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

**British Academy’s Sustainable Development Programme 2018, supported under the Global Challenges Research Fund, Reino Unido**

**June 2020**

**Gonzalo Sánchez (part II)**

**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 (part II)**

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

Location: interview conducted via Zoom

Date: 4th June 2020

Duration: 136:23

**II. TRANSCRIPTION**

[Conversation between Vikki, Oriana, Jaime and Cecilia]

Vikki: Oriana do you have any questions? I don’t think that he is going to need another question but.

Oriana: I have them here, the ones you sent. He is ready. What were you saying Ceci?

Cecilia: If we, because last time I had the feeling that we were a little bit following him all the time, and maybe here we can try to stick to the questions a bit more probably. If it’s possible, I don’t know, what do you think.

Oriana: I think that he is the type of person that has a narrative that he wants to share, so it’s quite tricky to.... you know?

Cecilia: No, you are right, ok.

Oriana: But I sent him the questions in advance so I guess he…

Vikki: Oh good, yes. And the last interview is very good anyways.

Oriana: Yes.

Cecilia: And Jaime do you have any special thing that you want to ask him because you already mention all the questions but…

Jaime: Yes, I’m already making that. I agree with Oriana, I think he has his own narrative that he wants to share with us, so I don’t know if he is going to follow the questions or not. But eventually we will see how to jump in and say: ‘you know more about this’. But will see, I don’t know.

Oriana: Yes, the thing is… should I try to ask him to discuss the questions which are basically about the current situation of the centre? Because him, I mean, he didn’t tell the whole story of his direction, so I don’t know. Well, let’s see.

Vikki: Yes. The thing is that he went to a certain point in the last interview and maybe there are some other important things. I don’t want to miss that big chunk if there is nothing important where he left off to now, you know?

Oriana: Ok. So let’s start to try, if he wants to wrap up something of the previous session before going to the questions.

Jaime: And maybe also ask him and ask us how much time do we have.

Oriana: Yes. How much time do we have? [Laughs]

Vikki: I have an hour and a half.

Jaime: Yes.

Cecilia: Yes. I might need to… it depends of the movement of the house. But for sure an hour, and maybe an hour and fifteen, and a half maybe. But if I need to leave just… I will apologize and you can continue definitely, no worries at all. But I would try to stay the whole time. It is just that I know that sometimes…

Oriana: He is coming. Hi!

Gonzalo: Hi Oriana, how are you?

Oriana: Great, and you?

Vikki: Hi Gonzalo.

Cecilia: Hi Gonzalo.

Jaime: Nice to see you Gonzalo.

Gonzalo: Hi Vikki, Cecilia and Jaime. How are you?

Cecilia: Fine.

Oriana: How are you?

Gonzalo: I am very well, and you? [Everyone laughs.]

Oriana: Well, despite the tough context.

Gonzalo: How is everything over there? Is it hard in day to day life? Or is it more relaxed now?

Oriana: Well, people seems to be very relaxed in the parks.

Gonzalo: That’s how it is everywhere.

Oriana: Parks are the new pubs.

Gonzalo: Oh yes [He laughs]. And in the United States people took the streets.

Cecilia: Totally.

Oriana: Yes, yes.

Gonzalo: This is huge. Those are very risky demonstrations.

Cecilia: They are very risky. And that’s also happening in here and everywhere. There will be one [demonstration] here on Sunday that will be very important. And I think that it is very exciting, because wearing a mask takes on a new meaning. It changes and it’s crazy. And yes, demonstrations in these ‘pandemic times’ that we are living, seems crazy.

Gonzalo: Yes [He laughs]. And now it seems like something ground breaking, and people look at it like: ‘And this also happening’.

Jaime: I believe that there was a big demonstration in London supporting the Black Lives Matters movement.

Oriana: Yes, it was yesterday in Hyde Park.

Cecilia: Yes, it was yesterday.

Gonzalo: It happened everywhere. I saw that in Amsterdam, they were trying to control the situation because they didn’t expect so many people on the streets. And there were also lots of people criticising those who went out because of the effects on the number of contagious that it could be. However, demonstrations have been impressive all over the world.

Oriana: It’s fine.

Gonzalo: It's encouraging for sure.

Cecilia: Yes, sure.

Gonzalo: Specially in the United States. It’s very interesting.

Cecilia: And what happened in Bogotá and the big cities? Did any of this echoed in there?

Gonzalo: There haven’t been demonstrations in here yet. But you can feel that there is anguish. There is a platform that I participate in, that it’s called ‘Defendamos la Paz’ and people from there have started to go out [inaudible 00:11:03:00]. I think that what happened in the US has nurture this. Because in here, social leaders are being murdered every day and nothing happens [inaudible 00:11:16:00]. Can you listen the noises over there?

Everybody: Yes. [They all laugh]

Oriana: Yes. Where does it come from? [They all laugh]

Cecilia: Maybe we can mute our accounts so there is no interference.

Oriana: Is it us?

Jaime: I don't know. My wife is having a meeting also, but she is in the room next door. Maybe that’s what you are hearing. But, we can mute the microphone when we start the interview.

Oriana: Ok Gonzalo. We were thinking that we can have a one or one-and-a-half-hour conversation. I don’t know if you have that much time.

Gonzalo: Yes, ok. As long as is necessary. If we finish earlier…

Oriana: Of course, if we can finish earlier we can stop the interview before too. The questions that I sent you are related to the present time and the future of the centre, the museum and the archive. We know that all of them are linked to the work that has been done by the group and the centre for many years. But before we start, we wanted to know if you need to go back to any of the issues that we were talking in our last conversation. That conversation was a bit about the history of the centre and the main milestones of the centre’s work. So, before we begin, do you think that there is something else that you want to tell us about that?

Gonzalo: I don’t even remember where I was, Oriana. [He laughs]

Oriana: You were telling us about La Rochela [She laughs].

Gonzalo: Also, feel free to ask me any question about any of the issues that I was talking about.

Oriana: No, let’s go straight to the point.

Gonzalo: I believe that the last thing that we talked about was the breakdown, and we said that we could talk about it in another conversation. The breakdown of the new axes. We were also saying that until the peace negotiations, everything has been ruled by a central principle that was ‘the victims at the core’, right? That principle was established in the negotiating process and became the leitmotif of everything associated to the peace process: the victims should be the most important matter. And I don’t remember how much I told you about that, but the outcome of the negotiation was the expansion of the centre, the expansion of the axis, and for the victims to keep being considered as an axis.

But also that the board extended the conversation at a national level. The board was going to stay the same in as much as it was a conversation between counterparties, not only political but also military ones. But other actors that also wanted to be heard began to participate in that board too. So, different sectors of society, directly or indirectly started to participate, by saying: ‘We want our voices to be heard in there’. As a result, the universe of victims started diversifying. Because until that moment, the general thinking was that the only victims that have been listened were the victims of the paramilitaries and the state, but not the ones from the guerrilla.

As a result, when the victims of the guerrilla began to appear tensions started to arise. This became a problem for the FARC representatives that were in the board, because while they were participating in the construction of new agreements of social coexistence and national reconciliation in La Habana, suddenly these victims arrived bringing their claims with them.

That brought lots of problems and had deep implications, because from the beginning, the FARC became part of the board presenting themselves as victims. They said: ‘Our uprising was originated because we were being victimized. We were holy warriors, the responsible for protecting our lands and we were excluded from the political arena. So we are the victims of this conflict’. It was very difficult for the board to convince the FARC to recognize that they were also responsible for the death of people and that they were also perpetrators. Today I know more about this issue because I’ve been working with a colleague that was closer to the negotiations at that time.

