Teaching in the Vortex: Everyday Violence and the Stories of Colombian Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in the vortex: Everyday violence and the stories of Colombian teachers

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This dissertation proposed to investigate the modes of violence (Zizek, 2008) used against teachers in Colombia, what the teachers' understanding of violence is, and how they interact with or resist it. Through *conversaciones*, a qualitative method that aligns with oral history methodology, the teachers who participated in this research (hereinafter, research collaborators) and I reflected on their contexts of teaching and living, their understanding of violence, their experiences with violence, and their preparedness for violence. We reflected on practices and knowledge that have the potential to inform the structuring of trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teachers. Moreover, the *conversaciones* enclose oral histories of what it means to teach and live in conditions of duress, such as those experienced in some regions of Colombia. The research collaborators also elaborated on practices to deal with forms of violence. Such practices are presented as recommendations for teachers and education stakeholders, hoping to be adapted by teachers in other challenging contexts.

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the commitment and support of the seven teacher collaborators who participated in it. Although their names will remain anonymous, their stories and knowledge will transcend, inspiring educators and researchers to find support and build guidelines to cope with the everyday violence affecting teachers. I am grateful and indebted to you for allowing me to learn about your teacher and life experiences through our *conversaciones*. The world needs to pay closer attention to your needs, and this dissertation is a tool that aims to help you bring your voices to others.

I want to thank all the researchers and scholars who have advanced the concepts I discussed in this dissertation. I also thank everyone in Colombia for raising awareness of the violence affecting teachers, giving teachers a voice in the Colombian conflict, and concretizing ways to deal with violence in the many forms presented in this dissertation.

I am thankful for the friends I made in this academic journey. Daniel, Anna, Brooke, Diana, Ed, Peter, Rawda and everybody who took a moment to listen to me: Your support, guidance, and time were essential to writing this book. Thank you for encouraging me to progress, challenging my ideas, understanding my learning process, and offering different perspectives.

To my family: ¡mil y mil gracias! Solo ustedes sabes los sacrificios a los que nos enfrentamos, los obstáculos que tuvimos que afrontar estos cinco años. Pero ustedes estuvieron siempre ahí para mí, apoyándome y escuchándome. A mi esposa e hija: gracias por haberme soportado estos años, por tenerme tanta paciencia. Prometo no hablar de este proyecto por un buen tiempo. Al menos no lo haré a la hora de la comida.

Lastly, I thank my supervisory committee for all the support and guidance. It is a dream—at least to me—that I, a teacher from Colombia, completed a Ph.D. at a Canadian university with a full scholarship. And this dream was possible because you believed in me since my Ph.D. application interview. Thank you, Dr. Waddington, Dr. Cambre (*Mil y mil gracias por brindarme tu apoyo y tiempo—como en esa llegada sorpresa a escuchar mi ponencia. Recordaré siempre tu buena disposición para ayudarme a avanzar en mis estudios, para diligenciar mis aplicaciones, y para escuchar mis preocupaciones*), and Dr. Corrigan. I also thank Fonds de Recherche du Québec – Société et Culture (FRQSC) for funding my doctoral research.

A Note on Conventions

In this dissertation, certain words, terms, and expressions will be used in a particular way. For the convenience of the reader, here are the terms with the explanations to why they are used in this manner:

The term "Vortex", used in the title of this dissertation, is taken from a novel written by José Eustasio Rivera. Originally named La Vorágine, this novel is one of the most important works in Latin-American literature written by a Colombian author, which narrates the story of a couple venturing deep into the untamed landscapes of Colombia. Context is an essential aspect in this dissertation, and La Vorágine provides a detailed description of the Colombian landscapes and a good analogy to explain where the research collaborators live and work.

The term "conversaciones" was used in this research to describe the main method to collect information. This term was defined from the literature on *pláticas* and the Chicana/Latina Feminist, Decolonial, and Latino Critical theory perspectives. Conversaciones occupied the common place of interviews—preferred are more common term used in research. A further explanation can be found in the third chapter.

The word "mediator" was used instead of researcher. This decision was made in support of a much-needed change in research and the sciences to build a categorical structure based on the knowledge of the other and not only on the episteme of the modern/colonial logos, considered superior.

In this research, the commonly called research participants were referred to as research collaborators. The term participants will be used in this thesis only when referring to another research.

The terms “docentes,” “maestros,” and “profesores” in Spanish are used interchangeably with the terms “educators” and “teachers” in English.

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¡Déjame huir, o, selva, de tus enfermizas penumbras, formadas con el hálito de los seres que agonizaron en el abandono de tu majestad! ¡Tú misma pareces un cementerio enorme donde te pudres y resucitas! ¡Quiero volver a las regiones donde el secreto no aterra a nadie, donde es imposible la esclavitud, donde la vista no tiene obstáculos y se encumbra el espíritu en la luz libre! ¡Quiero el calor de los arenales, el espejeo de las canículas, la vibración de las pampas abiertas! ¡Déjame tornar a la tierra de donde vine, para desandar esa ruta de lágrimas y sangre que recorrí en nefando día, cuando tras la huella de una mujer me arrastré por montes y desiertos, en busca de la Venganza, diosa implacable que sólo sonríe sobre las tumbas!

La Vorágine, José Eustasio Rivera, 1924.

Oh Jungle, let me escape your sickly shadows, your living cemetery, your primordial kingdom of agony and resuscitation, where one breathes the miasmas of all your dead and decaying former subjects. Let me go back to my own land. Let me unwalk the path of blood and tears that brought me here. I want to see the sandy plain shimmer on a dog day afternoon. Let me go back where one's eyes can roam freely across the landscape and one's spirit can rise freely into the light. How was it that, in pursuit of a woman, I came here seeking Vengeance, the implacable goddess who only smiles over tombs?

The Vortex, Jose Eustasio Rivera, 1924; J. C. Chasteen, Trans. 2018.

Introduction

Education in Colombia has often been the focus of violent conflict. Targeting teachers has intensified recently for different reasons, such as when mass media labels educators as left-wing activists, a label which may lead later to attacks against teachers. The grave situation for Colombian educators is evident in the following figures: "[...] educators assassinated (949), threatened (4003), displaced (1092), disappeared (60) and refugees (70), and only between 2000 and 2010" (Wallace, 2011, para. 10). Additionally, targeted violence has adopted newer forms, and expanded to social media, where hate speech and politization of the teacher profession is frequent and vast.

From within-school violence and lack of resources to low social recognition and even persecution and political clashes, teachers in conflict zones face a persistent threat of violence in their everyday contexts. What is more, they may also undergo secondary trauma in addressing the learning needs of children with traumatic stress. For teachers in Colombia, trauma is not peripheral, it is existential. Some tools exist to deal with this; a plethora of programs have embraced trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teaching (Tinklenberg 2021, Silva-McCormick 2020, Rideau 2020, Phelps-Ward 2020, Imad 2020, Gubkin 2015, Fedock 2021, Davidson 2017, Crumpton 2017).

However, these innovations have focused almost exclusively on preparing teachers to pedagogically address student concerns. Despite the theoretical inroads of trauma-sensitive pedagogies, they have yet to address the education of traumatized pre-service and in-service teachers. The question remains: What kinds of pedagogical strategies are needed for developing and retaining teachers in contexts of high stress and ongoing conflict? To understand teacher

experiences under duress, if not outright conflict, this study considered stories of teachers from Colombia.

Solid and extensive work on teachers' stories exists (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Craig, 2014; Golombek & Johnson, 2017), but little has been offered on the experiences of teachers when teaching and being teachers whilst interacting closely with violence. This study sought to contribute to understanding core needs of teachers amid violence, and the impacts of it on their personal and professional lives. To do this, I conversed with teachers to learn about their lived experiences with violence. Then, together we reflected on these experiences to understand what they understand as violence and how they have constituted teacher subjectivities in such settings. This manuscript hopes to contribute to the discussion of violence affecting teachers' lives and the development of trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teacher education programs.

Violence is here all the time so that things remain peacefully the way they are. (Zizek, 2013, p. 160-161).

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Teachers and Violence in Colombia

In this research, I analyzed teachers' experiences with violence from a subjective perspective and with great attention to the violence as exerted in their contexts. The aim was to explore teachers' experiences of teaching and being teachers in places affected by violence. For the case of Colombia, I proposed that factors such as the construction of a homogenous nation-state, a privatizing agenda in the education system, and a diminishing value of the teaching profession have merged with a narrow, identitarian narrative of Us vs. Them. This narrative is nurtured, reinforced, and executed at different levels: government, media, and armed groups. At each level, determined groups have built or employed three modes of violence—systematic, symbolic, and subjective—(Zizek, 2008a) to depict, define, and dispose of the teacher as Other. As a result, teachers have found ways to respond or resist such modes of violence by acting locally, disconnectedly, and showing adaptable signs of resistance. In this chapter, I will attempt to conceptualize violence, subjectivities, and resistance for the case of teachers living and teaching amid violence in Colombia.

On Violence

Violence is a changing, multiple, and context-dependent concept, and it can be assigned different and contrasted meanings depending on where it is observed (Blair, 2009). Searching for definitions of violence offered from and about Colombia, I found that The Study Commission on Violence of 1988 and Law 1257 of 2008 offered two legal approximations. The former presented a final report titled "Colombia: Violencia y Democracia", where they defined violence as: "todas aquellas actuaciones de individuos o grupos que ocasionen la muerte de otros o lesionen su

integridad fisica o moral" [all those actions of individuals or groups that cause the death of others or harm their physical or moral integrity] (Sánchez, 1988, p. 17). And in Law 1257, violence *against women* is defined as: "any action or omission that causes death, and physical, sexual, psychological, economic or patrimonial harm or suffering due to her status as a woman, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty" (para. 2). I regard this last definition of violence as especially relevant for this research, given that 66.1% of teachers in Colombia identified as women (DANE, 2022). And, as will be argued later in this chapter, being a woman affects how a subject experiences violence.

However, legal definitions of violence focus on the most visible violence, not on the most common or frequent, nor on what causes fear and disturbs the lives of citizens (Gonzalez & Molinares, 2010). Legal definitions of violence look at concrete events executed by an individual (Gonzalez & Molinares, 2010), disregarding a background where the subject and all other aspects that may cause the violence stay. On the other hand, Slavoj Zizek's discussion on violence is broader and more inclusive. It considers different moments and executors of violence, as well as the background where it occurs. Zizek (2013) hypothesizes that "in order to grasp this parallax nature of violence, one should focus on the short circuits between different levels, between, say, power and social violence" (p. 155). Thus, since I recognize the violence affecting teachers in Colombia as a complex, dynamic, multilevel, and malleable phenomenon, I will explore it—violence—and begin the discussion in this chapter from Zizek's arguments.

First, Zizek (2008c) elaborates on a triad of violence, constituted by one subjective kind of violence and "two objective kinds of violence" (p. 1): symbolic and systemic. These modes of violence are in a complex and constant interaction. Zizek (2008c) describes subjective violence as the "violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent" (p.1) and which is "just the most

visible of the three" (p. 11) Subjective violence encloses the direct acts of physical violence. For example, the violence executed by a robber, terrorist, or murderer. These subjects are identifiable, and commonly made visible through media or other means. Moreover, they are shown as examples of what violence is or looks like. Zizek (2008c) describes this type of violence as one "enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, [and] fanatical crowds" (2008c, p. 10). And goes on to explain that subjective violence is "experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the 'normal,' peaceful state of things" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 2).

Often, we focus our attention on the subjective violence. We are accustomed to and expected to focus on, say, an attack executed by a terrorist group or the individual who robbed the bank. But we tend to look the other way when armies commit atrocities in the name of a nation or when the banks and corporations exploit violently certain groups in the population or fund wars—unless these are foreign armies, banks, or corporations. Only then the story makes the news or becomes a movie. Subjective violence is understood as the subjects' desire. It has no reason to exist other than the subjects' impulses. And people are encouraged to see this mode of violence as the subjects' choice. In fact, people are constantly driven to think that the subjects have nothing to complain about or change or reform because things are fine as they are—sarcasm intended.

Then, Zizek (2008c) explains how objective violence differs from the subjective kind. Objective violence is "inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence" (Zizek, 2008, p. 9). It is more challenging to recognize and confront because it blends into the background of daily life. An example of objective violence would be

geopolitical conflicts, forced displacement, starvation, etc. He claims that objective violence is "inherent to this 'normal' state of things," and it is "invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 2). And yet, to say it is invisible—as if it happens spontaneously—is to ignore the work and funding many groups of people put into making it the normal state of things. Powerful groups cooperate to elaborate and disseminate a narrative showing a particular nation or group's efforts to pursue democracy and freedom. And this is okay. But when the executor has a different name, religion, or value system, then the same efforts are considered violence and evil. It is ironic and vicious how the same actions can be labelled violence or not depending on the persons executing them. Just like this, violence has been made invisible intentionally, and it has often been disregarded or accepted with a different name, depending on who benefits from it. In other words, subjective violence, the direct and physical violence, is made objective—systematic and anonymous—based on the people controlling the narrative.

