doing is to talk about the whole issue through the use of the parts. But my question is, where there any discussions in the group before you decided to work in this way?

When you decided that you were going to tell this story in this particular way, what type of discussions did you have as a team? How did you take the decision of working with the ‘casos emblemáticos’ methodology? Did you explore other options and did you discard any of them? How did you begin to work with the ‘casos emblemáticos’?

And also, are the products of this work these books, right? So you tell this story through these books, using a narrative format. In the interviews that we conducted earlier, we were told that you travelled to the territories interviewing, filming and recording people. And that was a choice that you took, you choose the way in which you wanted to communicate this story.

So these are two questions. Why did you decide to build memory by using the ‘casos emblemáticos’? and, did you explore other options? Because as you told us at the beginning, you wanted to show the different voices of the victims.

And secondly, why did you choose to use a book format for the reports to communicate the results?

Gonzalo: Yes, sure. I assume that some of those ideas were learnt from other experiences. And we fought against it all the time, but we were seen as a historical memory commission, almost like a truth commission. Even the press portrayed us like that, [they say]: ‘The historical memory commission presented… or the truth commission…’. And that produced a sort of inertia in us, so we decided to adopt the report format, because we were a strongly academic team. Then I believe that we adopted that format because the most natural step for us was to produce a substantial written text.

But obviously, other formats were worked at the same time. So, when we were working in the first report, the Trujillo report, we worked on a film too. And to tell you the truth, for the communities those videos were much more important than the book, because they were able to see themselves in the films. So they would say: ‘Oh yes, I was there’, ‘Oh, look! Fulanita is talking on there.’ [inaudible 00:39:15:00], etcetera, etcetera. But the book format was mandatory for us, and it was a format that allowed us to include some more things. So first the film was added, but suddenly more things were added too, like theatre performances about the massacres or the studied cases.

And those theatre performances were not produced in Bogotá and brought there. Instead, the theatre performances or musical expressions were produced in the same regions. And that demonstrate that we were aware of the group diversity and the richness of the multiples languages available.

Needless to say, at the same time we had to deal with some constraints, because if you wanted funding for a book, a video and a theatre play, eventually costs were going to increase. And even though we had the international cooperation support, they were not willing to pay everything that we wanted to do. However, those were times were institutions showed greater sensitivity towards these type of issues. I remember that even the UN and cooperation agencies were more willing to support these ‘less professional expressions’ than others that were more social or participative.

So, when we turned it into our mission to add more components (visual, audio, theatrical, artistic) to our report, we began to operate as a company. And this is because we needed to generate a structure to deal with all the tensions that we had with the Commission. They began to say: ‘How is it possible that the Grupo de Memoria Histórica that belongs to the Commission is using all their money in those activities? What’s happening with the rest of the Commission’s tasks like reparation and reconciliation?’ So tensions began to grow, and some of them were discussed and others not. And I remember that our first boss that at that time was the Vice-president Santos, was, to my surprise, a supporter of our autonomy. So when Santos became our president, and the second Vice-president, Angelino Garzón who was an old trade union leftist leader arrived, we became very happy at the beginning. Because we thought that if we had a good experience with the first Vice-president, who seemed to be very suspicious at the beginning, now this was going to be even better considering that the new one was a trade union leader from the left, so he was going to behave in a similar way.

But he was a total disaster. We had an extremely disappointing relationship with this person and I suffered a lot during this time, because he wanted to politically manipulate the Commission. He wanted to turned the Commission into a political apparatus for his own political promotion. And the first thing that he tried to do was to hire his own people. He didn’t even care if they were capable or not. He tried to hire very incompetent people. So we obviously asked him, what it’s happening? If we already had a team to work in the displacement issues, and it was a very large one, why was he trying to hire this very incompetent person? And this other one? And another one? People that didn’t even know how to do the job. But that’s how it was. It was a very challenging period.

Angelino Garzón put a lot of pressure to intervene the organization, and because he was the executive secretary he fired Pizarro in a very shameful way. Garzón fired Pizarro and hired a very incapable person in his place. That was unacceptable! But he had the support. And he was permanently showing us that he was in power, that he controlled the funding, and was constantly imposing his own opinion over ours. So the place became a field of continuous tensions and at some point, we were about to quit. I was under a lot of pressure. I’m a very calm person, a negotiating person and I can be patient. I’m more strategic so I tried not to sacrifice everything that we had built for small discussions. And we waited and waited, until we were able to bring the matter to president Santos.