Of course, the impact of this is enormous. Because from one moment to another, this group of victims that define themselves as the ‘original victims’, were told that everything that they did was done at the expense of committing atrocities like kidnapping, disappearing, displacement, assassinations, etcetera. And this has a huge symbolic effect because it changes the whole scenario. When the ones who were considered victims become perpetrators, it hinders everything and compromise everything that was done until that moment.

Consequently, the negotiations changed, because the victims of the FARC began to be considered as part of the victims’ group. So everything got more complicated, and the heterogeneity of the victim’s universe became more evident. And that’s going to stay complicated until today.

The idea of the book that I wrote, that was recently published, was that the negotiations demanded or promoted the arrival of new actors. The group of victims stopped being composed only by the opposite parties -the guerrilla and the state-, and new victims began to be considered too. Indeed, sectors of the ruling groups, like entrepreneurs, began to claim that they were victims too. And that’s the situation in which the centre find itself now. Their discourse emphasises the idea that we ignored some of the victims in our historical memory work, particularly the entrepreneurs and the militaries. So, they must amend and redirect the course of the research done by the centre.

And maybe I already told you this, but what they are saying isn't quite true. Because we had started to work with and we were having serious conversations with the militaries and the entrepreneurs. The thing is that, the new administration -or the new government- tried to balance the memories and the truths. So they made a major shift and tried to show as victims, people who were victims but also evidently perpetrators.

In other words, it’s undeniable that lots of landowners were victims of kidnapping, and that needs to be recognized. For a story to be complete, it must acknowledge that the kidnappings had strong impacts in some anti-guerrilla groups, that later originated the paramilitarism. That’s not the only origin but it played an important part on it. So, these groups take advantage of the moment claiming that they were victims too, that they want to be listened and that they have their own reports. They had lot of information, they even have the lists of all the kidnapping victims, etcetera.

And political parties take advantage of this, articulating themselves with these new groups of victims, who in return, began to gain a space in the public arena. So they have support, and somehow the uribismo has become the spokesman of these victims that weren't been heard before, and practically all of the people who were victims of the FARC.

Consequently, the militaries began to claim that they wanted to be considered victims too. They said that everyone who has fallen in battle should be considered a victim. And that was an extremely complicated discussion because under the eyes of the DIH (International Human Rights), the fact that they were combatants gave them a very different status in terms of rights. However, there were some grey areas in which they could have be seen as victims, so we made the efforts to involve the militaries in the memory building conversations, to see how could we help them to feel recognized as victims. That happened in 2013, 2014, 2015, when the boards were just being formed. And for the negotiating board of La Habana to gain legitimacy, it was very important that the militaries take part and feel heard.

Subsequently, the militaries began to be understood as victims because some of them have been victims of antipersonnel mines, and for the DIH that was a reason enough. That was a very important work for us, because listened to them allowed us to bring to light the existence of differences within the same military institution. Because once the victims began to talk, they started to complaint against the military institution and the state, saying that they felt abandoned by everyone.

So, there was an [impulse? inaudible 00:22:44:05] from the centre among other places, to define a new scenario to listen to the victims of antipersonnel mines. Because before this happened, the first conversations with the militaries were carried out in collective spaces were the antipersonnel mines victims had to speak in front of the military authorities that were above them. So, for example, lower-level soldiers with their maimed foot had to declare in front of a coronel or a captain. For us, that was a control mechanism of the victim’s word. So we negotiated it and pushed for changes to be made, and changes were made. As you can see, what we saw in the everyday process triggered important changes in the process. So now, when you look at it in the distance, what it came out in those antipersonnel mines reports were very painful stories and strong claims against the military institution. And none of those would not have come to light without the negotiations that we led. We were therefore left in a position of ambiguity in front of the militaries. Because they never expected that the victims that were part of their institution were going to accuse them too. Their own institution re-victimized them because they didn’t give them the support they needed, etcetera, etcetera.

So militaries started –or they pretended- to be considered between the victims, and this also happened with entrepreneurs. And not only rural entrepreneurs, that were the ones more generally associated to the paramilitarism, but entrepreneurs that worked on a national level.

And I think that this is one of the most important thing that happened around the development of the agreements in the memory field, because it broaden the conversation. In other words, the memory and the truth issues stopped being only focused in the victims and began to be an issue that concerned the whole society. And that was hard for the ‘first’ victims because it meant for them to stop being the focus of attention. For years they were the legitimate owners of that position, and suddenly they realize that there were new actors, that had their own claims and –victim/aggressor– ambiguities.

So, that complexity that crossed the war field in Colombia, related to the fluctuating identities of the politicians and the militaries, returned again. Cases, such as paramilitaries that were soldiers at the same time, or soldiers that became part of the guerrilla, showed the enormous identity mobility that occurred in here as a result of the long duration of the war. And the same happened with the victim/aggressor issue. That’s everything that I have to say about that issue.

The memory field became a controversial space, because the work stopped being focussed only in recognizing the victims’ identities, and instead, it became a space in which the agreements were signified and the type of society that people wanted began to be discussed. I mean, the memory issue became an important issue even for the highest levels of national politics. For me, it was [inaudible 00:27:05:09] a huge surprise when the first representatives that were elected were strongly rejected by the victims, the academia and a large part of the society. As Centro de Memoria Histórica, we never imagined that something like that could happen. We were under the impression that we’ve had some sort of influence on it, but we never thought that it was that much. But when this happened, the debate around memory was a completely different one. So, it did not only intervene [inaudible 00:27:42:05], but it also became an issue of great attraction for the press and the television. Suddenly, we received the attention that we never got in the 10 years of existence of the Centro de Memoria Histórica. And this happened in the middle of a crisis in which the general guidance of the centre and the memory field were being questioned.

After that happened, memory became a central field for the social and political struggle. And that happened not so long ago, but I have the feeling that today the scenario it’s a bit more complicated to define. Today, what you see it’s a scenario of tremendous dynamism in which the different participants dialogue about memory and the sense of memory.

Ok. Then, I will begin answering the questions that Oriana sent me. What is the current situation of the centre? I believe that there are several points to be considered. First of all, there is a general atmosphere that is affecting the centre, in the way that is affecting everything else around it. The situation of the centre it’s related to what is happening on a global level with the peace process, so the centre has been impacted by what has happened recently in the country. Things have occurred lately that indicates a turning point in the national scene. This is the coming into power of a government that was opposed, or wanted to stablish conditions that were almost unacceptable to negotiate with the insurgency. They also tried to dismantle the main structure of the peace process and the peace agreements, focussing mainly in the transitional justice. Not even in the Truth Commission, but mainly in the Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, that is to say, in the judicial dimension of the agreements.

And there is a sentence that became famous, that came out in the final stage of the agreements, after the first signing of agreements, just when the renegotiation process began. A political leader associated to the Attorney General of the Nation, that today is the representative of Colombia in the OEA, publicly said in front of the cameras: ‘We need to tear into pieces the peace agreements’. That phrase became the symbolic expression of their intention of denying the agreements and promoting reforms that would risk the sustainability of the process. And after that, certain things happened that have become a major source of debate in the last weeks, in the current context of the pandemic. And we can talk about the effects of the pandemic in these type of scenarios later, but there are certain issues that keeps people really interested, and this is one of them.