Zizek proposes two subcategories under objective violence: systemic or structural, and symbolic. Regarding systemic violence, the "ultra-objective" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 14) mode of violence, Zizek (2008c) asserts that "this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective,' systemic, anonymous" (p. 13). Two concrete examples of this mode of violence are the residential school system that took place in Canada and the racial profiling in the United States. He also deems this mode of violence as a consequence of the economic and political systems. Systemic violence is the violence that is deep-rooted in a system, which entails both physical violence and "more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 9). People often disregard this mode of violence, too. We are not encouraged to pay attention to it. We are told

that the systems that govern us are perfect, and if any flaw were to come about in the system, it would be explained as, again, an individual's error. However, we have seen examples showing certain groups in the population affected by systemic violence. This violence has affected black and Latino communities in the education and banking systems in the US; blacks and people of colour in the judicial system in the US; and indigenous peoples in Canada who were discriminated against, abducted from their families, segregated, and more, to name just a few examples.

Now, when elaborating on symbolic violence, Zizek identifies an issue on the one hand and a benefit on the other. He elaborates on symbolic violence and describes it as "embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call "our house of being." (Zizek, 2008c, p. 1). For example, we can see that symbolic violence is embedded in everyday language when immigrants are reminded that only a certain language must be spoken where they now live or when comments in social media about the car theft problematic in Canada blames only a specific immigrant population and disregards the nationals involved. That violence of language is what helped people build "protective symbolic walls that kept others at a proper distance" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 58). It separates, divides, and ensures that certain groups of people, as well as their culture, beliefs, and stories, are more welcomed, are accepted as the norm, and, in the long run, prevail over others. Zizek (2008c) places language at the core of this mode of violence and presents it as what,

> […] simplifies the designated thing, reducing it to a single feature. It dismembers the thing, destroying its organic unity and treating its parts and properties as autonomous. It inserts the thing into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it. (p. 61)

Here, he recognizes in language its ability to affect our sensitivity and our actions: "When [blacks] are treated by whites as inferior, this does indeed make them inferior at the level of their socio-symbolic identity. In other words, the white racist ideology exerts a performative efficiency" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 72). And yet, Zizek proves how there is also a chance for the people affected by violence to use symbolic violence as a means of resistance. Elaborating on the revolution in Egypt, Zizek (2013) indicates that oppressed people can use symbolic violence "in the sense that you walk in the street and ignore the authorities" (p. 155). This is an example of symbolic violence because they use language and embodiment to resist; they do not use physical or direct violence—subjective—, nor they can adapt the system to their will—systemic. It is a type of violence that does not seek to hurt or end the other. People may use this symbolic violence to lead themselves to social freedom and individual liberty. This violence removes power from persons in positions of authority. In a sense, they lose their symbolic authority. And, although nothing changes right then, everyone, including the powerful groups, knows something is already changing (Zizek, 2013).

Zizek comments on how we generally think about violence (2013): "Violence comes, as a rule, from the other side. It comes from those in power who think that they have to scare people to create violence" (p. 156). But in his analysis, it is more complex than that. As I argued previously, violence results from the synergy among diverse actors at different levels (e.g., government, industry, army, media, individuals, etc.) and on different sides. For instance, we have seen evidence that the market has required extra-market violence to create and preserve the conditions it needs to function (Zizek, 2013). Consider the oil wars and the United States' involvement in coup d'états in Latin America as examples of this synergy.

In addition, Violence "is not a direct property of some acts, but is distributed between acts and their contexts, between activity and inactivity" (Zizek, 2008c, p. 213). Violence is distributed between subjective (e.g., criminal activity, violent acts, or terrorism, etc.), systemic (e.g., economic, political, education systems, etc.) and symbolic (e.g., language, culture, media representations, etc.) acts. It is also distributed between acts which are executed at different levels of this chain of command.

To explore and understand how teachers experience violence in Colombia and what they do about it, I chose to think about violence in an interactive and systemic way, as Zizek does. I considered such a synergy among the diverse actors at different levels and how their acts inter-connect to advance violence against teachers. In other words, I studied what diverse actors at different levels said or did about teachers, investigated how what they said or did may have found support in other actors, and explored with teachers how and when they began to experience any mode of violence.

In the next section, I will further contextualize Zizek's thoughts on violence, the Other, and subjectivity. I will bring his arguments to the contexts and conditions of teachers in Colombia and thread them together with the discussion already advanced by other scholars interested in contexts affected by violence or oppression. I find it relevant to state that I saw Zizek's arguments and concepts as useful research starting points, a promising heuristic to think about violence, and not necessarily as conclusive or definitive. I expected these arguments and concepts to develop, grow, or adapt as I conversed about violence with teachers in Colombia.

Violence and Teachers in Colombia

I consider it necessary to offer a contextual description of the violence in Colombia if we are to understand how it affects the teachers' lived experiences and elaborate a common ground

for discussion for readers from other contexts. If I were to describe today's '*violence*' in Colombia and name its main influential components individually, I would have to list the social abandonment, drug trafficking, legal and illegal armed groups, politics and politicians, and the state as the most salient ones. On this topic, Novelli (2009a) argues that violence in Colombia results from the unequal distribution of wealth and political power, which coincided with government failure, and specified that "the bullet and the bomb have been the preferred option for conflict resolution" (p. 191).

I would argue that government failure alone does not lead to violence. Instead, violence comes about when it finds worsened forms of social control and a lack of alternative options to respond to newer social problems (Oquist, 1978). In the 50s and 60s, the guerrilla groups claimed that the Colombian government did not represent the vox populi and primarily followed foreign or imperial ideas. These were the reasons why guerrilla groups revolted. The violence experienced then was mainly a two-way war between the guerrillas on one side and the Colombian armed forces on the other. However, this violence has since welcomed more participants. Nowadays, multiple actors spread violence in different forms across all the Colombian territories.

Colombia has been mired in internal warfare since the 1950s. Guerrillas, paramilitary groups, drug cartels, and government armed forces have fought and brought all sorts of problems to the population (e.g., car bombs, extorsions, illegal recruitment of minors, extrajudicial executions, etc.). This internal conflict affects and confines the citizens. Since the 1950s, violence has swept over Colombia in its entirety. Indeed, the war experienced in Colombia has affected how we spend our free time, work, and do business, and how we live and teach.

Violence has affected various fields. One of the most impacted fields is education, which has frequently been the subject of violent crimes. There, "teachers and students are between bullets. In the classrooms, [teachers] have to serve as psychologists, therapists and something else. [Their] work is lost in the infinite world of violence" (Peña, 2019, p. 82). These attacks on educators have taken root for a variety of reasons. They typically have to do with associating education and educators with socialism or Marxism and portraying them as leftist activists. This anti-leftist campaign, which depicts all subjects on the left as "a kind of regional axis of evil that aims to harm Colombia and favour the project of the guerrillas" (Peña, 2019, p. 85), has affected teachers in critical ways. Of course, not all teachers identify as left-wing activists. Also, it is not only teachers with links to left-wing political groups who have been attacked.

The experiences of teachers with violence in Colombia resemble how Negri (1989) reflected on the functionality of violence and its adaptability. He explained,

> The more the labour force, or the working subject, becomes intellectual and social, the more the violence inherent in exploitation acquires an intellectual and social character. Violence is spread out in a generalized way; it occupies the whole of society and permeates all of its pores. Violence is no longer merely ideological. Instead, it is functional and innate. How can it be uprooted and destroyed? It is violence which we feel bearing down on us. Often, we are its prisoners and our thoughts and nightmares are implicated in it. (Negri, 1989, p. 59)

Negri's words lead me to question if violent actors target teachers because they, teachers, bring awareness to the population and may potentially help the population understand or reject the violence they have endured for decades. Also, I consider that modes of violence committed against teachers shape teachers and education. Thus, it is crucial to explore how teachers interact

with and react to the modes of violence used against them. After all, “alongside everything a society can produce (alongside: that is to say, in a determinate relationship with) there is the formation and transformation of things said” (Foucault, 1991, p. 63).

A further complexity in this debate is the fact that some Colombian scholars (Sánchez 1985; Ramírez, 2002; Blair, 2009) argue that discourses about violence themselves turn into apparatuses that alter and distance the realities of violence from their everyday reality so much that the definition, the concept, becomes more relevant than the fact. In other words, to conceptualize violence “erases in itself the violent act” (Villaveces, 1996, cited in Blair, 2009). Blair (2009) further problematizes the impossibility of reducing violence to a concept, acknowledging the diverse types of violence. In order to guard against this tendency, I adopted the broad and inclusive conception of violence from Zizek that have outlined above. Subjective, systemic, and symbolic modes of violence (Zizek, 2008c) have been used against teachers, discuss their understanding of violence, and elaborate on how they have resisted such modes of violence. As well, I was attentive to any other emerging forms of violence that teachers mentioned.

I further argue that the systemic and symbolic violence affecting the constitution of teacher subjectivities should be accounted for just as much as subjective violence. Teachers face insufficient conditions and reductionist labelling that they try to overcome with compensatory actions such as feeding students, fixing schools, and working with the communities. Teachers then attempt to close societal gaps, push back crises momentarily and alleviate pressure for political action. However, this kind of compensatory work potentially threatens the perceived value of political actors, who then contest this threat by politicizing teachers and teaching. Politicians delegitimize teachers and education, which leads to violence against teachers.

Teachers have had to respond to this by constituting adaptable teacher subjectivities while resisting violence (See Figure 1).

On Subjectivities

The constitution of the teacher subject is essential to the discussion proposed in this research. But what is the subject? Foucault (1982) asserted that "[t]here are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity

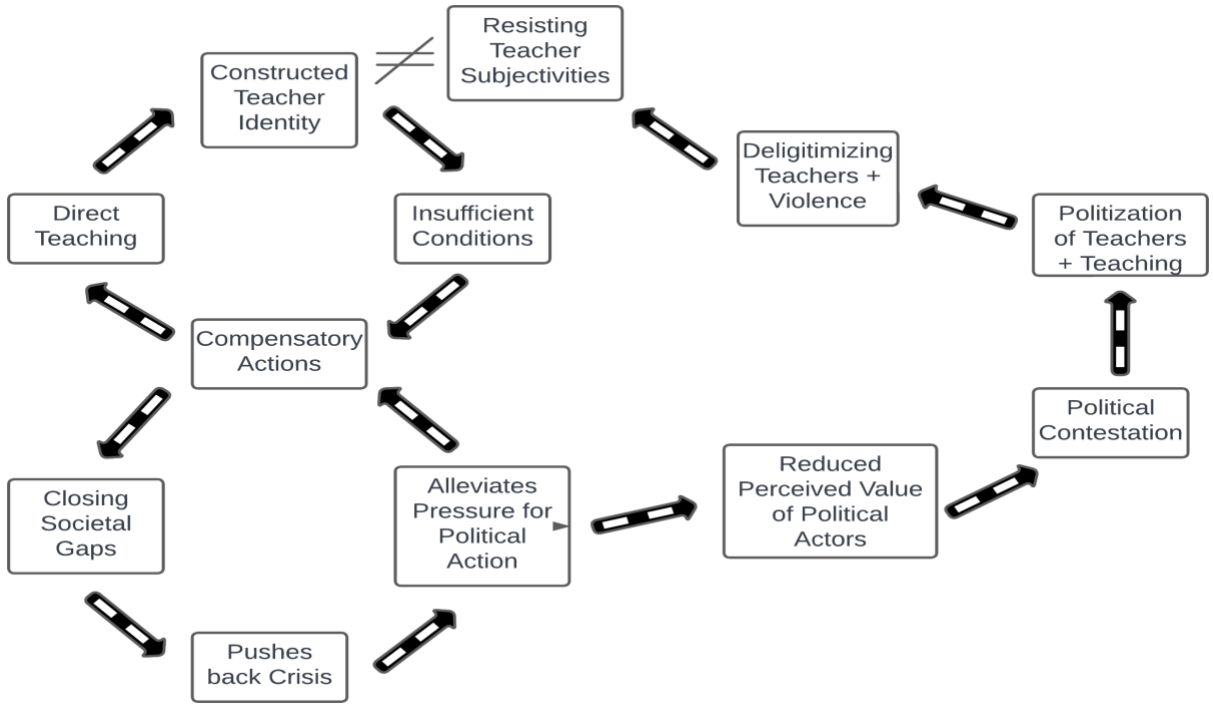

Figure 1. Teacher actions face reinforcing feedback loops of insufficiencies, crisis, and violence leading to teacher subjectivities.

by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to". (p. 781). Foucault proposed two understandings of the subject. First, a subject that did not enact resisting in its subjectivity, a subject that was the result of whatever control or society wanted to make of it. And then, he recognized a resisting subjectivity against the social apparatuses. Zizek (2008a) explains that Foucault's stand on subjectivity culminated when "he tried to outline the space of the "care of the self" that allows the subject to articulate through self-

relating his own "mode of life" within a *dispositif*, and thus to regain a minimum of distance from it" (p. 176).