So, through some contacts that I had that were working in presidency, I was able to schedule a meeting with Santos itself. We met Santos and we told him: ‘President, we are living an unliveable situation because of this and this…’. But before going to that meeting I was contacted by Sergio Jaramillo who at that time was the presidential adviser and soon after became the ideologue of the peace process. I had met Sergio in Paris when he was working with the Vice-president Martha Lucía Ramírez. He called me before the meeting and asked me: ‘Hi Gonzalo, how is this meeting going to be? What are you going to ask the president?’ and I told him a couple of things and he said to me: ‘Tell him what you need to say’. So he set the stage for us.

In that conversation, we were very honest and precise with Santos, whom immediately understood the situation that we were going through. Evidently, the fact that this meeting became publicly known -and we were aware of that- had a strong political impact. On the one hand, Angelino felt that he had been disrespected and that his position in the hierarchy had been challenged, and on the other hand, it gave us strength because we felt that we had the president’s support to demonstrate again that we were an autonomous organization.

These are some of the unexpected situations that can occur in politics. We could never have imagined that the president was going to support our autonomy, that later allowed the emergence of the Centro de Memoria Histórica.

Cecilia: It sounds like the current process is something that you knew that it was going to happen, right? It seems to be that the situation that occurred with Santos is happening again. There are similarities in both situations. In both of them you are saying: ‘They put a shameless person in charge’. It sounds like something that you said before.

Gonzalo: Exactly [Everyone laughs].

Cecilia: Then, it seems paradoxical that the ultimately responsible of the group’s autonomy ends up being the state.

Gonzalo: Exactly! Of course, it is. And that conflict with Angelino occurred when we were working in the final report and we were still a group. And let me tell you something, the final report began to get complicated because we started to work with the ‘casos emblemáticos’ and then we continue working with cross-cutting cases, that it was another methodological element that needed to be taken into consideration. We started working on territorial and violation cases, but then we added other cross-cutting issues, like land, land conflict, armed conflict, displacement and agrarian conflict. And later we also started working on justice and the Colombian conflict. So we began to add cross-cutting cases but also more number of cases, all of them very important ones. So the group began to be absorbed by [inaudible 00:50:01:02]. The group started to grow too much, so it became very difficult to finish the compulsory final report.

I mean, at the end of the process of writing the 'Basta Ya' report we were suffering. Because we knew what we wanted to say, and we had all this knowledge and experiences in our heads, but it was extremely hard to put that on paper. And that’s when we realized how complicated was to put together a collective work. It’s completely different than building a collective work when the tasks have been already divided between groups and all of them have their own responsibilities and autonomy, than building a final report from tasks in which all of the members felt involved and worked on them. Because in the second case, everything that is written there on that report, must be an expression of the feelings and points of views of all the people that participated in it.

So that’s when you have to face the difficulties. Even though we didn’t have to face that many difficulties, we did it anyway.

Cecilia: At that time, did you ever think that the reports that you were producing could be used somehow against the same communities? Because the reports’ contents are so strong and reveal so many things in so many ways. Because, one of the problems that I think that are currently happening is that many of the information that was collected by the group, when it is put into the hands of a government that doesn’t want to help the historical memory process, becomes very dangerous! What happens with that material? Was that a question that you asked yourselves as a group?

Gonzalo: Yes. I believe that when that happens you have to listen to the local communities’ wisdom. We were very conscious about the risks involved in managing this type of information and that was something that we had in our minds all the time. We told them that we were building memory during a conflict. And building memory in the middle of a conflict is almost a contradiction. We started from that idea.

And I have retold this story many times, but before I formally exercised as a Director. I believe that it was during February of 2007, because I was named Director in October of 2006, I attended to my first meeting, called ‘El Mosaico de la Memoria’ or something like that. The meeting was in Medellín and there were around 800 people from NGOs and local groups of victims. And before going to that meeting, people were telling me all the time: ‘Are you going to work in that? Are you going to build conflict memory? That is a problem, it can be a problem for the victims. There is no place in which memory is built during conflict’. And that was the idea that I had in my head.

But when I arrived to this meeting, the first thing that I heard on that stage was: ‘It is possible to build memory in the middle of a conflict. And we are currently doing it. What we need are spaces and platforms to show it to the rest of the country. And we are going to keep building memory taking all the risks’. So that reaffirmation made me felt relieved. I realized that we needed to listen to the people, that they were going to tell us how far we could go.