There is also the nomination –following a number of failed attempts– of the new director of Memoria Histórica. He is seen as a conflict denier even though he has done its utmost to change this idea. But the idea of him as a person who denies the existence of an armed conflict was etched into the memory of the people. Also recently, the son of Jorge 40, a widely known Colombian paramilitary, was hired by the division of the Victims Unit of the Home Office, and that raised the alarms among the victims’ universe and the human rights world. The discussion focussed on the fact that he hasn’t killed anyone and that he shouldn’t bear the costs of the crimes committed by his father. He must be given a chance; as other countries of the Southern Cone have done it.

Well, the Southern Cone has more complicated problems to deal with, like the children adopted by the perpetrators and all the identity issues. You know better than I do how difficult that has been.

So, the recruitment of Jorge’s son became a topic of discussion in here. [They decided that] He hasn’t committed no crime, so a political decision was taken and he was finally hired. But how can they appoint him as Chief of the Victims Unit of the Home Office! They can designate him in any other position and it can be legitimate and there will be no problem. But to designate him in that position was seen as an act of aggression and inconsistency.

Also, and this can be considered of secondary importance, the person who was designated to be the Chief of the Victims Protection Unit, that is to say, the unit that is in charge of protecting the human rights defenders, had made in the past some very disqualifying and condemnatory sentences on the FARC. That unit is a very relevant institution in a country like ours where so many assassinations are being committed, so obviously, any person who was going to be nominated in a position like that one, was going to be investigated.

So, I said, how are they going to designate as Chief of the Victims Protection Unit a guy like that…? Those kind of people must be condemned, they must be exterminated, right? They have created a discourse that justify violence. In addition, when he was asked about it, he gave a very defiant answer, and all his public messages are like that. This needs to stop, but at the same time the government message, on a presidential level, remains ambiguous.

And suddenly we realized that there is a unit that keeps doing what needs to be done. A unit that works on the consolidation of the territorial peace spaces, that is led by a person called Archila, who is one of the most decent persons on the negotiation, application and development of agreements field.

So, in that context, the centre is no longer seen as a victims’ territory. Instead, the victims see it as a place that’s been occupied and invaded by the perpetrators’ discourse, and that has lost its legitimacy. For example, because this information is always leaked and it has become visible, it is well known that, when the new director arrived, he liked to be seen alongside high military officials in the centre’s offices. People who worked there, used to tell me that the centre seemed as a ‘garita’, that is a guard post used by the militaries. The centre became a garita full of militaries, between those who gather there to talk and the ones who protected them, and that’s charged with significance.

And after that, the director showed himself receiving the report of the paramilitaries' victims, from the hands of two of the most associated to paramilitarism political figures in the country. One is a senator and the other one is an entrepreneurial leader and a landowner, and everybody knows that they have grown rich. So, the victims saw this as a way of legitimate the entrance of the paramilitaries into the group of victims. Thus, what happened in there was widely discussed.

There is something else that I would like to comment about this, and is probably something that you know better than I. Maybe in a different situation, if the designation of that person that was related to the perpetrators as the Chief of the Victims Protection Unit was tolerated, the peace process would have gone peacefully as it was planned. Perhaps, the reactions that people had are explained by the current context.

Because during the last stage and even after the process ended and the agreements were negotiated, there were many reconciliation gatherings between the leaders of the paramilitaries and the leaders of the FARC. And they travelled together around the country, recognizing that they both participated in the war and that they both committed atrocities. Showing the communities that they have reconciled and that they were willing to make peace. [They said:] ‘We are together in this. We fought on the battle field but now we are together in order to achieve peace’. And that message was really touching people. However, with the change of government, to a government that is constantly interfering with the peace process and swimming against the current all the time, the motivation for achieving peace and recognizing responsibilities begin to decrease. In other words, people are going to recognize its responsibility if they feel that there is a political environment that is understanding of the guilt admission. But if that space becomes a place of denial of what happened, people are not going to participate. So now, people have the feeling that all these institutions like the JEP (Justicia Especial para la Paz), the Truth Commission, and specially the Centro de Memoria Histórica, are all in the middle of a crisis of truth. Everything is different to how it was 2 years ago. So, that’s a first element.

The second element is that the centre has clearly become the place where this counter-narrative is legitimized. The centre is no longer the space where the victims are recognized, but instead has become the place where the excluded paramilitaries and landowners get into the truth arena. So the centre has become an instrumental apparatus of the power. And we need to recognize that in the prior stage, during the Santos government, even though the centre was also linked to the government, the language used by Santos made that this sort of things would passed by unnoticed. Also it was well-known that Santos has had promoted the Victims Law, and it was assumed that it was a law that needed autonomy to work.

At that time then, the centre had the support of the government, but it worked as an independent organization. And that was one of the most important things that we achieved over time. Now we see the problems of not obtaining earlier another type of legal figure, but we can talk about that later.

The centre, that over the years built a reputation of being a rigorous entity and a conflict knowledge generator, today in the eyes of the victims and the academia, has become an institution that has lost its power and has become an instrument. And it lost all its prestige after everything that happened, especially after the messages that the new director sent when he arrived. And once that an institution loose its legitimacy, anything that it does after, is seen as something negative.

So, for example, I remember seen the director taking certain decisions or saying something and being strongly condemned. And some of those were things that I didn’t even considered to be so serious, and probably if I would have said them, they wouldn’t have told me anything because people trusted in me. But everything he says is judged by people. But this happened because an image has been built around him and people can see where things are going.

Before we started with the interview, I was thinking in something else that was interesting and that I would like to tell you about. There were many statements issued by the national and the international academia on the crisis caused by the controversial designations. Not only all the big Colombian research centres raised their voices, but also foreign universities, research centres that we have worked with, and people linked to the centre. And that was one of the things that surprised me the most: the support given by the international academia to the centre. Because, for them, what was happening in Colombia was closely linked to the peace process. Peace has become a field of action and intervention for the international community, and this includes not only the UN and other formal institutions, but also the international public opinion. The international academia raised its voice, and important figures like [Edgar Morin? inaudible 00:45:25:02], Alan Touraine, among others made statements about the Colombian situation.

After the new director declared that the work done by us was biased and that a balance needed to be achieved, he took the decision of outsource the research work. His idea was to hand over the responsibility of doing research to a neutral and objective institution that enjoyed sufficient legitimacy to do this job. That institution is Colciencias, that has its equivalent all over the continent. By doing this, the new director deprived the centre of one of its most important tasks, the one that gave its identity to the institution, as if by doing that, there would have guarantees that the work that Colciencias does, is objective.

This also had an effect on the victims, because for them, the fact that the centre was the one in charge of conducting the research work had a very important meaning. The centre was seen by them as a space that was created to build memory and for people to be listened. Knowing that it was the state the one that was listening to you and making public the testimonies, had an important impact on them, especially knowing that the same state has been the perpetrator. They were told that there was just one truth and it was theirs. And that truth was going to be respected. We witnessed that by ourselves every time that we travelled to the communities to deliver the reports. You cannot imagine how moved people were and how healing can be for them to receive the Centro de Memoria Histórica book, where they were able to see their interviews or the pictures of a family member that was killed.

I remember going to El Salado and visiting one house at a time to deliver the reports. Some of the people from there have lend us pictures of their relatives that they kept in their wallets, so the centre could enlarge them, fix them, and they could hang them on the wall. The fact that the same state visited them in their own houses and that their testimonies were captured in those reports had a sacred meaning for them. To be on a book and to have their words recognized provokes a sacred, strong, relevant and perennial feeling. And [inaudible 00:49:13:02] ‘nobody can steal that, it’s already written in the reports. It’s not at risk and nobody can kill that, like they can kill my voice here. My voice is already captured in the reports and it will pass on to posterity. It will be read by my children or my grandchildren’.