Either adhering to, resisting or distancing from it, Foucault sustained the thesis that subjects are constituted when embedded in the population management of prisons, hospitals, schools, and almost every aspect of life (Smith, 2017). On this note, Smith (2017) states that,

> [T]his is not subjectivity but identity, and it relates not to politics but to what Rancière calls 'policing.' A proper form of subjectivity is not a positive placing in a specific world, as in Althusser and Foucault, but a subtraction from it which enables access to the empty universal world. (p. 63)

Two questions arise from this statement: what would the subject's fulfilment be like if it were to continue a Foucauldian subjective constitution, and how does the subject subtract from a specific enforced place in the world, as Smith (2017) suggested? I will continue to develop the answer to the first question and ponder on the second question later. If the subject were to constitute itself as explained by Foucault, it would do so only as defined by what the dispositif wants, be it an accepting or rejecting enactment. Or it would be able to master its interests and desires, resulting in something worthy of showing to the world. Zizek suggests that "Foucault's notion of the subject is, rather, a classical one: subject as the power of self-mediation and harmonizing the antagonistic forces, as a way of mastering the 'use of pleasures' through a restoration of the 'image of self'" (Zizek, 2009, p. xxiv).

But Zizek suggests that the subject is beyond that. The subject is (meant to be) disruptive. It is a source of chaos within the institutional and administrative structures and knowledge systems that reinforce and sustain the power relations (Zizek, 2009). And, quite importantly, the subject disrupts itself—it is chaos for *itself*. The subject—or most subjects—contests its social

structures, reacts to routes predetermined by others, and allows itself to feel for itself. It constantly attempts to alter the *dispositif*, the social substance, *and itself* by engaging with others as a unique and political individual (Smith, 2017). Zizek acknowledges that what the subject may feel has an effect on its own subjectivity and emphasizes that "I am a subject the moment I can say to myself: 'No matter what unknown mechanism governs my acts, perceptions, and thoughts, nobody can take from me what I see and feel now'" (Zizek, 2006, p. 231). This "*nobody can take from me what I see and feel now"* is to me a moment of realization, a wake-up call. And what follows this moment? What do the subjects do after deciding nobody can take from them how they see and feel?

> At this point, we should consider the hysterical of the subject. Zizek argues that (2008a), an individual is interpellated into subjecthood, this interpellation fails, and the "subject" is this failure. This is why the subject is irreducibly divided: divided between its task and the failure to remain faithful to it. It is in this sense that, for Lacan, the subject is as such hysterical: hysteria is, at its most elementary, the failure of interpellation, the gnawing worm questioning the identity imposed on the subject by interpellation—"Why am I that name?", why am I what the big Other claims I am? (p. 518)

Allow me to make a reflective parenthesis. Some questions arise as I elaborate on subjectivity and consider how the teachers constitute their subjectivities in Colombia: Do teachers question the identity imposed on them by society (i.e., school, parents, family, etc.)? Who, or *what*, else enforces or limits what the teachers should be and do? How does the failure of interpellation feel or look like for the teacher subject? Also, it is necessary to reflect on the consequences the teacher subject must face when *questioning the identity imposed* on them. Teachers in Colombia frequently experience persecution, displacement, and silencing. Is it

possible that these are consequences teachers must deal with for contesting what political groups and a part of society claim they are?

As I have elaborated thus far from Zizek's arguments, the subject, sometimes unconsciously, realizes what society imposes upon it and decides to question it. The subject refuses to play a part in something it has not agreed upon and decides to act by subtracting from the background it has been placed. Consequently, a gap appears between the subject and its background. At this moment, we need to elaborate more on how the subject subtracts from where it has been placed and when it decides to do so. This process brings me back to the other question I suggested earlier: how does the subject subtract from a specific place in the world?

The subject is in constant friction against its environment the moment it realizes and questions what this environment (e.g., society, family, government, etc.) expects of it. Such friction places the subject in what Zizek has defined as a gap. This gap exists "[…] between the subject and its "background," the fact that a subject never fully fits its environment, is never fully embedded in it, defines subjectivity" (Zizek, 2006, p. 68). The constitution of the subject occurs in this gap, while the interpellation—the process of giving the individual an identity—always fails to some degree. The subject never entirely fits its environment; the subject questions it. In that gap, the subject *subtracts* itself from the background in which it has been placed.

As described thus far, the process of the constitution of the subject relates to the Hegelian *negation of negation*. I will weave together two explanations of this term offered by Zizek: first from a macro perspective and then from a micro perspective. Zizek (2008b) explains the negation of negation as,

> […] a process of passage from state A to state B: the first, immediate 'negation' of A negates the position of A while remaining within its symbolic confines, so it must be

> followed by another negation, which then negates the very symbolic space common to A and its immediate negation (the reign of a religion is first subverted in the guise of a theological heresy; capitalism is first subverted in the name of the 'reign of Labour'). p. 92.

The social protests in Chile that started in 2020 may serve as an example of this negation of negation from a macro perspective. *Negating the position of A while remaining within its symbolic confines* happened when women, students, workers, young people lacking job opportunities, acting as individuals and collectives, took to the streets to demand women's rights, free education, justice, equal pay, better salaries, etc.—although the hike in the Santiago public transportation system's fare catalyzed the emerging social protests. This moment shows how different subjects questioned what was imposed on them and negated the position of the State/system at the time, one that perpetuated inequalities, inequities, sexual violence against women, poor working conditions, and more. Although at that moment these people *remained within the symbolic confines* of that State/system, the Chilean people began to transform their political and social conditions. This is of how the ensuing negation of negation is taking place—or at least how Chileans are attempting to do so.

After the first negation, representatives of the diverse social groups who participated in the *Estallido Social* continued to work together. These representatives are working to transform their symbolic space. Even the current president, Gabriel Boric, who became a public figure for being a student leader and social activist, is advancing this task. Overall, many Chileans are leading a negation of negation. The activist students and social leaders and traditional politicians are struggling to write a new charter enclosing principles that guarantee just living conditions for everyone. But this is just one of the many tasks they are taking on to secure the collapse of a

symbolic space that fostered an unjust system for many Chileans to live in and which was sustained for decades. Both parts, the oppressed and the (former) ruling class, are working together to build a new and improved nation.

Now, speaking about the negation of negation from the perspective of the subject, the micro perspective, Zizek (2008b) says that,

> "[…] the Hegelian' negation of negation' is not the magic return to identity which follows the painful experience of splitting and alienation, but the very revenge of the decentred Other against the subject's presumption: the first negation consists in the subject's move against the social Substance (in his 'criminal' act which disturbs the substantial balance), and the subsequent 'negation of negation' is nothing but the revenge of the Substance (for instance, in psychoanalysis, 'negation' is the subject's repression into the unconscious of some substantial content of his being, while the 'negation of negation' is the return of the repressed)." (p. 92)

In the case of the subject's negation of negation, the subject contests or rebels against the core values and expectations that society has preestablished for it. Then society perceives this contesting as a threat—and if not society in its entirety, those who oversee and control certain social aspects that sustain the status quo do. The negation of negation is evidenced when the social substance fights back to keep the subjects at bay in the place society predefined for them *and* the subjects transform themselves into whatever they desire or deem necessary to be. In the case of teachers in Colombia, researchers and journalists have documented how teachers are perceived as a threat by illegal armed groups as they may interfere with their recruitment goals. Also, there is evidence of how some politicians label teachers as leftist activists because they cover a topic about the corruption of the government or the government's involvement in

extrajudicial killings. And like this, teachers face numerous actions that limit their engagement with (the change of) society. In other words, the social substance tries to contain the teachers, to repress them, and sometimes it does so with violence. And yet, teachers have resisted and transformed themselves, education, students, and the communities around them, as I will discuss in detail in a subsequent section.

I do not try to reduce the teachers' subjectivity constitution to their experience and reaction to violence. I do not argue that all teachers can do is respond to or try to contest an all-superior violence, bowing to the conditions of their contexts as pure objects. I argue that teachers constitute subjectivities as they contradict their conditions, as they question what they experience as teachers and the meaning of teaching itself. Teachers constitute subjectivities when they contest what others—far from education and the school—say being a teacher and teaching is and subtract from the background they were placed.

Bearing in mind what I see as core insights on the nature of subjectivity as laid out by Zizek (2008b,c, 2013), I also add to my conceptualization of the matter from the perspectives of other scholars who had experience with the Latin American context or contexts where violence or oppression accrues. For example, Freire (2005a) alludes to the process of men becoming subjects when discussing critical consciousness. He stated that "[…] a serious and profound effort at *conscientização*—by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects—is necessary" (Freire, 2005a, p. 160). Freire worked to encourage people to engage with the true causality of their conditions—the praxis of the subjects. Freire saw the need to leave behind the magical and naïve consciousness and talked about the importance of taking action and participating critically in

reconstructing peoples' worlds. He saw the "subjects as capable of making choices and transforming reality" (Freire, 1973, as cited in Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 29).

Freire (2005a, 2005b) understood the necessity of subjects contending the imposed social relations of power as if subtracting from the background they have been forced to inhabit. By means of becoming aware of their conditions as oppressed, the subjects break from that historical and alienating conditioning. Thus, as the subjects question and contest their oppression, they develop their subjectivity. Freire's understanding of the subject encourages me to explore *how* teachers may develop subjectivities while contesting relations of power and facing violence. For instance, Freire noted that the subjects needed to break free from conditioning, technological domestication, and massification. He observed how the subject is "[e]xcluded from the sphere of decisions made by fewer and fewer people, [and] is maneuvered by the mass media to the point where he believes nothing he has not heard on the radio, seen on television, or read in the newspapers" (Freire, 1973, p. 54; as cited in Morrow & Torres, 2002).

Additional important ideas about subjectivity come from Medina-Zárate and Uchoa de Oliveira (2019). They evaluate the productiveness of subjectivity for critical research and elaborate on this concept from and for Latin America. They argue that "subjectivity must be understood as historicity interwoven" (Medina-Zárate & Uchoa de Oliveira, 2019, p. 282) and that "the study of subjectivity must be located within the discontinuities of history, in a search for its folds" (p. 282). After reading Medina-Zárate and Uchoa de Oliveira's work, I consider teacher subjectivity a complex amalgam that incorporates teachers' paths and experiences as shaped by their individualities, contexts, and social conditions. These authors assert that leading the discussion on subjectivity from a different geopolitical context brings alternative understandings. This approach to subjectivities favours an attempt to decentralize Westernized

teacher education thinking. It debunks the standard knowledge on how to be teachers by welcoming the subjective life experiences of teachers in Colombia who have dealt with violence.

In addition, I find it helpful to include the ideas offered by Barrera (2019), addressing how subjectivities have derived from colonial thinking and the role of education. She explains that although subjectivities are learned by subjects through institutional mechanisms—in line with Foucault's initial thesis—there is yet another form of subjectivity. Barrera (2019) considers that "emergen nuevas subjetividades liberadas de formas universales de los poderes institucionalizados hasta nuestros días" [new subjectivities emerge liberated from universal forms of powers which have been institutionalized to this day] (p. 240). Such as when racialized minorities decide to mobilize against police brutality or when students and teachers who lack resources work together to bake and sell pastries to raise money to buy school supplies or pay for a field trip. She insists on supporting these new "liberated" subjectivities that help Latinos understand our historical and sociocultural contexts and responsibilities.