And regarding the managing of the information, we always knew that there was a political risk involved in working with that type of material, but our way of dealing with that was to talk with the communities that we were working with. And we always tried to be very explicit with them. We never asked them for information that we considered dangerous for the communities only because we thought that it could be academically interesting. We always asked them before: What can we say about this? Or what should we not say about this?

At this time, some tensions began to arise between the memory work and the justice work. We were explicit from the beginning about being autonomous from the state, including the [inaudible 00:55:50:00], and not just from the government but from all the rest of the organisms. We believed that the memory work that we were building could not be used by the justice work, because if it was, how were the communities going to talk to us knowing that what they were saying could be used for something different after all? And how were we going to become ‘depositaries of truths’ that could be used to prosecute after, without publicly declare that we were going to be doing that?

So, the issue of autonomy between the justice, memory and truth fields was a tough one, however we were able to reach some interesting synergies. Since we built the first report, the Trujillo one, judges began to use them because they contained information about the contexts of the cases that they were investigating. It was information that they had been unable to find so they didn’t have it. And I must confess that, even though my colleagues were scared, I was very happy that they were using our reports. I used to tell them: ‘I see this as a benefit, because it shows our ability to influence’. The thing is that we didn’t know what happened over there, with the information leaked by [inaudible 00:57:30:00] the same communities. Communities don’t say everything that they know, but what they know that can be said.

Tension remained there until we began to work in one particular case: The Masacre de Segovia, one of the most complicated cases that we had to deal with, because state responsibility was involved. The massacre was committed against a group of people that belonged to the Unión Patriótica, an opposition party founded during a negotiation period with the FARCs in 1985 when Belisario Betancourt was president. It was one of the most horrendous cases that ever happened in the country, and it was committed by the public force together with the paramilitaries. We decided to use it as an ‘emblematic case’, since it was an example of the risks and threats to democracy in a generalized violent context were the state was responsible of committing the murders. When we worked in this report the case was reopen, and this also happened with many other cases. Our reports reactivated judicial processes that were on pause. This also happened with the Trujillo’s case. When we launched the report the case was reopen, and even the attorney general travelled to Trujillo to show that he was going to prosecute the perpetrators, whether they were politicians or paramilitaries.

So, for our [inaudible 00:59:26:02], it allowed to get everything back on track again [inaudible 00:59:35:05]. The reports also demanded answers, because in occasions they showed that the judicial system was negligent and that they were not working in those cases. So it was a way of putting pressure on the judicial system, to push them to publicly declare that they were working on the cases.

For me, that was definitely one of the most interesting things that happened. On one side, there was this tension between memory and justice, and on the other side, new articulations and processes were being activated.

Regarding the massacres that I mentioned you earlier in which the state was responsible, I never understood the reason why, but I was called to testify in a trial. The prosecutor that called me to declare became very important after a while because he was one of the toughest prosecutors against the state. He was Medellín’s prosecutor and he had worked in some of the most complicated cases related to drug trafficking, paramilitaries and state agents. I don’t understand how can he be alive. And he was a very brave man, so when I realized that he was the person in charge of the Masacre de Segovia investigation and that he was calling me to declare, I got really scared. Because he put us in a complex situation, because he was going to tell us to publicly disclose victims’ testimonies.

And I do not know how, but even though I did not have the pressure to say anything, I was able to pretend that I was collaborating without saying anything. But that situation made us rethink again that the memory work and the justice work needed to be autonomous.

So, on one side, I believe that the reports are a great support for the justice department, for them to solve and reopen processes that are stand-by. But on the other side, there will always be the threat of how will the judges use that information, and what implications could have.

I’m sorry for changing the subject, but this subject is very important because it leads to the deaths of some judges, known as the Masacre de la Rochela. We turned this case into a ‘caso emblemático’ about justice. On one side, there was the impunity issue, and on the other side there were deaths, the murder of people that became victims because they assumed a role in which they investigated these type of cases. It was a massacre committed against judges by paramilitaries and state agents. It was widely disseminated because there were high army commanders of the region and important politicians involved.

Soon after the report was published which, by the way, was very well received by the members of the judicial system, we were sued by one of the political leaders that we mentioned as one of the responsible in the report. We thought that we were very cautious, but of course that there were plenty of risks involved and even though we tried to avoid them, in some cases, it was impossible. Sometimes, the degree of involvement that a military or a politician had, was so acknowledged by all, that to hide that information would have meant to become accomplices in some way.

So, we had to go to court. We were sued for defamation by the political leader associated to that massacre. And we were lucky because we had a good lawyer and we were able to reach an agreement.