But that won’t happen if you outsource the research work, because you will stop having that direct dialogue with people. The research conducted by the centre was extremely particular since it invited the victims to be participants of the whole process, so they could feel identified and recognized by the institution. It was an institution built up specially to work on memory, truth and reparation issues. That’s when you realize how repairing can be for people to feel that they are being listened to. But you can’t know that if you don’t see it with your own eyes, and we were lucky to appreciate it every time that we delivered the reports to the communities.

The outsource of the research work has brought discredit and a loss of legitimacy and sense to the institution. And I believe that the fact that they are outsourcing such an important task, as it is the research work, to third parties means that they don’t know what they are doing. It also shows that they don’t have the adequate personnel, compared to our team, that was made up of well-known researchers, some of them trained in the same centre. That gave it real strength and credibility to the centre. I believe that, instead of having to rearm a whole new research team that takes time, and as a way of not succumbing to pressure and brushing off their responsibilities, they decided to handed the work to Colciencias, giving up this important role that they had from the beginning.

The main effect of that decision has been the minimization of the research work. And even though, I try to stay away of all of this for my own mental sanity, my impression is that today there is not that much ongoing work. I believe that because of the direction that the public debate took, they had to stay working on the things that we started. I think that most of the things that have been published until today, are things in which we were working on. And they have tried to modify them but it hasn’t been easy. My impression is that the new direction is on the defensive, at the same time they are in an ambiguous position because on one side they have the support of the highest power in the country, but on the other side they are socially delegitimized. People don’t trust them because they don’t understand the path that they are following and the projection that this project have.

And here comes another thing, that maybe I can mention to you later, and is that the centre has a new institutional framework. The focus of their task is different now, it has expanded. It has multiplied or fragmented, I’m not sure. Sometimes is both things.

Regarding international cooperation, we know that for a while, there has been a crisis in this area that’s knocking on everyone's door, regardless of the evolving pandemic. And for years, the centre was supported by international cooperation, not only economically, but also by giving us their trust. We were like the international cooperation’s favourite child, not only because of the funding that we received from them, but also because of the acknowledgement that they did to our work. We were very proud of being funded not only by one embassy, but also by plenty of them, like Switzerland, Canada, and all of the international cooperation.

And that helped us to keep our work independent of political changes. We were seen by the international public opinion as a strong and recognized institution. And the highlight was the recognition made to our work by the person that awarded the Nobel Prize to Santos. Because, in his discourse he included many phrases of the ‘Basta Ya’ report made by the centre. The centre’s work was recognized during the awards ceremony. And that acknowledgement was also showed in the fact that many of the victims’ documents were declared a Patrimony of the Humanity by the UNESCO. You cannot imagine what it meant for the victims to have their documents in which they have work their whole life recognized by that institution.

For us, the political support that the international community gave to our work was even more important than the funding that we received from them. And that has ended because [the new direction] is not interested in that. They feel that they are part of the government, part of the state, like their spokespersons. They don’t want to be an autonomous institution. We were the ones who needed to be autonomous, because we knew that we were part of the state so we needed to create the conditions for our work to not be interfered. Today, that place is an appendage not only of the government, but also of the most extreme positions.

Ok. So, returning to the questions that Oriana sent me, about the work that each unit does. The centre have, or had, 3 or 4 important lines. One is the research line, but we already talked about that one. A second one is the Truth Agreements line, that was the unit that received the paramilitaries testimonies. We already talked about the challenge that it was for us having to receive those testimonies and at the same time the ones of the victims. But the archive and the museum were involved in that matter too. We tried to finish the Truth Agreement work before we left, so there shouldn’t be no problem with that one. We’ve already finished the task of listening to the perpetrators at that point. We listened 13,000 testimonies of demobilized, that it was around 80% or 90% of the job.

We had envisaged that they were going to finish some of the work that we have started, because we took all of our tasks very seriously. So, we decided to extend all of the tasks that had a very precise limit, with the objective of research more in depth some of the issues that we have been working on. We realized that there were too many lines within the paramilitary issue, and the person in charge of that line wanted to explore in all those lines and listen to all the different voices. So, that line became very strong and began to work almost like an institution that worked parallel to the centre.

The most complicated issue was what happened with the archive, because it became the bone of contention of all the legitimacy process of the centre. Because through the years, we gained the trust of the victims’ organizations and that was even enshrined in the signature of a pact with them. That pact was signed on an encounter with victims from different parts of the country, were they committed themselves to give us information and we committed ourselves to take good care of that archive material, following the conditions imposed by them.

The new director arrived shortly after that pact was signed, so it came as a surprise and raised fears among the victims. We knew and understood that it wasn't an easy job for them to hand it out their testimonies, documents and materials to the centre. When the new direction arrived, a message that they were going to include and listen to new ideas, that the militaries were going to come in, and that their documents were going to be compromised started circulating. And that immediately caused panic among the victims.

I think that I told you last time, but when we were there we tried to protect the work that we have done in many ways. First of all, we ensured the physical safety of the information. As I mentioned you before, confidentially, we created external mechanisms for the archives not to physically disappear. However, the problem wasn’t the materiality of the archives but the ways in which people could used them. There is plenty of material that are part of those archives that is available online, and anyone can access to it. Surely some of them were hand it out with a final date for use, but I don’t know how many of them. The problem is that this new situation caused a sense of uncertainty on people. They started to ask themselves who was going to have access to those archives. Because as you know, the victims’ archives are full of names and testimonies. We even received, at the end of our period, an archive that a NGO called País Libre gave to us that contained information of people who were kidnapped by the FARC. I didn’t have access to that archive and we didn’t work on it. And after a while it was requested by the JEP, that is currently using it to investigate the kidnapping matter, so they have the jurisdiction. That was another issue that the centre faced, related to the way in which the JEP proceeded.

That archive contains sensitive information [inaudible 1:03:26:00], nobody knows what type of material it contains. So, one can imagine that, as many of the ones who were kidnapped by the FARC were entrepreneurs or were related to people with power, they could have some complicated truths revealed in those archives. Regardless of whether they should or shouldn't have been kidnapped. However, I believe that the victims’ concern is more related to the use that people can give to the archives, more than what can happen to their materiality.

Now, I already told you that basically what the centre did with the archives was to receive, process and copy them, and then return them to the victims’ organizations. I don’t think that the centre kept many original documents. The original ones were always returned to the owners, because that is how it was determined in some complicated negotiations between the victims and the organizations [inaudible 1:04:39:08]. When we started this process, the communities and the NGOs were already politically mature and were clear about what it meant for them to take their archives from them. For them, taking their archives to the Centro de Memoria in Bogotá meant a robbery, so they wouldn’t allow to have their history torn out from them. That’s also related to a debate that I mentioned you earlier about the local and regional memory centres.

So, the problem wasn’t so much about those few original documents that were left in the centre. People were more concerned about the political legitimacy of the centre, of how could they trust their copies to an institution that was starting to be associated politically with people that were mentioned in the reports, with their whole names, regions, were they operated, etcetera. Victims felt that to have their information being kept by the centre posed a risk. That’s why the organizations began to publicly announce that they were going to take back their archives from them. But I honestly think that it had a symbolic meaning. The message sent by the victims’ organizations and the local communities was: ‘We don’t trust in this institution anymore, so we are going to take back our archives, even if it’s just the copies. We signed an agreement on how that information was going to be used and who was going to keep it. But at the end we are the owners of it’. So they started pressuring by threatening to take out their archives.