Barrera's approach to subjectivities calls to explore emerging contesting subjectivities. It allows us to imagine the subject as able to decide, make, propose, and not just assimilate. It looks at the subject not just as a site of reproduction but as a doer, a maker, and an agent of reflection. In other words, the subjects question what is imposed on them and take action. This active and conscious view of the construction of subjectivities leads me to reflect on how teachers constitute subjectivities in the context of Colombia beyond resisting the hegemonic and dominant discourses which certain actors enforce violently. It makes me consider what teachers do after they resist a preestablished way of being a teacher as mandated by the government and politicians and as depicted through media. Then, it is essential to recognize that,

> Becoming a subject presupposes self-reflexivity, imagination and the capacity for deliberative action. The subject "for itself" means being an end of itself; it includes self-reference and reflexivity, the power to take oneself as an acting activity through imagination. […] [the subject] must be made under certain conditions and circumstances: it is a historical creation (Torres, 2006, p. 96)

Praxis toward *conscientização,* contesting oppression of technological domestication and massification, the influence of the subjects' context and social conditions in shaping their subjectivities, and the need to look beyond contesting into the liberated subjectivities are aspects that may also help explain the constitution of subjectivities of teachers amid violence in Colombia.

The arguments presented thus far impact how I reflect theoretically on how teachers may constitute their subjectivities. However, I am also fully aware of the particularities of the Colombian contexts and know I must keep my analysis open to insights beyond these perspectives. In my work, I constantly considered these perspectives on subjectivity, but I gave primary importance to the arguments and stories of the teachers who collaborated with me on this research and the contexts where they lived. I welcomed other perspectives that could help me understand the teachers' interactions with violence beyond the theoretical insights presented in this chapter. I found it important to elaborate on how violence—in its different forms—takes place and interacts with the teachers in Colombia.

Identity vs. subjectivities

An alternative to "teacher subjectivities" might be "teacher identity." But the concept of identity has been problematized in interesting ways, especially by Stuart Hall. Hall (1996) described this process of constructing one's identity—identification—as supported "on the back

of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (p. 2). Hall continued to elaborate on identity and identification, as 'an emotional tie with another person,' a 'moulding after the other,' ambivalent and dichotomous: "which is constructed in or through *différance* and is constantly destabilized by what it *leaves out* [emphasis added]" (p. 5). And, when discussing identity from the political and as unity, he considered that "identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude" (p. 5).

From the stand of a hierarchical and divisionary dichotomy, Hall (1996) explained why identities are more often the result of difference and exclusion than sameness and identical inclusivity. He then stated it is expected to think that:

> […] it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed. (p. 4-5)

Hall (1996) mentioned how Derrida had explained that the constitution of identity is "always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles – man/woman, etc." (p. 5). When identity is practiced as such, it suggests that it is contradictory when someone, a subject, represents both or more sides, values, or marks (Lugones, 2012). This understanding of identity is insufficient to explore how teachers constitute certain teaching practices and specific ways of being teachers. It is insufficient if we consider how the diverse social and political contextualities shaping a teacher and teaching may affect that "natural closure of solidarity" or interfere in creating "an emotional tie with another person". Also, it is possible that what is *left out* of that identification process, those decentered

subjectivities, are the only way to teach and live in contexts affected by violence. Moreover, I agree that,

> [o]ne must leave behind the particularities of identity that are used by the anti-political order to categorize, place, count, and ultimately dismiss one as incapable of political speech. By negating one's given-being, or identity-place in the world, and embracing one's lack, one can then emerge to perform acts of universal significance that can both lead to recognition and change the world" (Smith, 2017, p. 45).

Research on teacher identity has tended to construe and analyze the resultant poles, marks, and categories: native/non-native English speaker teachers (Archanjo et al., 2019; Viáfara, 2016), academic/non-academic (Posada-Ortiz, 2022), expert/unexperienced (Olsen, 2008; Trent, 2011; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Ivanova & Skara-Mincane, 2016;), gay/straight (Lander, 2018; Haddad, 2019). However, I suggest that exploring teachers' lived experiences should not focus or result in statements about which mark they represent, confining them to who they are, are not (yet), and cannot be at all.

To explore lived experiences should neither be approached from the marks engrained by the violent division between that *constitutive outside* and the 'positive' meaning. Exploring teachers' lived experiences with violence should consider their sometimes complex, mutually inclusive dissimilarities. To explore teachers' lived experiences, we should acknowledge that one mark does not define totally, nor constantly, the teacher subject they are or will enact at some point in time due to certain contextual conditions. Hall (1996) reflected on this as well. He questioned how to close the gap between a theory of the mechanisms by which subjects identify and the positions that attract them and another theory that investigates:

> […] how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do, or are in a constant, agonistic process of *struggling with, resisting, negotiating* [emphasis added] and accommodating the normative or regulative rules with which they confront and regulate themselves. (Hall, 1996, p. 14)

I consider subjectivities, as explained earlier, a better fit for such a task. They allow exploring who we are and who we are not yet as somewhat indefinite subjects. Identity is determined by the marks or dominant categories society assigns to subjects, which constrains the marked subject to the limits of a category. On the other hand, the concept of subjectivity allows one to understand the subject, not necessarily by erasing the mark/category already assigned, but with primary attention to how the subject unfolds and interacts with its context and society, even if there is a violent dividing border between what the subject wants to be and what society wants it to become. I will now elaborate on how the subject unfolds and interacts with its contexts and the limits there might be for teachers in Colombia.

A Resistance with the Tools at Hand

I begin this last section by stating what is likely obvious: in the same way that violence in Colombia has developed to involve multiple actors, to be of numerous forms, to be fragmented, resistance has changed and has readapted as well. For the discussion developed in this section, it is necessary to explore the concepts of contestation and resistance, as they help explore how teachers constitute their subjectivities and what they do once they are in *the gap*. To that end, I will elaborate on resistance and how some scholars have previously defined it, discuss factors that determine defining or embodying resistance, and describe the resistance that teachers have enacted in Colombia.

There has been ambiguity in conceptualizing resistance. Davies (1995) indicated that researchers had used the concept of resistance in teachers to accommodate almost anything, to measure from 'drinking and fighting' to indifference and quiet behaviour. Post-Marxists, he stated, have contended that not all oppositional behaviour is resistance and that "definitions of 'true' resistance include only opposition that possesses 'authentic emancipatory promise'" (Davies, 1995, p. 1469). Then, addressing Aronowitz, Giroux, and McLaren, among others, Davies (1995) adverted that they did not offer documented examples of authentic resistance and that such scholars mainly focus on the resistance in the form of critical pedagogy, which was the theory to which they were committed.

For their part, critical pedagogues have had some ambivalence about the concept as well. Giroux and McLaren (1987), for instance, discussed how resistance had been seen and defined in educational literature as a "gap between the widespread forces of domination and the state of being dominated" (p. 272), as apolitical, reactionary, atheoretical, unconscious, and disorganized. They instead adhered to the concept of counter-hegemony, as it "implies a more political, theoretical and critical understanding of both the nature of domination and the type of active opposition it should engender" (p. 272). Also, they advocated for how this latter term, as it implies the creation of 'social relations' and 'public spaces,' which enclose forms of experience and struggle.

Resistance has been defined using characteristics like those Giroux and McLaren attributed to counter-hegemony, and its term has also evolved with the changing landscape. For instance, Apple (2012) considers one cannot ignore the fact that "in any real situation there will be elements of resistance, of struggle and contradiction" (p. 85) and that all such elements occlude the lived experiences of subjects. He also insisted that "resistances may be informal, not

fully organized or even conscious; yet this does not mean that they will have no impact" (Apple, 2012, p. 147). In certain cases, descriptions of resistance do not do justice to the contextual realities of some places where subjects must enact different forms of resisting. Resistance, in response to the individualizing domination of the subject, has moved to allow and accept individual and delinked *resistances*, with varied forms, paces and causes. Resistance cannot be enacted similarly in all places […]

> Resistance, important as it is—both for political reasons and for individual questions of self-worth—is a socially and psychologically demanding pursuit that wears people and societies down. It is an exhausting mode of existence. This is why a dominated people cannot survive simply by resisting. They do not only need a space in which to make autonomous decisions to counter occupation and domination; they also need a space or a dimension of their lives that is free from the very problematic of occupation, free from both occupation and the resistance to occupation (Hage, 2015, p. 167)

Resistance is a taxing social and psychological endeavor that requires that the subject acts, aware of the conditions of the context where resistance intends to take place.

Some descriptions of resistance seem excessively intellectual. For instance, Giroux and McLaren (1986, 1987) argued the necessity of having teachers, transformative intellectuals, reclaiming spaces in schools and outside to recast schooling, teaching, and authority relations, where radical educators could *theorize* for schools and impulse radical democracy. However, I feel that such a view does not acknowledge all that teachers are already doing in and outside schools to edify such spaces. Teachers cannot always theorize (Kilpatrick & Leitch, 2004; Ommering, 2011; Pace, 2017; Ortegón, 2017). Some teachers are in that 'gap,' resisting, living, fearing, but also doing, teaching, feeding... Teachers have collectively and individually

constructed meaning of their experiences and have partaken in this social meaning-making to redefine what a *teacher* is, their roles, responsibilities, and frontiers.

Teachers have found ways to resist or counter-act hegemony or be resilient, and I argue that we should strive to understand how teachers constitute subjectivities and resist violence. Such an understanding should evolve from the teachers' unique experiences and contexts. To explore the resistance enacted by teachers in complex conditions, one should accept that teachers resist against sociopolitical conditions by using any resources at hand. This view allows one to explore teachers' resistance within a much more ample spectrum. Teachers in certain conditions have resisted violence by changing a decontextualized curriculum (Becerra et al., 2012; Greaves et al., 2021), addressing topics forbidden by powerful groups (Chavez et al., 2016;), teaching in conditions of war and postwar (Kilpatrick & Leitch, 2004; Ommering, 2011; Pace, 2017; Ortegón, 2017), as well as by building, painting, and maintaining the schools, feeding their students, serving the community where they teach, and more. I suggest that teachers have had to resist—and survive—by not fitting an identity and acting *subjectively* against violence.

Teachers have enacted varied modes of resistance against and dealing with these complex forms of violence. I believe, then, that teachers have learned to cope with the fragmented and multiform violence that has been imposed on them. They have lived and taught amid violence. They have learned from it, taken its properties, and fused them in their struggle. Then, when teachers are observed resisting, one could not expect a standard reaction, a linear resistance. Teachers' resistance encloses fragmentation, timelessness, and adaptability. Although the conditions of a context regulate teachers' resistance, this is not abolished or limited to a unique type of resistance by these means.

Conclusion

In this theoretical framework, I have advanced a discussion from the critical and political sociology of education to ground space for problematizing and understanding the constitution of teacher subjectivities in places beset by violence, such as Colombia.

I began by discussing Slavoj Zizek's concept of violence as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Zizek argues that there are three types of violence: subjective (direct violence executed by identifiable individuals), systemic (violence inherent in systems), and symbolic (violence through language and culture). He maintains that subjective violence is the most visible but least impactful, while systemic and symbolic modes of violence are more challenging to see but have more far-reaching consequences. I presented Zizek's perspective on violence as helpful in understanding the violence faced by teachers in Colombia, which comes from multiple sources and actors.

Then, I elaborated upon the concept of subjectivity and how it applies to teachers in Colombia. I argued that subjectivity is formed through questioning and contesting the social norms and expectations placed upon individuals. I mentioned that societal forces and institutions shape teachers, but they also can resist them and form their subjectivities. Also, teachers may never be fully at ease within society and are constantly in a state of tension. This tension can be a source of subjective constitution. Although teachers in Colombia face violence and oppression from various groups, they can also use their subjectivity to resist these forces and create new possibilities for themselves and their students. It is essential to consider the specific contexts teachers face in Colombia and the importance of listening to their stories.

Finally, I challenge the concept of resistance, particularly for teachers in Colombia facing violence. I described a disagreement on defining resistance, with some arguing for a more theoretical and critical approach. In contrast, others emphasize the importance of recognizing

more minor acts of defiance under challenging situations. I draw attention to how some teachers resist violence in various ways, adapting their methods to their context. I invite everyone to understand that this resistance requires considering the teachers' experiences and the complexities of their situations and contexts.

We, both teachers and researchers, need to invest more in exploring how teachers interact with the complexities, challenges, and consequences of places in violence, which sometimes extend beyond the conflicting economic and curriculum regulations. So, by evidence of what I presented, it is necessary and urgent that educational work connects deeply to a critical understanding of the realities faced in contexts of violence, or it may risk 'losing its soul' (Apple, 1996a).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Phenomenon of Violence in Colombia: Una invitación a hacer memoria

"Hacer memoria" is a phrase which means "to remember" in Spanish. *Hacer memoria* means more than retelling past occurrences. It is an opportunity for someone to recall emotions, meanings, and memories about an experience, event, situation, etc. This chapter explores the concept of "hacer memoria" as a methodology to review literature on issues of violence in Colombia. I decided to approach literature on violence and teachers in Colombia as "hacer memoria" is an act of recalling information, meanings, and experiences in order to understand their impact on the present violence experienced by teachers. Much like "hacer memoria" is a process that can empower marginalized groups to speak their truths and seek justice, while also informing efforts to heal and rebuild, I hope this literature review provides some insights to support the teachers affected by violence.