We cannot change anything that is in the report. That's how it was published and that's how it's going to stay. But we provided a space to this political leader, for him to tell his own truth. It was not going to be published in the report but in our internet platform. We told him that he could say what he wanted and we were not going to say anything. And with that proposal the judge acquitted us and the ‘parapolítico’, as we called him, was also satisfied. This situation made us realized that at some point we, as researchers, could ended up in jail, sued by one of the ‘parapolíticos’ or paramilitaries that we mentioned in the reports. It made us rethink in the problems involved in producing truth, justice and memory without having autonomy from the judicial system.

That case was very important, because when the Centro de Memoria Histórica was beginning to developed, it allowed us to be directly involved in the discussion of the law to protect victims, and all the discussions related to the memory issue.

I participated in those panel discussions, sharing with colleagues that are very well-recognized, like Patricia Linares, who currently presides the Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, the biggest Court of Justice of this country. Patricia, who was one of the team members, is widely recognized and is also an extremely valuable person. We already knew that lots of social organizations were going to participate in the law discussion. At that point we already had a good relationship with the social organizations in general, even with the Victims of State Crimes organizations, they trusted us. Of course that some of them were more or less reluctant. But in general, we had good relationships with them, and we were able to participate in the discussions.

One of the issues, [inaudible 01:07:25:02]. On another occasion we were reunited outside Bogotá when the Victims’ Law was going to be passed and we had to call…, could I say his name? [He laughs]. We had to call the minister that was in charge of that law. So we called him and told him: ‘There is something that we cannot leave unremarked. After what we lived while working in the Masacre de la Rochela’s report, it’s very important for us that there is a formal recognition of the autonomy of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica and the Centro de Memoria Histórica, from all the court proceedings’. And we achieved that. It was explicitly written: ‘No researchers may be prosecuted for anything that they say in any of the reports, under the Victims’ Law’. And that became like a guaranty for us. It was very, very important for us.

These are some of the needs that emerge during the process, and they create other needs for action in places that you didn’t thought you were going to have to intervene. And sometimes luckily you can have access to people that take important decisions.

Jaime: Gonzalo, Sorry to interrupt. To link this issue with…

Gonzalo: Give me one second, I’m going to get a glass of water.

Cecilia: Will you ask him something more about contemporary things? I will need to leave in 5 to 10 minutes.

Jaime: Yes. We also need to leave around 11. So in 23 minutes.

[Gonzalo comes back]

Jaime: Gonzalo, I was telling you that I would like to link what you have been telling us during this conversation with the current situation, that we all know is very tense, unclear, etcetera. I would like to go back to three of the issues that you have mentioned already, to know your opinion on them considering the centre’s current situation.

You told us that, even though there were risks and challenges, two of the positive key elements of your management and the centre’s management in general, were the organization’s autonomy and the support of the international cooperation. So, a first question is how do you see those two elements in the current management considering the present context.

And the third question is related to what you were saying about the centre, that it had been an autonomous organization under your leadership. You were saying that the production of those reports, of what was published, and the issue of building historical memory was something that the country had never seen before. And I believe that it is something that the country still doesn’t completely understand. If you can compare that with what you were also saying before, about being sued by the ‘parapolítico’ because you were telling one version of the memory, but that person had another one. That reminded me what the new director of the centre, Darío Acevedo said: ‘We cannot talk about just one memory, but about one version of that memory’.

So I wanted to ask you about those three issues. How do you see them from the present time? Can you make any reflexion about it? Considering that the Centro Nacional de Memoria had only one year left before it becomes the museum.

Gonzalo: Ok, thanks Jaime. Before I answer your questions I’m going to go deeper into the subject of the relationship with justice, because I think that that subject is related to what you just asked me. Because there is also the Rochela case, so I want to finish telling you about this issue. Once the autonomy of the centre was guaranteed by the legislation, something very interesting was proposed. The specialized prosecutors in reparation and conflict issues added to every judicial sentence, a paragraph about historical memory. So, after every sentence was announced, a memorial or a victim’s biography had to be built as a way of reparation. So the sentence involved not only the punishment, incarceration or prosecuting of the guilty person, but it was also added this form of reparation.