I don’t know if they finally took any of that material with them. I don’t think that they did. But they opened the political discussion on the vulnerability in which the archives find themselves when the heads of the institutions in charge of taking care of them changes and are replaced by their enemy. It’s a very tough situation.

[The recording is interrupted 01:07:15:00]

I don’t know what else I can tell you about the archive. Another protective mechanism that we implemented was to hand out copies of the archives to the JEP, the new institution and the Truth Commission. So the archives are being kept very safe by different institutions. But I insist, the problem is not where the material is kept, but how it’s used. Because everybody has a copy now.

Maybe the most complicated issue is with the museum. We knew that during the negotiations the idea of the Truth Commission was going to emerge. And there was a long discussion regarding the necessity of having a Truth Commission when the Centro de Memoria Histórica already existed. Some of the people involved in the discussion argued that a Truth Commission wasn’t needed because the Centro was already doing that job, so it was just going to mean a duplication of tasks and duties. And to tell you the truth, I heard this from people who was in the negotiations, more than a response to a real need, the Truth Commission was a granting to the FARC. Because for the FARC, the Centro de Memoria Histórica was a state institution, so they thought that after the negotiations they and their truth were going to be subjected. So, for the FARC, the Centro was a problematic institution. I mean, all the criticisms of the ‘Basta Ya’ report, always came from those groups [inaudible 1:10:00:01] the militaries and the FARC. When it came out in the ‘13’ the negotiations were just starting. They felt that weren't represented by our work. However, over time, the Centro ended up being recognised by everybody, including them, and with the arrival of the new directorship all that changed again.

But the discussion at that time was if it made sense to keep the centre. And it took us a long time to decide on that matter. I probably told you already, but there were some discrepancies on this issue among the same members of Memoria Histórica. I was of the view that the Centro needed to keep doing research, but other colleagues thought that we needed to leave that work to the Truth Commission. They thought that that was the only way of legitimate the work done by the Commission. For me, the clarification work that needed to be done in this country was such an extensive task, that a 3 years Commission was not incompatible with the existence of centre that was built to last longer. There was a Spanish guy that told me once: ‘Your Centro de Memoria is like a permanent Truth Commission’. I can’t deny that there were good arguments on both sides, even among the government advisory groups about what to do with the centre.

The centre became a problem because it wasn’t going to be shut but nobody knew how to make it fit in this new institution. Even in financial terms, they said… [inaudible 1:12:06:00] it’s going to be financially dependent on the Ministry of Finance and the Comptroller General of the Nation, and they were going to ask: ‘How are we going to keep two institutions that are doing the same job?’ When they see this from their logic and bureaucratic point of view it doesn’t make any sense. And it’s very hard to create an institution having in mind the bureaucratic issue, because they need to think in how many positions need to be created, and what if there is already an institution with 300 or 400 people that’s already doing the same job. Who should be fired? So, the continuity of the centre was a complex discussion.

At the end, what was established in the agreements was that the Museo Nacional de la Memoria was going to be the institution in charge of keeping the testimonies collected by the Truth Commission. That was the only formal thing in which they all agreed.

And there is something else related to that. Excuse me for not following an order, but I’m remembering new ideas as I speak. I think that I forgot to tell you about something that I mentioned you in our last conversation. While the negotiations were in progress, an Historic Conflict Commission was created, called something like ‘bipartite’. This commission was composed of people from the FARC and the government, and they were given just a short time to deliver a report. My impression is that that commission had the explicit approval of the FARC. The FARC wanted to have an official document that said: ‘We participated on this agreement and we stated our position on the conflict’. I honestly believe that it wasn’t important and I’m sorry to say it, [inaudible 1:14:41:04] It was erased. There was not a negotiation for building that report, instead, everybody just gave their testimony. So there are 13 or 20 reports, all of them with different profiles. That commission didn’t make one big report with different testimonies, so that’s what stayed, a big divided story.

So, you can understand how complex this situation was. There are the Historical Commission, the Centro, the Truth Commission and the JEP. And when you see all that bureaucracy, you think: ‘This country is a little messy’ [he laughs]. The purpose of that commission was to unify all the different tasks made by these institutions, in one big concerted state action. In practice, however, this has proved very difficult to accomplish because the ways in which all these institutions can work together are not clear. In the signed agreement the institutions seem to be very integrated, however, effectively the institutional structure is fragmented.

I believe that what it is important here is that the museum should be the institution in charge of collecting and work with the testimonies gathered by the Truth Commission. And we had already built the museum’s script, so that triggered some tensions with the new director. During 2 or 3 years we worked together with the communities, the victims, the organizations, the academia and some centres from different parts of the world, on the design of a script for the museum. Part of our team travelled to Germany, Chile, Argentina, Peru, and we were advised by the Wilson centre, that have a long experience in these issues. So we expended a lot of time and effort on the museum script, where we also placed our own stamp on it. And I believe that that stamp triggered the onset of the first stumbling block that we faced.

The script was organised around 3 main lines that are symbolically very meaningful: land, water and body. Land is associated to the place where the fights took place, where displacement and confrontation occurred, and where the profound roots of the conflicts are found. Water can be understood as the source of life, the river as graves, and there are many complexities around the use of rivers during a war, because they could be seen as resources that are useful but also as places where people died. And finally the body can be seen as an object of torture, rape, and a place where war was developed.

So, we dedicated a lot of time into that work. It wasn’t easy to find 3 elements that involved every aspect considered relevant by us, without leaving anything out. We believe that those 3 elements have a huge symbolic power and a strong ability to integrate. And one of the first things that the new director said in an interview, as a way of making fun of it, is that the script reminded him something that Hugo Chávez once said about hearing a little bird talking to him. And that became known because he was being recorded and it was quickly covered by the media. That gesture demonstrated that the script was going to become a focus of conflict.

Because we had enough time to do it, we were able to organize ‘pre-exhibitions’ and we transformed into a process almost all the initiatives that we had. So, even the idea of museum became a process itself. The idea of the museum is the result of long conversations with the communities to include their expectations, their points of views, their own ideas for the script, and to think in how to involve them… [inaudible 1:20:56:08].

And before the museum was physically built, we organized itinerant exhibitions to see how people received the museum content. The most important one was exposed in the International Book Fair, another one in Medellín, another in Cali, and 2 or 3 in [inaudible 1:21:18:07]. In some of those regional exhibitions the new direction tried to cut some of the contents arguing that they didn’t have enough money. But it was clear that those contents were being cut by them because we have given them too much visibility. So, for example for us it was very important to give a particular place to the state victims in the exhibitions. We felt that as part of the state, we needed to permanently show that we weren’t going to hide the state responsibility. We weren’t going to be like the government when they hid the UP genocide by highlighting other things over their responsibility.

So the museum becomes the most strategic place where different ideological and political views face each other. In there, the discussion on what happened to us, who were the responsible and who were the victims of the process occurs.

After the agreements, and this is something that is still under discussion, the museum will move with the archive. So the archive wouldn’t be an independent unit but an organic part of the museum. And that will allow to keep the archive together with the museum. Because that was another discussion that arose. They argued that because the archive was a human rights and victims’ archive, it needed to be kept by the General Archive of the Nation, that is the archive that contains all the historical truths and it’s administered by the historians. Unlike them, we always defended the idea that it needed to be kept in a different place, that it was an archive of human right conflicts and therefore, needed to be kept in a place separate from the national history. The history of the conflict is not a matter of national history.