Hacer memoria can empower people who have been disregarded or marginalized, giving them a chance to speak and say what they have experienced, and leading them to justice (Gaborit, 2006). It is a conversation a person has with the past. *Hacer memoria* needs to be founded on a clear purpose that states what lived experiences we want to recall or bring back to memory, and it should be done to create a route or plan that people can use to repair the present (Pastoriza, 2005). For this chapter, I understand *hacer memoria* as an act of justice to recall and gather different meanings attributed to the violence lived in Colombia to understand what it has meant and how teachers have been affected. In this chapter, I analyze existing efforts to record and learn from these experiences, identifying both strengths and limitations.

La Violencia (Pollock, 1975; Ballvé, 2012) in the case of Latin America was understood by many as natural—and some still understand it this way—and certain levels of it have long

been expected and defined as “a regular feature of the political landscape” (Pollock, 1975, p. 22). Older studies on Colombian violence have described a traditional kind concerning transfers of power (shakedown) and another retaliatory. Blair (2009), referring to the Colombian case of violence, holds that scholars in Colombia have attempted to “describe its presence as a phenomenon” (p. 21) more than to define it.

However, conceptualizing violence in Colombia today will require us to acknowledge how it evolved from “LA VIOLENCIA,” of an armed and political type, into the more heterogenous types of violence, with newer aspects such as sexual, gender, social, racial, etc. The latest piece of violent history in Colombia has been fueled and characterized by drug trafficking, anticommunism, corrupt politics, guerillas, paramilitaries, cartels, and social “readjustment.” The control of trafficking routes and the violent attacks have produced a reordering of the land, an integration of Colombian society (Ballvé, 2013), and a desired linear production of subjects. Drug trafficking has backed dislocating, atrocious events: displacement, massacres, genocide, and kidnapping, leading to a forced readaptation of what Colombians can be, do, or even aspire to become. This phenomenon relates to the interaction Negri (1989) described between State violence and social integration,

> [T]here exists neither a linear process of social integration, not a simultaneous contradiction between the growth of working-class consciousness and the crisis of capitalism. Rather, the system tends towards disintegration. Social integration comes about through war—or rather, through the fear of war. Moreover, systems of domination are overdetermined by state violence. (p. 213).

In analyzing the violent internal war of Colombia, Ballvé (2012, 2013) suggested that State and paramilitary relations perpetuated State formation by employing land grabbing, which

ended in the construction of auto-(para-)legislated land. Consequently, on these lands, all that seemed leftist was targeted. He states, "Fueled by zealous anticommunism, the paramilitaries slaughtered thousands of innocent civilians accused of harbouring leftist sympathies" (p. 610). From banana unions and teacher unions to an entire political party (See *Genocidio Político: el Caso de la Unión Patriótica en Colombia*), people who could have a connection with left-wing ideologies were attacked.

Workers, citizens, activists—civilians—were assassinated, sometimes for simply 'being in the wrong place.' Former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe Velez provided an example of this. Talking about the 19 victims of extrajudicial executions in 2008, he said, "los jovenes de Soacha no fueron a recoger café" [the young kids of Soacha were not harvesting coffee]. He infers that they were not doing something not legal at the place where they were killed. In this case of *falsos positivos* [extrajudicial killings] in Soacha [Municipality of the metropolitan area of Bogota, Colombia], 19 young men were assassinated and fraudulently identified as guerrilla members. In total, members of the Colombian army executed about 6,402 innocent people without cause and falsely identified them as enemy fighters. Also, it was a common practice to accuse and condemn civilians publicly before investigating their deaths. Recently, former military members have confessed their participation in these killings and asked for forgiveness from the victims' families (Pardo, 2022).

That systematic violence engendered social activism, disobedience, and silencing and fragmentation. Novelli (2009b) explains violence in Colombia, arguing that the unequal distribution of wealth and political power have been combined with government failure and, meanwhile, "the bullet and the bomb have been the preferred option for conflict resolution" (p. 7). I would complement this by saying that state absence alone does not lead to violence. Instead,

violence occurs when it finds worsened forms of social control and a lack of response to newer social problems (Oquist, 1978).

Another aspect that may contribute to exploring how teachers deal with violence is Freire's proposed culture of silence. Freire (1985) stated that "understanding the culture of silence presupposes an analysis of dependence as a relational phenomenon that gives rise to different forms of being, of thinking, of expression, to those of the culture of silence and those of the culture that 'has a voice'" (p. 72). He explained that dependence results from the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators, which causes a dominated consciousness not to be sufficiently distanced from reality. This distancing, in turn, obstructs knowing the world critically.

Freire centred the relationship between the Metropolis (the North) and Latin America (the South) to analyze the phenomenon of domination and recognized silence as not critically acting on the world. However, in this sense, silence sounds more like a choice when, in fact, teachers have been silenced in Latin America, and I refer with greater certainty to the Colombian case. However, what is more critical in that silencing is that they have created options. People in Colombia and other places of violent silencing have found, in and through it, various forms of political expression, of sociality, of contesting and living. In this regard, referring to the case of Sri Lanka, Lawrence (2000) stated,

> In this region of protracted war, people live with many kinds of silences: protective silences, some silences that may be understood as empowering—and the muteness of intimidation, trauma, erasure, and loss. "Silencing" and denial are standard coping practices widely reported in contexts of violence where there have been large numbers of "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions. (p. 178)

In addition, standing by the weakness in the conceptualization of resistance that Shamai (2006) adverted, issues of gender and race must be considered when exploring the constitution of teacher subjectivities in places of violence. In the last two decades, teachers' activism and work have been challenged with different' tactics of dismissal and engagement', and these domesticating and managing forms of teachers' contestation have significantly impacted specific groups of teachers.

Violence has taken forms of revolution and repression, insurgency, and institutional armed forces of the State. It has been tested and moulded in diversified forms, and different actors have instigated it. Violence has been part of a political and economic plan, as argued by Montesinos (2013): "The violent reordering of the Colombian society over the last two decades can be seen to display characteristic features of the dispossession wrought through capitalist development" (p. 173). Violence has been a political strategy and has permeated the governmental institutions.

For the following section, I searched *SciELO Colombia, Biblioteca Digital Colombiana,* and *Repositorio Universidad Nacional de Colombia*, gathering 127 academic articles and books with titles including *violencia* or *docentes* or *maestros*. The literature on violence in Colombia is vast, with some texts dating back to the 1960's. To examine all the historical and abundant records of violence in Colombia that resulted from the academic and theoretical literature review was beyond the limits and goals of this chapter. Instead, I focused on literature discussing events in the last two decades in Colombia involving the State, teachers, and violence.

Who has listened to educators in Colombia, and how? A research literature review[1]

There two governmental initiatives led by the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica [Historic Memory National Center], which welcomed the voices of teachers regarding peace construction projects, and amid the armed conflict in Colombia. One of these projects is *Red de Maestras y Maestros por la Memoria Histórica y la Paz de Colombia* [Network of Teachers for the Historical Memory and Peace of Colombia] (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2019). The other is *Memorias que Transforman* [Memories that Transform] (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018).

The first project gathered around "40 teachers to exchange experiences and knowledge on how to approach historic memory in the classroom" in August 2019. Both teachers and civil servants from the Historic Memory National Center indicated that they are doing this toward peacebuilding and recognize themselves as fundamental actors in such a process. Also, they do it to acknowledge the acts of violence lived in these places by constructing narratives for comprehending and avoiding the repetition of violence. The second project, from 2018, works with the same population, involving the same network of teachers plus students and local researchers, but oriented towards making pedagogical resources to spark discussion in the classroom.

Similarly, Novelli (2009) led over 50 semi-structured interviews in Cali, Bogotá, Medellin, Buenaventura and rural areas with trade unionists, insiders from a database on human rights, jurists, and researchers on popular education. This research sought to analyze how political violence influenced teachers and their trade union organization and scrutinize

[1] This section is the literature review of the published article "Listening to Emilce and Pedro: Exploring the subjective constitutions of teachers amid violence," which will be presented in the upcoming chapter. I decided to include this section here to help the readers locate the information based on the content.

opportunities developed to resolve the lack of state protection for teachers. Novelli (2009) elucidated the links between politicians and right-wing paramilitary organizations when discussing political violence in Colombia. From the 90s to the date of his research, these groups "have been responsible for the vast majority of political violence against the civilian population including massacres, selective assassinations, rape, torture and forced disappearances" (Novelli, 2009, p. 191). He stated that right-wing paramilitary organizations had attacked anyone who stood against the government's political and economic goals. Novelli also mentioned legal strategies to seek protection—human rights commissions to raise awareness and international support to secure human rights—as opportunities to counterattack political violence against teachers.

Along these lines, Becerra, Infante, and Cortes (2012) explored memory as a teaching tool in response to systematizing significant experiences of educators. The researchers argued that orality became an option to valorize the teacher subject and the student's voice which have been the focus of violence since the 90s. They emphasized that orality had been repressed by the permanent and endemic violence experienced in Colombia and mentioned that some "work initiatives [were] silenced and subjected at school to processes of 'invisibility' by a certain type of official discourse" (Becerra et al., 2012, p. 23). Such initiatives attempted to contribute to materializing "the truth", but some were led and regulated by governmental agencies and likely supported the official discourse. Nonetheless, their study presented a valuable and informative work addressing memory and teachers, which is pertinent in setting the tone for furthering such discussion in Colombia.

The research presented in this section (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018; 2019; Novelli, 2009; Becerra et al., 2012) and other research (Chávez Salazar et al., 2016;

Novelli, 2010; Ortegón, 2017; Osorio González, 2016) exploring teachers amid armed conflict or violence, and which were consulted for the literature review of this research project, employed participatory action, narratives, and oral history approaches. They allowed teachers to participate, retell their stories, and plan ways to avoid the repetition of violence.

However, although these projects considered teachers' stories amid the armed conflict, it was unclear whether teacher participants reflected on what it means to be a teacher and teach amid violence. These projects did not allow a co-construction of the meaning of docente nor discussed ways (e.g., pedagogies) to prepare teachers to deal with forms of violence (e.g., war, school shootings, political hate speech, etc.). It was unclear how the teacher community and the community, in general, could engage with the outcomes of these projects to contribute to understanding what it means to be a teacher and teach amid violence.

Given teachers' risks in these contexts, investigating the question of what it means to be a teacher in Colombia is relevant to education and prospective teachers. Studying the lived meaning of things as a phenomenon and attempting to redescribe and reinterpret it offers insights into understanding it (van Manen, 2016). Consequently, studying the lived meaning of being a teacher amid violence and attempting to redescribe and reinterpret it may contribute to understanding the teaching profession and possibly prepare teachers more wholly to teach amid the post-violence context.

To conclude this review, I consider it relevant to include Paez's (2017) research study on life history since it sheds light on a possible venue to explore what it means to be a teacher and to teach amid violence in Colombia. In this study, she inquired about the armed conflict and political violence which affect the school and the teachers in Colombia. Paez (2017) pondered how teachers have been considered military targets and have had to limit their teaching practices

to survive. Also, in her article, the author reflected on how subjective narratives foster the strengthening of subjects and collectives, create a space for acknowledging political subjectivity, and nurture a dialogue inclusive of diverse political standpoints. Paez (2017) articulated a powerful concern,

> Many teachers have been forced to coexist in spaces where conflict and political violence have become naturalized. Still, it is to this extent that the urgency of recognizing them as a place of enunciation emerges. Although they are part of civil society like many victims, they must be singled out and recognized as subjects with characteristics developed by the fact of being teachers […]. (p. 803)

Although the methodological aspects and how she interacted and shared authority with the teachers are not included in her manuscript, her study shows the importance of recognizing teachers in their subjective positions when responding to contextualities.

Overall, I found the initiatives and research projects in this section informative and pertinent to exploring how docentes constitute their subjectivities amid forms of violence in Colombia. They also invite reflection on critical initiatives that call docentes into action, principally in response to the repressive silence they had endured. Such initiatives may help to construct collective ways to explore and understand what it means to teach and be teachers in Colombia amid violence.

Chapter 3: Pilot Study

In this chapter, I will introduce the article *Listening to Emilce and Pedro: Exploring the subjective constitutions of teachers amid violence* (Hernandez, 2023). This article discusses what it means to be a teacher and to teach amid violence in Colombia and conversation as a research method to explore violence. It describes the context where teachers teach amid violence, examines violence and educators as discussed in the mass media and X (Former Twitter)—the latter being the public arena where political and social debates occur, challenges the official definition of education and teaching, and presents the conversations sustained with two Colombian teachers.