And there were two issues involved in this measure. The first one is that initially the judges began to issue measures in a predefined format, so every time that a judgement was delivered, the Centro de Memoria Histórica had to support the victims in the building of a monument or a bridge. But the victims began to say: ‘We don’t want a monument. For us is much more important to have a school for the community and the victims’. So we became intermediaries between the communities that were supposedly [inaudible 01:14:36:00] and the prosecutors. And because the Centro de Memoria Histórica had reached a higher status, we were able to speak in a different way with the prosecutors. So we began to speak with them sotto voce, and almost define with them the reparation measures that were later going to be assigned to us. The judges understood that they could see us a mediators and listen through us the victims’ voices to be able to define what they needed in terms of memory reparation.

Therefore, I want to summarize all this path in the following terms. First, there was a moment in which autonomy between memory and the judicial system was declared. Second, there was a confrontation moment in which the relationship between the judicial system and the historical memory was put into risk. And third and last, we worked in a form of collaboration between the memory and the justice production. And I believe that the way in which the relationship between these two big elements was worked on a national level is an issue that allow us to make a reflection. Ok, I’m going to stop talking about this issue, but this is something that fascinates me. I look forward to writing about this one day.

Ok, back to where I was before [inaudible 01:16:19:04]. I have avoided speaking about the work lines of the last director. I have given just a couple of interviews were I almost didn’t mention him. Because I have said some strong things about the way in which he handled some things. Some complicated things have happened. I have known the director for many years, I even wrote the prologue of one of his books, that it was a very interesting book about the violence discourses during the 50s. So we have always had a respectful relationship, especially from his side. And even though in the last interviews in which he participated he challenged me a bit, most of the time he has not bothered me. But to tell you the truth, I have been very active in the public mobilisation that has been organized against what he has done.

Now, to answer your question about autonomy, Jaime. What do I think? I believe that he gave up the idea of leading an autonomous organization. We started our work claiming that we were autonomous and he renounce to it. Because he arrived with the idea, based on his own political convictions, that the people who worked on the Grupo de Memoria Histórica and the Centro de Memoria Histórica were a bunch of left-wingers servicing the insurgency, the FARC and, as the extreme right called us, the ‘Santos FARC’. And he arrived with the idea that they were in power now, president Duque that is Uribe’s president, so they needed to do their job. ‘Everything that was done so far was done by a biased left-wing group’, so they needed to build their own version now.

Probably this is the way it has been done in any place of the world, maybe that’s just the nature of this type of process. When a traumatic dictatorial past is being negotiated, there is a public trading of the story that is going to be built. So they arrived with their own story and the message that they gave was: ‘We are the spokesmen of this new version’, and when they declared that, they also said that they were the spokesmen of the ruling party. It became and it [allocated? inaudible 01:19:27:00] to own the true memory. After he gave that speech, he has been softening it saying that memory is plural, that there is not a unique memory, but the thing is that for him the unique memory is our memory. The unique memory is not his own, but the one that we built.

So, I would say that in concrete terms, I think that he resigned to the autonomy. He tried to give peace to his own political universe with his public message, but either implicitly or explicitly he resigned to the organization’s autonomy that we so strongly defended.

And after this happened, he lost the public confidence of many victims’ organizations, of the academic world and of many other social organizations. And now he is judged for anything that he says, even for things that I could have said two or three years ago. But there is a lack of confidence, people don’t trust him anymore. So every interpretation that people do of his words are done by thinking that there is something suspicious in his words. So I believe that the main problem is the loss of legitimacy and the lack of confidence by people.

He has had to retract his first statements. He said some things and he has not been able to go back and fix what he said. So, for example, there is this issue with the archives, that I know that you are interested in. The fact that the victims have declared: ‘We are going to take them out of here’ it’s like a political bomb for a research team that had built itself upon public trust. This is a team that built an enormous human rights archive with more than 350,000 classified documents, that stablished a relationship with around 3,000 victims’ organizations so they could hand it over their archives to the centre, that signed an agreement with some of the toughest victims’ organizations in the country to protect the memory and organize and keep their archives. So, for them to then listen to the victims say: ‘We have lost our confidence in the centre so we are going to take our archives with us’ it’s something symbolically very difficult.

In practice, the situation doesn’t change that much and I’ll explain you why. When we started to build the idea of the human rights archive, we organized with the regions what we called ‘Diálogos de Memoria’. They were big encounters between regional communities, victims’ communities and us, where we gathered to discuss the museum’s idea. We always considered that the archive was supposed to be a central component of the Museo Nacional de la Memoria. And this is because as the Centro de Memoria Histórica was going to disappear, we thought: what long-lasting element is going to remain for the national memory? We knew that of course there were the reports that we have elaborated but the most important one was the Museo Nacional de la Memoria. And the museum was going to receive all the archives that have been gathered. So it would be very important for the museum to have an archive line associated.