Some years ago, at the end of the 90s or the beginning of 2000, we organized with Maribel [Mauilse? Inaudible 1:24:13:00] a large symposium that we named Museum, Memory and Nation. In that occasion I argued that the budget of the national museums was the nation’s unity. National museums are built upon that idea. And the Museo de la Memoria must show the nation’s structural breaks. And I’m exaggerating when I say this, but those were the elements that allowed us to argue that the human rights archive and the conflict documentation needed to be kept by a specialized place. And that’s supposedly the way in which it’s currently being done. So, right now, the operational issue shouldn’t be a problem.

[Silence]

And I don’t know what’s going to happen with the articulation of the Centro Nacional, the Truth Commission and the JEP, because that conversation completely changed. And this happened because at the beginning we thought that in the future we were going to be able to work in an articulated manner with those institutions. But at that time, we were pointing in the same direction. We agreed that we were working together for achieving peace. However, if the person who’s currently leading the centre have such a different view, it’s being a conflict denier and is not interested in achieving peace, it will be difficult for them to work together. If the centre stopped being a support of the peace process, and became an instrument for the new policies of conflict denial and agreement denial, those institutions will hardly be able to work together. Now, it only remains to wait. Only time will tell us how this is going to continue. There are many people who think that it only remains to wait and that it makes no sense to keep fighting.

To give you a sense of this, I recently took part on an event related to that subject. We discussed about whether to submit or not a bill, an allowance law for the place and the legal structure of the centre. But I think that we all agree that we are not in a very good political situation, so it might be counterproductive to carry on with something like that. Ironically, the proposal of autonomy came up. But this seems to be easier to do with a friendly government than with an enemy one. So I think that to revive the autonomy issue can be extremely dangerous today. It can be easy to legalize a new version of the history that eliminate everything that has been built. Many of us have agree that maybe the best thing that could happen to the museum and the centre, is for their construction to be stopped until the end of this government, and wait to see what the next government will do, to see if they will go back to what was being done before. And we must have a long term outlook, because our greatest motivation is to save the museum. That’s where our efforts are placed.

These new actors –militaries, landowners and manufacturers– that have arrived into the memory field are becoming very strong, and they are preparing themselves to be part of this place. And that’s very, very hard to see. So, many things that we have taken for granted have changed. The memory field is currently going through a difficult period, and we do not yet know how this is going to end.

Ok, I’m going to stop in here, so we can discuss some things together.

Jaime: Thanks a lot Gonzalo, that has been very informative as usual. You have showed us like the big picture. There are some things that we as researchers or even as citizens can’t understand sometimes.

I don’t know if you would like to add something else about the future? Because you were basically saying that the future is uncertain and that we need to wait to see what will happen.

You said that the centre had lost all legitimacy, and that the new team does not give credit to the work that you and the previous administration built. But, what’s going to happen with the future of the museum in this uncertain context, if by law the centre must end its functions at the end of the year and become a museum? Some people will say that the outlook for the future museum is grim, if it’s ever built. As a Colombian citizen, this scenario leaves us without hope, a bit…

Gonzalo: Worried. I’m also very worried. I honestly think that we are living on a time of uncertainty. Now, we know that these memory struggles are not easy to solve, and they last decades and even hundreds of years. So I think that we need to trust and wait to see how it will evolve. I trust in the social transformation that the victims’ organizations have provoked, that later helped the development of the peace process. [Moreover? inaudible 1:32:44:05] the social changes that have happened in this country are hard to erase. There might be political groups that are interested in imposing a new reading of the national history, but the number of academics, social organizations and human rights organizations in this country is huge, and they have been strengthened in this fight.

And I think that what we have earned can’t be erased, it can go on pause, but it will stay in there. And challenges can arise but they will be overcome. The future of the centre not only depends on the context, but also on the institutions that emerged from the agreements. In other words, the future of the centre will depend on the future of the Truth Commission and the Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz. Because even though, in operational terms, they are completely different institutions, with different roles and contributions, in political terms they are all part of the same field. And that is the peace and democracy field that unifies everything. So, we are definitely living in times in which democracy it’s being questioned in this country. But the social forces who built this project and achieved the peace process are still in there.

There is another issue which hasn’t been discussed yet, and it is the impact that coronavirus will have on all this. And, I have been trying to talk about it with the Truth Commission from my position as a member of the advisory committee. I believe that this virus will have an impact on all this work, but that it will be useful for the centre as it has been for the government. Because in the context of the pandemic, social mobilization and the claims against the centre has decreased. The centre has remained silent. The other two institutions instead have had to stay working.

As I said in our last meeting, first of all, for the Truth Commission, in words of its president Father Francisco de Roux: ‘The virus has completely changed the work that we did. Because when it arrived we were working with people on the regions. And now because of the pandemic we are not going to be able to meet them there anymore. We are not going to be able to travel’. The chances of meeting in public spaces with groups of people are going to be limited. And they have little time before its mandate finishes at the end of next year. But they need to finish 6 months before that, if they want at least 6 months to write the reports. However, from our point of view, it’s impossible to write a report in 6 months. So from the remaining one and a half year that they have left, they should use half of it in the writing process.

Evidently, for now, they have to eliminate any type of fieldwork. What I have carefully said to them is that there are many ways in which they can take advantage of this new context of pandemic. First of all, they can remove the pressure of having to study every aspect of the situation. As a researcher that’s something that you always want to do, but they must also recognize that not having to do it can also be an advantage. They're going to have to work with the material that have been already collected. And this is hard for me to say because we struggled with this too. But there are already lots of accumulated material that have been made by the Centro de Memoria Histórica, the academia and different social organizations. And we received comments from many people saying: ‘You have dedicated yourself to build all this new material to say a completely different truth. Why didn't you use the material that already existed and reread or gave a new meaning to the things that have been already produced?’. If the Commission is capable of producing 3, 4 or 5 messages and sent them to the country it would be a huge achievement. So first of all, they need to take out… [inaudible 1:38:47:05]

Second of all, I think that the pandemic has changed people’s expectations. They are different from the ones they had 4 or 5 months ago. At that time, the purpose was to rebuilt the past and do research in regions. However, the pandemic gave raise to new necessities. What society needs right now are messages of hope of a future, not about the past. Because the current times have entangled their past and their future. So the report’s message should be a manifest on the future and not a genealogy of the past conflict. Today, the concern of Colombians and people around the world is not related to achieving peace, but to survive in this new context.

So, the Commission and the ones who are writing the reports are going to have to make lots of changes to be able to articulate in their reports, issues like peace, surviving and live, and considering also issues like the people's survival and the assassination of social leaders. The Commission will need to ask itself: how can we send a peace message to a hopeless society that’s just coming out from a pandemic?

That’s why my recommendation for them is that if they are not going to be able to conduct their field work, they must rethink and give a new meaning to the material that they already have. Don’t expect to write 500 or 950 pages, instead, work on developing 3, 4 or 5 strong messages. There lies the real meaning of the Commission, in develop a future proposal more than an interpretation of the past. I am not saying that they should listen to what I’m saying, they are free to accept or reject my advice. They are aware that the production conditions in this new context are constantly changing.