Listening to Emilce and Pedro: Exploring the subjective constitutions of teachers amid violence[2]

Docentes[3] in Colombia have had to work in the middle of a very fluid and multilayered violence, with official records showing them as victims since the 1980s. As a result, they often decide to teach a topic against the interests of powerful political groups or advise children not to join illegal armed groups, which place them in the epicentre of violent attacks. Violence against teachers in Colombia raised the primary goal of this inquiry: to explore what it means to teach and be a teacher amid violence. This article contributes to raising awareness about teachers' lived experiences amid the forms of violence that affect them (i.e., war, school shootings, political hate speech, etc.) and to evaluate research methods that help study teachers' lived experiences amid violence.

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[2] This article was published in Teaching and Teacher Education. Recommended citation: Hernández Varona, W. (2023). Listening to Emilce and Pedro: Exploring the subjective constitutions of teachers amid violence. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 132,* 104260 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104260

[3] Spanish word for *teachers*. Both words are used interchangeably in this article. *Docente* is used in sign of support and to raise awareness for the Colombian teachers dealing with violence.

In the first section, I describe violence in Colombia as experienced by teachers, focusing on armed violence and political hate speech. Then, I elaborate on how the Colombian government defined "docente" and challenge that definition from the voices of the participating teachers. Teachers' stories challenge the government's definition of docente, which requires bringing in their voices at this point. After, I will present a literature review of research projects investigating how teachers have interacted with violence in Colombia [This literature review was removed and presented in Chapter 2]. I reflect that describing the context in this way is necessary to illustrate the teachers' conditions and help clarify the discussion and conclusion in this article.

In the second section, I present a pilot study I conducted using an oral history approach. There, I argue why oral history as a methodology, and conversation as a method, offer an opportunity to gain insights into teachers' stories to increase understanding of the constitution of teacher subjectivities as mediated by the contextual violence they coexist with. Then, I introduce the stories of Emilce (who decided to use her real name) and Pedro (who preferred a pseudonym), two rural educators who talked to me about their experiences teaching and living in rural areas in the South of Colombia. Emilce has ten years of experience as a teacher, and Pedro has more than 25 years.

Finally, I conclude that conversing and reflecting could help teachers send a message against the forms of violence they confront daily. Also, conversations with teachers could facilitate co-constructing what being a teacher amid violence means and challenge the current governmental definition of "docente." Therefore, I propose that a well-planned reflective interaction between the researcher and the participating teachers is needed to understand what it means to teach and be a teacher amid violence.

Docentes Amid Violence in Colombia: A Description of The Context

Violence is a changing, multilayering, and context-dependent concept, and it may have different and contrasted meanings depending on where it is observed (Blair Trujillo, 2009). Therefore, a contextual description of this violence is necessary before exploring teachers' lived experiences amid violence in Colombia. For example, if I were to explain today's violence in Colombia, I would have to list social abandonment, drug trafficking, legal and illegal armed groups, politics and politicians, and the state as the most salient components. Novelli (2009), moreover, added that violence in Colombia results from the unequal distribution of wealth and political power, which coincided with government failure, and stated that "the bullet and the bomb have been the preferred option for conflict resolution" (p. 191).

In this sense, I would argue that state absence alone does not lead to violence. Instead, violence occurs when it finds worsened forms of social control and a lack of alternative options to respond to newer social problems (Oquist, 1978). As a result of revolution or repression, insurgency or official representation of the state, violence has been tested and molded in diversified forms. It has been instigated by multiple actors in Colombia. In Colombia, armed violence wears different outfits. Violence has been institutionalized, condemned, and it has been taught and learned.

In Colombia, an internal war has taken place since the 60's—has taken, in present perfect—orchestrating a complex clash between guerrillas, paramilitary groups, drug cartels, and the government's armed forces. This internal war confines and affects the civic population. From then on, violence has buried every corner of Colombia, affected all, some terribly more than others, and adopted different shapes and regulated different fields. Education, one of the affected fields, has been, in many cases, the target of violent acts. These acts have arisen for various

reasons, most commonly linking education and teachers to Marxism or socialism and depicting them as leftist activists.

To build a more concrete representation of the armed violence—docentes relation in Colombia, it is relevant to address that "1579 teachers were assassinated in the context of the armed conflict, with 68% being selective assassination". (Ibarguen, 2019, par. 1). Most recently, however, violent acts have incorporated a newer form: political hate speech (I will expand on this violence against teachers in the next subsection.) Similarly, a research study by Fundación Compartir concluded that teachers are often viewed as a military target in rural Colombia (Semana Rural, 2019). Unfortunately, because of this armed violence, some educators fear speaking up and do not contest or respond to what is said about them.

Public scrutiny and criticism of educators and their performance happen daily. However, this scrutiny and criticism are acute and make educators insecure in responding because powerful and violent groups constantly target them. Scrutiny and criticism must happen, and I encourage them as it calls for improvement and development of the teaching profession. However, critics must acknowledge that violent attacks hinder educators' will to respond. Violence plays a role in how teachers voice their stories of being teachers, in how they teach, and in how they constitute their teacher subjectivities.

Citizens of Colombia are at constant risk of experiencing violence—or already have experienced it—in any form. Yet placed in the middle of this violence are the docentes. As reported by the BBC, teachers are on the list of the most dangerous professions in Colombia (Wallace, 2011). Unfortunately, this news article did not mention other jobs. Still, given the numbers of educators assassinated (949), threatened (4,003), displaced (1,092), disappeared (60) and refugees (70) between the years 2000 and 2010 alone, one can easily compare educators to

the military in terms of risks. Docentes are silenced and denied an opportunity to tell how they have experienced violence. As stated by Wallace, "The key to the problem is that the teacher, as part of his job, has to interpret the reality of the environment where he lives, 'and some armed men don't like that'" (par. 14). Other professions do not require critically interpreting their environment and leading a group of people—the students—when doing so.

Conceptualizing the violence experienced in Colombia in a few lines would be imprecise and incomplete. Extensive documents carry the accounts of survivors of the longest war in Latin America, one of the most devastating. This article focuses on discussing the forms of violence that affect educators. Now, I will continue to elaborate on the political hate speech targeting educators in Colombia.

Docentes and Political Hate Speech

Since 2000, political hate speech has targeted members of opposition political groups in Colombia (Piazza, 2020). Frequently labelled as opposition members despite occupying no formal political role, docentes are criticized by other actors—politicians—and faced with yet another form of violence. In addition, some politicians have charged education and educators from their position of power and hurled different accusations through Twitter—this being the most recent contentious arena to do so. However, traditional media (e.g., newspapers, radio, tv) serves that aim, too. Let us explore several concrete examples of political hatred against teachers occurring in 2018–22.

"In the university, they [students] are not taught to debate. Let's hope they can at least understand this message […] Professors are afraid of debating. They only have the strength to slander" (Semana, 2018, para 2). These words were part of a speech delivered by the former president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, in the 2018 presidential campaign. His accusations

encouraged the Twitter trend #MiProfeSeRespeta [#RespectMyTeacher], unleashing tweets from politicians, teachers, and citizens, both against and in favour of Uribe's indictments against educators.

María Fernanda Cabal, a senator affiliated with the right-wing political party instated and run by Uribe Velez, caused a similar episode. Her tweet read: "Shameless. How much longer do we have to put up with these anarchists who live off the taxes of the Colombians? It is time to subsidize the demand for quality private education. No more slavery of the poorest receiving lousy education" (María Fernanda Cabal, 2020). With around 3500 likes and almost 2000 retweets, this statement generated controversy and contributed to the image of educators and education. Her adherents and media vastly disseminated Cabal's opinion on teachers and public education. People can find in the comments of her tweet threats of physical violence against teachers (e.g., "use the strong hand of the state, the necessary force, to safeguard the peace and tranquillity of all"; "eradicate" or "finish" teachers).

A more recent incident took place on March 17th, 2021, when the mayor of a city in Santander accused teachers of "earning [the money] sitting down without going to work" (Noticias Caracol, 2021). Although a controversial accusation, it is not unique. Docentes are constantly described from this assumption. Lastly, on May 10th, 2022, Enrique Peñalosa (2022), former mayor of Bogota, tweeted, "That is what FECODE is dedicated to: doing politics. Not to improving the quality of children's education. That is the reason for the poor results that our children obtain in international tests". FECODE (the Colombian Federation of Education Workers) and educators, in general, are targets of political hatred constantly. Without an opportunity to contest a tweet, analyze the allegations against them, or be given the same dissemination to their responses, docentes are targeted by politicians like Peñalosa, who can

share these hateful discourses publicly and whose tweets can reach thousands of Colombians within minutes.

Hate rhetoric against teachers is shared as well in traditional media. For example, the citizens of Colombia are presented daily with columns titled “The teachers: the true problem of education in Colombia” (Lopera, F, 2017) and “Teachers threatened for assigning too much homework” (El Tiempo, 2021). Even misleading news like “Teachers from Bogotá protest against the new Minister of Education” (Valbuena, 2018), in which the journalist who wrote the report acknowledged later that teachers were protesting for privatizing measurements targeting public schools in the capital of Colombia. The issue evidenced here is twofold: a campaign against docentes in the media and social circumstances that hinder teachers from teaching and being teachers.

To conclude, in the case of Colombia, it is evident that members of politically dominant groups employ hateful discourses to control and threaten educators. Perry et al. (2020) argued that “dominant groups use [hate crimes] to reconstruct their authority and remind victims of their boundaries and limits” (p. 196). Members of the political group ruling the state employ hate rhetoric when they see that docentes may step outside the fixed spaces they are meant to occupy—which I will explore in the following subsection. Such rhetoric “depicts ‘others’ as ‘different,’ deviant, dangerous, and inferior, unlocking the ‘permission to hate’ and further legitimating hate crimes and mistreatment against certain oppressed groups” (Perry et al., 2020, p. 196). In a country like Colombia, where violence escalates quickly from words to physical actions, politicians disseminating hate speech must reflect on the effects and damages their discourse causes to the lives of teachers.

Challenging the Government's Representation of Education and Teaching

In this subsection, I elaborate on the government's definition of docente and challenge it from some participating teachers' experiences. The Ministry of Education defines educators in Colombia as "the people who carry out academic work directly and personally with the students of educational establishments in their teaching-learning process" (Ministerio de Educación de Colombia., 2002, p. 1). Also, it defines them as someone who may conduct "activities linked with organizations or institutions in the sector that directly or indirectly affect education" (Ministerio de Educación de Colombia., 2002, p. 1). The Ministry's definition, however, does not explain how docentes must engage with community organizations and institutions or recognizes teachers' relationship with social issues outside the classroom and school. In decree 1278, article 4, The Ministry of Education defines the teaching function as,

> […] that of a professional nature that implies the direct realization of the systematic teaching-learning processes, which includes the diagnosis, planning, execution and evaluation of the same processes and their results, and other educational activities within the framework of the institutional, educational project of educational establishments. (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1.)

The function of the docente, as depicted in article 4, places them within the classroom and school setting and only mentions their interaction with the external stakeholders as necessary "to assist for the community, especially parents of the learners." However, this view underestimates the docentes' vast interaction with all community members, not just parents, and the risks that target them—for being teachers—inside and outside the classroom. Here, it is important to ponder how the Ministry of Education defines and expects educators to interact, primarily because this decree rules the state's relations with the teachers at its service. Also,

anything teachers do that is not defined in the norm will be an overreach or a breach of the legal contract, at least insofar as it is viewed as being political.

The above is the official state definition of the role of educators in Colombia and what they must legally be and do. However, it is a limiting and incomplete description of what educators have had to do amidst so many social inequalities. This definition underestimates the vast array of functions a docente fulfills daily. For instance, Pedro contends that,

> When we are here, you feed the student at your school, you lend your horse so that the community can move around, you buy coloured pencils, you give things away, you know who arrived having had breakfast, you know who did not have breakfast, you know a lot about the human part of the child and then you start doing a job that, well, you were not paid for that, but you do it because it is your work. (Talk with Pedro, p. 29).

Pedro also added that "Being a teacher is a very personal thing. It is like an exchange of emotions with students. It is about what good I can bring out of each child and not just assess whether they know or do not know" (Talk with Pedro, p. 28). Pedro's definition challenges the official understanding of what an educator is and does put out by the Ministry of Education.

Similarly, Emilce, who works in a rural area, discussed her experience at an impoverished school with me. She mentioned how all teachers there are very committed to the school, and regardless of the school's economic conditions, they are always on the frontline struggling and teaching. Yet, inappropriately, the official definition of a teacher falls short of who she is and what she does. She is beyond the characteristics and descriptions of a teacher as regarded by the Ministry of Education. I spent about 10 min talking to her particularly about how I could represent more genuinely what she did, the role she enacted. In her retelling, I saw Emilce, the farmer, the social worker, the therapist, the explorer, and the builder.