When we first started that conversation, the communities were suspicious of us. And there is something very important to consider, and it's that the way in which the communities see their victims or the way in which a community see its own [archives? inaudible 01:24:23:05], for them is closely related to their own identity, it’s almost like their own skin. So if you take their archives from them it’s almost like mutilated them. So they told us: ‘We cannot allow them to expropriate our memory from us and take it to Bogotá’. And very interesting discussions arose from there: ‘Why does the museum have to be in Bogotá? Why can’t it be a group of regional museums instead? If you want this to be an important message for the victims’ world and the regions, why don’t you build the museum in one of the remotes regions of Colombia?’ Etcetera, etcetera.

Unfortunately, the decision was already made and the museum was going to be placed in Bogotá. But we had very long conversations with the communities in these ‘Diálogos de Memoria’ in which we tried to convince them that we didn’t want to take their archives to Bogotá. We just wanted to bring copies of their archives to the Museo Nacional de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos of Bogotá so we could give them another dimension and show them in public. We wanted them to see it as an opportunity, for their own experience and work to be recognized. And they would still own the materials of their archives. We worked a lot in that, and also in building that human rights general archive.

In short, that’s what happened. And over the years, we were able to gather the archives of the most important organizations of human rights and victims in the country. They lent their material to the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. So, when the victims were saying: ‘We are going to take our archives from the centre’ that was simply not possible, because their archives were with them, their archives never left their sides. But that was a political message. They were saying that they didn’t trust in the political nation and they expressed it by using a very concrete phrase: ‘We are going to take from you the documents that we gave you before’. But that wasn’t something that they could do. That was complicated even in legal terms. Because once that that material became state property, the state was responsible for taking care of them, making sure it was protected with appropriate security protocols. So taking away the material from them, was something very complicated.

However, and let’s keep this between us, we were conscious since the beginning about the risks involved in working with these archives. It was one of the first things that we talked about. Where are we going to keep the gathered archives? How do we do this in legal terms? That was a problem. How could we take these archives out of Colombia knowing what something could happen at some point? Not because we thought about a new director coming, that wasn’t what we were thinking. But thinking in a more general political context in which all our work could be at risk, knowing what happened in other parts of the world.

I’m not going to give you the details, but what I want to say is that at that moment we took the necessary precautions. We had talked about it. And when we realized that a new anti-peace, anti-victims and anti-everything government was going to arrive, we started to speed up the process. So the archives are safe, and they are safe in different ways, even in the same centre [inaudible 01:29:07:09], and I think that is very hard to protect them. I was told about the moment in which one of the organizations went to the archive to take out their archive. It’s an operation in which the Procuradoría general de la Nación, the Ombudsman Office and the Ministry of Justice had to intervene. It’s a very complex operation. And I think that they deliver their main political message.

Now, regarding the other part of Jaime’s question...

Cecilia: I’m so sorry, but I’m going to have to leave because I have to take care of the kids. We split the time to take care of them. But thank you very much for your time Gonzalo. I’m going to ask my colleagues for the audio of the last part.

Gonzalo: We can talk again, I’m available to talk again about the second phase. And if you want we can stop here [inaudible 1:30:55:00].

[The dialogue between Jaime and Gonzalo is not clear]

Cecilia: Thank you very much.

Gonzalo: We need to talk about the last stage, that I think it’s the one that interests you the most. It’s very complex, but I think that it’s important to talk about it in our next meeting.

Jaime: That would be ideal Gonzalo. I'm going to talk to Oriana and Vikki, and we are going to propose you a date and time, to see if we can coordinate the next meeting.

Gonzalo: Sure, of course. Now that we are in lockdown we are working more than before [He laughs].

Jaime: That’s true. Ok.

Gonzalo: I will be glad to talk to you.

Jaime: Thank you very much. It’s very nice to listen to you.

Gonzalo: Vikki and Oriana, are you ok with this?

Oriana: Yes, I agree, so we can all be at the same time. You can tell us when it’s good for you now if you want.

Gonzalo: I can’t tell you right now. I have problems finding a date on my phone.

Oriana: Perfect, I’ll talk to you about it later.

Gonzalo: Yes, let’s coordinate a date.

Vikki: Ok.

Jaime: Well, it was a pleasure Gonzalo, thank you very much.

Gonzalo: I appreciate it.

Vikki: Thank you Gonzalo.

Oriana: Thank you very much, let’s stay in touch, thanks.

Jaime: Thanks.

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