Returning to the prior issue. The future of the centre depends not only on the centre itself, but also on the context that surrounds it. And that’s going to be a difficult context for the Commission. Next year it is election year and is going to be a highly polarized atmosphere because all the crimes against the demobilised and social leaders that have taken place. And that’s going to be extended into next year. So, how can the Commission send a message of reconciliation in this polarized atmosphere? And how much does the society want to hear this message, especially when anything you say can be misinterpreted as the opponent’s discourse? So, It’s a difficult situation.

The rest of the institutions have more time available, they can still survive, they can even take a pause of 1 or 2 years to rethink themselves, to reword and rescheduled themselves. The JEP doesn’t need to conduct a fieldwork; they can work with the material that they have already collected. And that might help them too, because to keep adding new material and tasks can complicate their work. Different, however, is the case of the Unidad de Búsqueda. In this new pandemic context, this 15 or 20 years old institution can’t do their job, they can’t go out and look for the bodies of the disappeared. Nobody is going to do that job because it involves a high health risk. So, this situation exacerbates all the other political context problems.

At the present times, the whole peace field is compromised, not only the centre. So, we need to broaden our vision, and see what is happening in the rest of the continent and the world. We are surrounded by Maduros, Bolsonaros, Piñeras, Trumps among other conservative leaders, and that threat the victims' discourses and the democracy ones, challenging also the discourses that seek to transform societies. It was different, when the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia were –at least in their names– democratic ones. That offered more opportunities to work on these issues. Though, today's governments discourses are of total denial, and that has happened not only in Latin America, but it has also begun to growth on a European level. So, the work has become much more complicated for the people who’s working on these issues and for society as a whole. I don’t know, I would like to hear your own experiences, how is it in your countries?

[Silence]

Gonzalo: Ok, ok. What happened?

Jaime: I already asked my question. I think that Gonzalo wants to hear you too. Besides, an hour and 45 minutes have already passed. Do we still have time? Oriana, Vikki?

Oriana: One second, we can’t listen to Ceci.

Gonzalo: We can’t hear you.

Cecilia: Now?

Oriana: Yes. Wait, wait.

Cecilia: Now? Ok. It’s so good to listen to you Gonzalo. To tell you the truth, it’s quite scary to think that the best thing that could happen now, is that nothing happens.

[Everyone laughs]

Cecilia: To hope for nothing to happen in the museum as a way of preserving the materials that are kept in there. This is like thinking in biological terms, in a life hierarchy, a kind of *necropolitics*, right?

Gonzalo: [He laughs] Yes, exactly. For us as a society and for the centre…

Cecilia: One of the questions that we asked to the people from the different memory organizations that we interviewed was if they could give any recommendation to other organizations that could face similar problems in the future. There is something that you could tell us on that? What do you think that could happen considering the current context in which the pandemic test the many years of work of the organization?

You also mentioned that there was a lot of accumulated work in the academic and the social organizations fields. So, if you could think in a legacy that the centre could leave to other memory and archive organizations from all over the world, what would that be? What recommendations would you give them?

Gonzalo: Hey, that’s complicated.

Cecilia: I’m sorry.

Gonzalo: [He laughs] No, it’s fine. The first thing that comes to my mind is that one major lesson we learned from the work we did was to be aware from the beginning that we weren’t going to build a report, instead of that we were going to activate processes. We weren’t going to build a product called ‘The Truth Commission’s report’ or ‘The centre’s report’, but we were going to conduct an extensive process of conversations with the victims and the society. Now, obviously this depends on external conditions, because for a work of this kind to become a process it involves an increase in costs and times, and the commissions are built to last 2 or 3 years. When we were told that the Truth Commission was going to last 3 years, everybody said: ‘That’s impossible. How can it last 3 years when the Centre has been operating for 10 years and its work is not done yet?’

When an institution like that one is created it shows the gaps that a society has. I think that anybody who works on this, needs to take into account the different conflicts that are happening in terms of the complexity of the actors involved and the duration of the conflict. All of that complicates the work.

We realized that if we turned the work that we were doing into a process, only brought good things and contribute towards the legitimacy of it. And sometimes we asked ourselves: How did we came to that conclusion? And I know how and when did that happened. It occurred when we were working on the first report. A friend of mine, who works on academia came to us while we were building the structure of the first report that we were asked to write. Suddenly he told us: ‘Considering the complicated context in which you are working on, you should be producing some results along the way. If you don’t do this, is going to get very complicated’. I don't know how he came up with that idea but we thought that it was amazing, so we took it. And after that, we ended up in a process that went beyond what we thought it was possible. I mean, we never imagined that we were going to be able to produce 100 reports, we never did! We had no idea of how much time we were going to have or how much income we were going to receive. And no matter how it ends, for me the idea of the work as a process is very important.

I think that the second issue that’s important to have in mind from the beginning, and this is something that we learnt from our Peruvian colleagues, are the cross-cutting issues. The Commissions that have considered these issues have been only the most recent ones. But today, no commission can carry on without considering all the cross-cutting issues that are intrinsic to the conflict that is being addressed. It doesn’t matter if it’s a technical issue or a gender related one. If you don’t consider them since the beginning, they can get lost in the day-to-day work. When you start to work on this, you begin to respond to immediate needs… [inaudible 1:53:28:08] ‘Why have you produced so many reports on the paramilitaries and none on the guerrilla? Why haven’t you produce any on the state? Why have you gone to the most central regions and not to the marginal ones?’

Working on the emblematic cases helped us to solve the pressure of having to tell as much as we could of the things that were occurring. It was an exercise of identifying the most important aspects of the conflict. So, every emblematic case report that we built was related to a big issue such as impunity, land dispossession, political exclusion, extermination of [inaudible 1:54:31:09], political, etcetera.

It was an exercise of having to find cases that showed the most important issues occurred during the conflict. I believe that if you don’t do that you can get lost. And I think that much of the strength of our work relied in the fact that the cases that we choose, as much as they were local or regional ones, were problems that affected the whole country. The emblematic cases that we chose communicated, unveiled, and questioned central problems that the political institutions, and the social, legal and cultural structures of the country had. Methodologically speaking, I think that to work on emblematic cases instead of trying to reach the entirety of cases is a good suggestion that I would make.

A third issue that comes to my mind is something that we fall short on, but that I think that is absolutely crucial, and is the social appropriation issue. These types of job tend to rely on testimonies of people that are very similar, that can even be considered ‘equals’, who share same values and opinions. So, the big question is, how do we reach those who don’t believe in us? And that’s a major political bet: how do we convince the adversary so our discourse is also accepted by those who don’t share our vision of society? That’s a huge challenge, because it depends on the political context. And we knew it from the beginning, but we couldn’t find the right way or the formula to achieve it.

We couldn’t reach an agreement to achieve that goal with the Ministry of Education, or the local and regional Secretaries of Education. Our biggest challenge was to reach the universe of the younger generations because they are the ones who can prevent such a situation from happening again, so they must learn what happened in here. Our generation experienced it, so we somehow know what happened. So the most important thing is: What are we going to teach to the new generations? We proposed something wider to the educational system, and it was to teach students to create an opinion when they received information like the one that we were communicating. And that’s an extremely complicated task, because you worry that the information transmitted can be biased. It wasn’t an easy job to pass the information that we produced. Because when you try to do it, you have to face obstacles like the lack of time, the bureaucratic structure, or day-to-day problems that researchers always experience.