I observed a diversification of the teaching profession: farmer, social worker, therapist, etc., that does not fit the official description of docente and teaching. Two questions arise—how did the governmental definition of a teacher relate to the effects of violence against teachers in Colombia? And would a state-led redefinition of what it means to be a teacher amid violence bring safer conditions for teachers in Colombia? Exploring the answers to these questions is necessary to understand how violence may affect teachers and teaching in the forms addressed in this article.

One can argue that the official discourse about docentes may be a form of violence affecting how teachers constitute themselves as subjects. This view is consistent with how Barrera Castañeda (2019) perceives Latin American subjectivities. She argues that although people constitute their subjectivities in part through institutional systems (and hence the importance of the official definition), there is yet another way. Barrera Castañeda (2019) affirms that "new subjectivities emerged freed [emphasis added] from universal forms of institutionalized power to these days" (p. 240). She insists on advancing this approach to new subjectivities so we, Latinos, understand our historical and sociocultural settings. Barrera Castañeda (2019) condemns that "The work of colonization has been to create dependency from foreign identifications" (p. 245) and to individualize the subject. Such an approach to subjectivities enables exploring new, contending subjectivities. It allows imagining the subject as the bearer of decision-making, proposing abilities, and creativity.

It is also important to note that the gap between the official discourse of what it means to teach and be a teacher and the tasks assumed by teachers is a phenomenon that transcends the Colombian case. For example, Bunting (2010) and Torrence and Forde (2016) discuss discrepancies between policies or expectations of what it means to be a teacher and the realities

of teachers. Concretely for this article, I aimed to explore what it means to teach and be a teacher amid violence in Colombia. Thus, I needed to investigate how teachers have participated in previous research addressing these matters. In the upcoming subsection, I will review governmental projects and research literature conducted in the last 15 years in Colombia, which explored violence, armed conflict, and educators' accounts of what it means to teach and be a teacher amid violence.

…

The phenomenon of teachers amid violence encloses a critical normative issue that is advocated and/or disregarded even by governmental agencies. In Colombia, contexts staging the first-person accounts have been historically ignored; however, we should embrace that "[m]eaning can be found in the form and structure of the recorded narratives, and in the silences therein, as well as in what is actually said" (High, 2015, p. 10). As outlined, teachers are silenced and presented as obstacles to societal betterment. Thus, the violence against teachers has led me to reflect on how teachers have been considered to redescribe and reinterpret teaching amid violence in Colombia to understand what it means to be a teacher there.

This research aimed to explore what it means to teach and be a teacher amid violence and how to adopt conversation as a research method to explore that phenomenon. I consider this article contributes, on the one hand, to the discussion on the relevance of designing trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teacher education. On the other hand, it raises awareness in teacher education programs about teachers' lived experiences amid the rampant forms of violence that affect them (i.e., war, school shootings, political hate speech, etc.). To achieve that, I deemed it essential to describe the context of violence experienced by the teachers who participated in this pilot study and to illustrate their social conditions to help clarify the discussion and conclusions

found later in this article. Now, I will introduce the experiences and perspectives of two rural school teachers about violence.

Methodological approach

I conducted this pilot study (Vivar et al., 2007) to explore my researcher skills and phenomenological attitude when conversing with docentes, to practice how to allow docentes to express without constraint about violence, and to identify what research aspects (e.g., questions, techniques, methods) needed restructuring to allow an in-depth sharing of the teachers' experiences with violence. I started by reconstructing the educators' understanding of what teaching amid violence means so that we could later discuss how violence may have affected their teaching and themselves as teachers. I valued their stories and listened to their retelling of what they had lived. Then, we discussed what it means to teach in their contexts. Emilce and Pedro were the two rural docentes who agreed to talk to me about their experiences teaching in rural areas and about violence. Our talks were in Spanish, video recorded, and the excerpts used in this article were translated into English. Emilce and Pedro teach in the departments of Huila and Caquetá, located in the south of Colombia. They responded to a call for research participants I shared with teachers' groups and colleagues.

I employed oral history to get to know the teachers' lived experiences with violence and to attempt to understand what it means to teach in such conditions. High (2015), in this regard, discussed the relevance of oral history in comprehending the effects of mass violence and displacement. He showed that oral history helps to understand issues ranging from resistance to mass violence. Also, High (2015) considered that "[f]irst-person narratives give us unique 'glimpses into the lived interior' of forced displacement and its aftermath." (p. 9). Thus, oral

history offers excellent support to articulate this inquiry on how teachers constitute subjectivities in rural areas amid forms of violence in Colombia.

I approached oral history more as a conversational or co-created narrative between subjects (De Garay, 1999; Portelli, 2019). I understand a conversation as a means to discuss interests and express one's political, ethical, and aesthetic views. "The conversation can be understood as a favourable space par excellence for the expression of the subjectivities of the people involved." (Campesato & Bonafe, 2019, p. 51). Through conversation, a subject can practise being in contact with the other and experiencing the otherness that both conversation flow and the formation of one's subjectivity enclose. In this research, the conversations served as an exercise where the teachers retold their lived experiences, and I listened to them and asked questions seeking understanding.

Before I elaborate on our conversations, I must position myself. I am a teacher from Colombia residing in a foreign country, with training and experience in foreign language teaching. I am pursuing doctoral studies in education and am interested in exploring how teachers constitute their subjectivities amid different forms of violence. I wanted to converse with teachers from rural areas to learn about their routines, stories, and understandings of what a teacher does and is obliged to do. I wanted to find out if they recognized violence in their communities and their teaching exercises. This article describes a preliminary and exploratory inquiry that may inform my doctoral dissertation and includes researcher self-reflecting points.

I will retell Emilce's and Pedro's stories in the upcoming subsection. I will describe how I interacted with them and interweave my reactions to the elements they discussed during the conversations. My interest was not to analyze their stories but to experience and allow our interactions to contribute to exploring conversation as a research method. I do so to withdraw

from the traditional analysis of results and discussion sections since I understand the current inquiry as "oriented to the lifeworld as we immediately experience it—prereflectively rather than as we conceptualize, theorize, categorize, or reflect on it" (van Manen, 2015, p. 40). Conversing with rural educators should also give us insights into their lived experiences, allowing us, teachers, to co-construct meanings and answers to the questions guiding this inquiry.

Listening to Emilce and Pedro

Conversing with these two rural educators, I had to hold back from making remarks constantly to not show my admiration for the titanic tasks they do daily at their workplaces—I had to listen. I met twice with each educator separately, conversing for up to 3 h. These conversations followed some short asynchronous interactions—sharing pictures of their work and sharing other stories they initially forgot. My role in the conversations was more of a listener who wanted clarity on specific topics. Initially, I had considered defining the role of teachers, their interactions with the community and their understanding or experiences with violence. However, I was fortunate to have listened to emerging comments on these and other aspects.

The definition of 'docentes' and the social perception of teaching

We discussed how they defined their profession of docentes and how certain factors influence such definitions. When conversing with Pedro, for instance, he confronted me directly, indicating how teachers like me—he then clarified that he meant a university instructor, which I was not, who mainly "sits at a desk"—have little understanding of what happens in the classroom, or what being a teacher fully involves. He clarified further, saying that most university instructors,

> See the teaching work and the teacher, set up in a theoretical framework, saying this is so and so [He pauses]. This child passed, and this one failed. You know, you don't. They

> leave aside the human part when, to say something, all of us who are teachers in Caquetá, we feed the students at our schools, we lend our horse to the community, we share colored pencils, we give things away, we know who came having had breakfast, we know who did not have breakfast, we see a lot of the human part of the child, and then we start doing a job that, well, we were not paid for. Still, it is what we have to do. (Talk with Pedro, p. 29)

As a researcher, I was interested in listening to him, his story and how he talked about his students. As a teacher, I respected his experience. In a conversation, it is vital to learn how to balance the researcher and teacher I am and how or when to ask for clarification and further details.

I tried not to offer comments during the conversation, but this time I felt I owed him my opinion about his acts. I accepted his comments about the distant and likely decontextualized doctoral student I was because I understood that in Pedro's context, solely thinking and ideating theoretical solutions is ineffective. In his context, Pedro needs to take immediate action, plan, act, and be an active agent in the school, the community, and with the students—thinking theory alone does not respond quickly enough to their emerging needs.

My reaction while listening was that "I ha[d] not done anything as a teacher compared to what [he] ha[s] done" (Talk with Pedro, p. 29). That troubled me. It was difficult for me to have come this far, far away from Colombia, to notice something happening there, where I came from. I have already read that stepping out far enough to gaze better at a phenomenon is necessary. However, to experience that—and to find someone holding me accountable for it—was newer to me.

Emilce had a similar way of defining the profession. As I previously revealed, the docente she enacts differs from what appears to be defined in the dictionary. [Emilce boldly added, "No!"]. I told her that when I listened to her, how she had constructed the docente she is, I saw Emilce, the farm worker, the social worker, the explorer, the therapist. In other words, her experience displayed a multilayering teacher profession and the teacher subject. Emilce's title of docente, as defined by the Ministry of Education, does not fit. The definition does not do justice to the docente she enacts. She is beyond the characteristics and purposes of a docente portrayed by the media, also. She is the teacher she needs to be regarding the conditions of the context where she teaches. Riding a horse for over 3 hours to go to work, as she does, already adds to her teacher tasks and suggests not seeing her profession as just another job. This action reflects more a vocation, something more deeply ingrained and meaningful.

Despite constituting diverse practical teacher subjectivities, Emilce mentioned how society might not think well of her and may even discourage her profession. She explained, "Society, well, not all society, has the idea that all teachers face no efforts to earn their salaries. They imagine us sitting in classrooms when they want to see us as construction workers, under rain or sun" (Talk with Emilce, p. 21). She added that whenever teachers go on strikes, demanding better work conditions for them or better facilities for students, "[People] think [teachers] just want to whine […] [People] do not think [we] are making efforts to do things better" (Talk with Emilce, p. 22).

Docentes and community involvement

Our conversations touched on another important aspect: their involvement with the community. Along with our discussions, Emilce and Pedro shared stories of experiences with their immediate communities and how they interacted with them outside of the school settings.

Emilce, for instance, mentioned how proud she was of selling bread and vegetables and organizing with school parents and other inhabitants to paint the school and do its maintenance. These collective initiatives showed support and somehow sent a message—she wanted to show everyone why she was a teacher there.

On the other hand, rather negatively, Emilce had to deal with some people: a friend, her uncle, her sister, a school mother, and even her boyfriend, who believed that the role of the teacher was just a person standing in front of a board who dictates some information to a group of children and does nothing else. That is the assumption some have of her profession, which she has confronted on different occasions. For instance, Emilce recalled how in a gathering, she was challenged by a man who questioned why she was teaching in a rural school if she had a master's degree. The man suggested Emilce could work in the city, having more advantages, because she had a graduate diploma. Emilce's sister and the mother of one of her students have told her they support this man's idea.

Pedro had found a way to measure his quality of being a docente while interacting with the community. He said being a teacher is being greeted by his students and the community with a wave wherever you go. It is not about whether students look down or walk the other way when they see you. For Pedro, "Being a teacher is when they look at you on the street, they shake your hand, they smile and say goodbye. That means that you left a mark on that child, and that is very satisfactory" (Talk with Pedro, p. 31). He constantly said that being a teacher is about changing children's lives, positively impacting them, and being well-received in his community.

Pedro then mentioned how he escapes the school walls—the fixed squares. He shared,

> I arrive every day with seven goats, two sheep and a calf. 3, 4, 5 children follow me along to the school […] all the children in the area when I pass by with the sheep, they come

> along, and then I tell them that is a Dorper, blah blah blah […] that calf, it is a something, something […] This one produces that much milk [pause]. And then, in that coming and going, the children learn something from school.

Whether it is the community or the environment which allows Pedro to move out from the classroom to have these experiences or his agentic self who seizes the opportunity and does what is beyond his teaching duties, Pedro's story highlights something important. There was a teacher—community interaction, the teacher living the community and a community spawning the teacher subjectivities—both shaping, maybe aiding each other.

During our conversations, I mentioned how unusual this relationship can be in big cities and how I had never experienced it teaching or seen colleagues doing so. Both Emilce and Pedro argued that these smaller local communities tend to be more grateful and welcome any initiatives for their betterment. However, Pedro did mention how newly hired teachers get out of their cars, do not "get their boots dirty", and hop in their cars and drive away by the end of the week, with little interest shown in being there for the community. Indeed, violence does not scare Emilce and Pedro away, but I wonder if it does scare these novice teachers Pedro mentioned. It may be possible that an uninvolved or disengaged teaching-community relationship may keep these teachers safe. However, this situation requires further inquiry before offering a concluding statement.