A fourth issue, and I think that we already talked about it and is often repeated, is the composition of the institutions. This is not a small matter. I apologise for coming back to the Centro de la Memoria Histórica but, for me, is the one that had the strongest composition. Maybe it lacked of certain things, but where was the lie? [inaudible 2:00:08:04] Plenty of renowned people from the academia worked on there, there was also people from human right and victims’ organizations, and people from the political field. And we helped them to articulate their relationship in there.

So, who wasn’t included in there? If we look at, by contrast, the composition of the Commission, the victims are the ones who were left out of the group. I don’t know if it has been easy to work with the victims, because they tend to be seen as a homogeneous group, but they are a very complicated group to work with. Because, as the Commission says, there are plenty of groups within the victims’ field. There are victims who represent regions, victims who represent other victims’ groups, and all of that can create difficulties among the groups and communities. So, we tend to idolize the victims’ groups as if they were a whole group that shares consensus and a same culture, and sometimes is not like that. And we have witnessed that process. The arrival of the new groups of victims was seen as a disturbing element by the FARC victims, and it complicated the work with victims greatly. But well, that issue must be carefully managed.

I believe that there must be an intention to integrate them. That’s what this type of job should aspire to from the beginning. I already told you about it, but the first thing that I said when I was hired to be in charge of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica was: ‘I want to meet with the Commander in Chief of the FARC, Manuel Marulanda’. And I knew that he wasn’t going to accept to meet me, that Uribe wasn’t going to let me meet him and that I was a ‘nobody’ for Marulanda, but I wanted to send a message with this. We wanted to listen to all the victims and the different actors involved in the conflict. We wanted to hear the discourses of those who were at war, because in those discourses they justify and reproduce the war, and that's what we needed to understand if we wanted to stop the war.

So, that was the other issue that was important to us, the one on integration and universality [inaudible 2:03:26:06]. And it doesn’t mean that we always reach it. But at least we were sending the message, and I think that it can have an effect on people. Nobody can say: ‘I was forced to think different’, we want people to have a different attitude towards these types of issues, not to deny what happened.

I got lost. Where was I going with all this? Oh yes, the social appropriation issue. We already talked about the educational issue. Yes, we did.

I believe that these are elements that must be considered from the beginning. You need to be sure of what you want from the start of a process. We knew what we wanted, so we repeated it in every discourse that we gave, in every document that we wrote. We are not a Truth Commission because they are consensus bodies that seek to end conflicts. We are living in a conflict context so… Excuse me one second.

[A phone rings]

Ok. I got lost, I got lost.

Oh yes, the initial messages.

I got lost. Can anybody tell me what I was talking about?

Oriana: You were saying that an organization needed to have a vision from the beginning.

Gonzalo: Oh, yes! I was saying that the goals and the main categories must be defined from the very beginning. And also the political messages. From the very beginning, we said that we were working on a conflict that was not over yet, that for the same reason we were barred from conduct any process of clarification and therefore it created distrust. But our goal was that, whatever the context was, our work needed to contribute to a future peace process. And at that time, we didn’t know when was that peace process going to happen, but it became our political horizon.

Having that political horizon defined helps to clarify many things: What am I working for? Why am I going to this region? Which ones are the most sensitive points to achieve peace when a negotiation is occurring? What should be discussed on an agenda of negotiation? What actors should I convene? I think that that was a defining moment for us. Because while we were looking for a peace process, the same peace process found us. That’s why the work that we did received wide coverage. And that happened in 2011, 2012, 2013, when the conversations were announced for the first time.

So, for example, at that time many issues were left out of the public debate, like the agricultural theme. For a long time, that was a central issue across the continent, but specially in our country since the 80’. It began with the peasant’s struggle, in which I was involved, and then a new non-reformist and non-distributionist but modern, industrial and technician discourse around the agrarian issue was imposed. So peasants were left out. They were left to their own fate, surviving as best as they could. And because I have militated in the peasants’ movement before, I always felt that I needed to respond to the needs of this people. So I knew that the agrarian issue was going to be a turning point of a negotiation and it was going to be part of the solution of the problem. The launching of the report on disputed land, allowed to reposition the agrarian issue and fulfilled the peasant’s expectations. Because they had disappeared before that. And that was only achieved because the political horizons were defined since the beginning.

As I told you at the beginning, when the centre was founded we spend a lot of time building an agenda, we even spend more time than what the FARC spent defining their own agenda with the government [he laughs]. At some point, we started to get worried because we were organizing events, meeting with organizations and international experts [inaudible 1:10:21:00] and we didn’t begin to do the work. But that stage was extremely important, because it helped us to build the path that we were going to follow, and once that was done, everything became much more easy. If you define from the beginning what your research, political and methodological horizons are going to be, everything is simpler.

Now, that doesn’t mean that it was an easy job. For example, the ‘Basta Ya’ report wasn’t simple to write. Because at the moment you start the process is when you realize how diverse and complex the situation that you are working on can be, so it can become a very hard job to produce a synthesis. And maybe, another recommendation that I would make, that is also something in which we worked a lot, is to have a planned narrative structure of how would you like your final project to be, since the beginning. Though we worked hard on that, still was a very hard job to do. I think that the work that’s being done by the Truth Commission today, is much harder because of their team composition. Because, at least we were a group of academics accustomed to discuss and to deal with different positions. But in an environment in which the attendees are choose by their social role more that for being academics, it’s hard to produce a more analytical work, because this is an academic job.

And I understand the political message that they tried to send when they decided to include that type of people into the team. They wanted to send the message that they were including a more diverse profile into the team. But the fact that you include everybody doesn’t mean that you are going to solve something [he laughs]. Because when you do that, the chances of coordinate people and generate consensus drastically decrease. There is always going to be struggle. If your team is only made out of academics, it should not be hard to reach agreements on the type of basics activities that should be done to produce results. But if you have 10 social organizations or 10 communities participating, the result can be completely different. Because the structure of their conflicts can differ. And maybe one can overlap the other, so it can become a struggle between whose identity gains more recognition than the other one.

I’m sorry, I think that that can be a complicated issue to explain. I have an opinion on that because I know how things work in there. Some of the tensions that are produced on there can be hard to handle. Theoretically, it can look that’s perfectly working, however we don’t know what happens in terms of efficacy.

Ok, I’m done [He laughs]

Oriana: I understand, I understand.

Gonzalo: You made me do the exercise, so now I need something from you. Can you send me the copy of these lessons? because I haven’t written them down. [He laughs].

Oriana: Yes, sure. We are going to transcribe the interview. So, I can send you a copy when it's done.

Gonzalo: Ok, thanks a lot.

Oriana: Yes, of course.

Gonzalo: They were mostly random thoughts. Some of them are things that I have thought about it, but I haven’t organized them. I imagine that as you have talked to other colleagues, you are going to have other opinions too. But I think that the ideas that we talked today in this conversation, are the ones that are being widely discussed.

Oriana: Perfect, thank you very much.

Gonzalo: Ok, fine.

Jaime: Thanks a lot Gonzalo, it has been very illustrative. And very long [he laughs]. I think that we all agree that the time has come to end. Cecilia your microphone is still off so we can’t hear you.

Cecilia: Thanks for your time Gonzalo. We are very grateful.

Gonzalo: Well it’s part of the work that we did. And it was done with conviction so we need to transmit that feeling.

Jaime: An intellectual job.

Gonzalo: Thanks a lot.

Vikki: Thanks Gonzalo.

Gonzalo: Bye Vikki, bye Cecilia.

Oriana: Thanks a lot. Talk to you soon. Let’s stay in touch.

Gonzalo: Yes, of course, bye.

Oriana: Thanks, good afternoon.

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