Docentes and violence

Another aspect that we discussed was the different forms of violence that interacted with them and their teaching. Pedro's stories of violence were encountered from the beginning to the end of our conversation and displayed nuances. For instance, he narrated how he and his wife—pregnant at the time—were walking down from his house once when a helicopter from the

Colombian military started shooting nearby, and men began a fast-rope insertion. Also, how the guerrillas began to kill people and dump them by the river; how they would kill children, who were supposedly thieves; how they killed people for snitching. He narrated, "At that time, my wife, when she went to the river once, she found a young boy of about ten years old, she found him dead. My wife told me we should not live in this place anymore" (Talk with Pedro, p. 21). His stories of violence were shockingly many, and he indicated candidly that he had many more to share in other talks.

As Pedro described it, you learn to live with violence. Pedro explained how he and other town inhabitants live with their backs against the wall:

> If you collaborate in a certain way, then you are a collaborator, and someone notices that. With ordinary justice, someone will tell you, 'He is a collaborator', and that's it. But with others, if you do not collaborate, then you have serious problems, say the guerrillas (Talk with Pedro, p. 24).

Frankly, what I found most astonishing is how he talked about his way of living there and contradictorily, at least to me, how he felt about it. Pedro insisted that people in other areas, in the cities, could never understand this because they do not know the context. It is difficult to live where he is: "That is why it is difficult because you have to walk [*caminar en*] a very fine line, so as not to go one way or the other". But, and here is the part that bewildered me the most, he emphatically said, "Of course, here everyone lives happily […] Because it is as […] look, you become familiar with violence". At that moment, I did not want to say anything inappropriate. Instead, I focused on understanding why and how he could still manage to do a lot for his school and community, being very limited by these armed groups and such a degree of violence.

When I asked Emilce if she saw any violence around her school, she argued that people in the countryside in Colombia could not tell the difference anymore between violence and non-violence, as this has been every day for them for so long. She added that she usually hears that the community apparently appreciated illegal groups even more than the official authority—the national army or the police—for their work. She said, "These people control, they create their own laws, that you cannot steal, that if someone behaves wrong, they will pay you a visit and talk to you" (Talk with Emilce, p. 31). In their way, and despite the violent means they use to enforce it, these groups have created structures that facilitate a type of functioning of their local community.

An inhabitant of that area told Emilce that there was so much robbery of farms and cattle in the 80s and 90s before these groups came, and after they got there, it became better and safer. So, in these zones, the inhabitants see illegal armed groups as "peacekeepers", ironically, because they do not believe strongly in the military or the police. However, Emilce does not see this as a problem. Although she acknowledged that armed groups, both legal and illegal, have done bad things to these regions, she does not see it as a form of violence, not a form to fear, at least. At this moment, I asked her if these aspects had modified or affected the teacher she was. She responded with a clear no. She suggested that being a teacher is to prepare others to be ready for life. In this sense, she wants her students to see their other life options, not just join an illegal armed group. However, she insisted this had not changed her.

Emilce sounds uneasy at this point. While talking about this, she seems confident but needs more information or interest to continue elaborating. I took from that part of our conversation that, as she had described earlier, this form of violence is part of our inheritance,

part of our landscape, part of who we are, and pointing the finger at one responsible was not her interest.

Conclusion

Conversing with Emilce and Pedro and listening to their stories and experiences caused in me a desire to be watchful and to learn from their stories what it has meant to be a teacher in Colombia. It also prompted me to question the concept of teacher I had learned, the role of teachers that the Colombian society and contexts allow us to carry out, and whether we are expected or permitted to bond with the communities in a more profound and fluid form. Conversing and listening, as opposed to simply asking a preset list of questions and leading these two *interviews*, offered an opportunity to think about, challenge, and relearn concepts of teacher and teaching and of using oral history to understand teachers' lived experiences amid violence.

I unassumingly shared my learning experience as a researcher and author in this article. As a student researcher, I appreciate when more experienced researchers openly disclose their experiences trying out unfamiliar methods. I value this as inviting others to a collective reflection. Exploring and writing about how violence affects teachers and how teachers resist that violence requires watchfulness and ethical professionalism to preserve the voices of persons generally excluded from academic research as much as possible. This approach may act in dissonance with the research writing style that reports only a study's successful findings and aspects. However, as indicated earlier, I wanted to show elements of my interaction conversing with these rural teachers to contribute to the strengthening of research methodologies which may help inquire into the lives of teachers amid violence.

These two conversations required me to listen. While conversing with Emilce and Pedro, I learned about the diverse meanings of being a teacher in Colombia and the contextual factors

that may contribute to the redefinition of the profession. I listened to them. I concluded that, even with the forms of violence they coexist with, Emilce and Pedro have been stakeholders in the understanding and meaning-making of their professions. They collectively constructed the meaning of and from their experiences, contesting the official unilateral and theoretical definition of docente. Emilce and Pedro are integral members of their communities. Conversing with them allowed deepening into how they may have constituted their subjectivities when freeing themselves from forms of institutionalized power—official discourse is one example. Their stories describe contending subjectivities and evidence that they, as teachers, can indeed create, propose, decide, and think critically, even if they have to find reserved ways to express themselves, which is in line with what Barrera (2019) affirms.

The conversations invited me to reassess how to do qualitative research with the teacher community in Colombia; how to adopt an oral history approach and a phenomenological attitude to explore teachers' lived experiences amid violence. Oral history materialized into everyday conversations. This view may not be theoretically purist, but because of the context, our shared culture, and maybe because we share the same profession and language, 'genuine' conversations occurred. These conversations enclosed an interest in listening to their stories and advancing a reflection. From this, I can contribute to creating a space where teachers can share their experiences and their voice, and others in their communities may come to listen, interact, and reflect later on the work they do. I want to believe that through conversation, we could send a message against the forms of violence docentes confront daily. Also, this approach can contribute to trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teacher education to assist in preparing pre- and in-service teachers to deal with forms of violence.

This pilot study allowed me to practice as a researcher to lead a conversation with teachers who have coexisted with violence. It made me more aware of time, questions, facial expressions, and wording to facilitate teachers to share their experiences. Moreover, it is still making me reflect on the research questions, how to approach them, and how teachers could elaborate more freely and extensively about forms of violence woven into their teaching experiences. Violence in the lives of these teachers complex and requires more than isolating and highlighting it for analysis. Based on this study, I determined that group reflection must occur after the conversations. A well-planned reflective interaction between the researcher and the participating teachers is needed to understand in-depth what it means to teach and to be a teacher amid violence. Analysis and reflection led by the researcher on experiencing violence should not exclude the person who experienced it—the teachers. This reflective element will likely add value to understanding and explaining what it means to teach and to be a teacher in such conditions.

Finally, I affirm that the government's inadequate definition of 'docente' flows at least in part from the context of violence. Emilce, Pedro, and likely other teachers must "overstep" the definition to resolve critical elements such as food security or social counselling. In "overstepping," especially when this overstepping is seen as political somehow, teachers make themselves the targets of violence, generating a causal chain: Violence erodes social foundations, eroded social foundations cause teachers to need to do more than their explicit job description, and overstepping that description exposes teachers to violence. Then, I argue that the state is responsible for solving the underlying violence that causes this problem. As long as that underlying violence endures, the state should at least consider expanding the definition of what a teacher is to give teachers the space to do what they need to do to fulfill their role and to protect

them while doing so. The state should engage critically with how the docentes themselves are a powerful mechanism for contributing to the eradication of that underlying violence. In that case, the hate speech against teachers is not only against teachers but also against the community's peace and social improvement.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Conversaciones amid Violence: How to Learn from Teachers and Their Experiences with Violence[4]

Violence is a contextual condition frequently ignored by education researchers, teacher educators, and policymakers in Colombia's education field. Varied modes of violence cross and affect the teachers' lives and practices. From within-school violence and lack of resources to low social recognition and even persecution and political clashes, teachers in areas affected by violence face not only a persistent threat in their everyday contexts but they may also undergo secondary trauma in addressing the learning needs of children with traumatic stress. Trauma is not peripheral; it is existential.

Recently, a plethora of programs have embraced trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teaching (Tinklenberg 2021, Silva-McCormick 2020, Rideau 2020, Phelps-Ward 2020, Imad 2020, Gubkin 2015, Fedock 2021, Davidson 2017, Crumpton 2017). However, these innovations have focused almost exclusively on preparing teachers to address student problems pedagogically. Despite the theoretical inroads of trauma-sensitive pedagogies, they have yet to address the education of and professional development or support offered to pre-service and in-service teachers in contexts of violence. There is little research addressing the education of teachers who will most likely work and live amid violence or after experiencing it. Then, teacher education programs and policies must acknowledge the relevance of this phenomenon that continues to affect teachers and teaching.

In Colombia, first-person accounts have been historically ignored. Teachers' knowledge, in particular, "have historically been conceptualized from a modern vision of a fixed canon of

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one single knowledge base, and there is a myriad of reasons for the need to de-naturalize such a view" (Castañeda-Londoño, 2019, p. 241). Thus, *docentes* partaking critically in telling their own life experiences should give us insights into what it has meant and currently means to be a teacher and teach amid violence. As a researcher (hereinafter, mediator. See Ortiz & Arias, 2019), I saw this study as an opportunity to know, share, and learn from the neglected voices. I took this as an opportunity to join forces with teachers to communicate their experiences, learn from them what it means to teach and live amid violence and build trauma-sensitive pedagogies for teacher education.

Theoretical Considerations—Who has Contributed to the Conversation?

Within qualitative studies, oral history methodologies (i.e., testimonios, pláticas, counter-storytelling, conversaciones, and narrative inquiry) have significantly impacted teacher education, teacher education research, and consequently informed teachers' practices (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Kovach, 2010; Craig, 2014; Delgado, Burciaga, & Flores, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Campesato & Bonafe 2019; Ortiz-Ocaña, 2019; Flores et al., 2018;). Using conversaciones, I will learn about teachers' experiences and co-explore key factors that teachers recognize impact their professional lives, development, and community involvement. Through conversaciones, the teachers who collaborated in this study (hereinafter research collaborators) and I will gain insights into their experiences as teachers and advance critical dialogues to co-construct meanings of their roles in connection to the violence experienced in Colombia.

Chicana/Latina Feminist scholars refer to this method as "pláticas" and use it interchangeably with conversaciones (see Fierros & Dolores, 2016). However, I will use the latter term for this chapter. The research collaborators and I speak Colombian Spanish and relate

more to the term “conversaciones.” This decision follows the example set by Hamzeh (Flores et al., 2018), where she states, “I realized that plática to me is hikaya, which means both weaving and crafting a story in Arabic. To me now hikaya is plática and plática is hikaya” (p. 41). For me, platicar is conversar. Nonetheless, I will define conversaciones from the literature on pláticas and the Chicana/Latina Feminist, Decolonial, and Latino Critical theory perspectives.

La conversación is,

> [A] space par excellence favourable to expressing the subjectivities of the people involved. Through it, it is possible to experience contact with the other, that is, in the alterity inherent in the development of the flow of conversation and the constitution of one’s subjectivity (Campesato & Bonafe, 2019, p. 51).

Conversar presents an opportunity to tell and be listened to. It is determined by orality and time. People engaged in a conversación tell their stories while thinking—it is thinking out loud (Campesato & Bonafe, 2019). Conversar “opens space for errors, stutters, noises, and the between-the-lines. It allows the subject to communicate not only what is expected but especially what is hidden, unconscious” (Campesato & Bonafe, 2019, p. 67). It does not require agreement on the content of the conversation. It requires an openness to be transformed while engaged in the conversación (Haber, 2011).

Conversaciones urge often-silenced experiences, opinions, and knowledge to emerge. Additionally, they lead to recognition and bring understanding back to the people who need it the most. Haber (2011) defines la conversación as,

> [A] flow of intersubjective vestigial assemblages that creates subjectivities in relation. It is not limited by the linguistic exchange or by the humanity of the interactants. Still, quite the opposite, one is not in conversation as a speaker but as being or, better, being. (p. 24)

In other words, conversaciones allow people to do more than share their life experiences, they nurture the constitution of subjectivities.

In addition, Conversar involves listening. Kovach (2010) concludes that she needed to be an active listener and co-participant when discussing a conversational method within an indigenous research framework. As such, "the process felt less extractive and one-sided (even with the given that research can inevitably be an extractive process). Because [she] was a co-participant, [her] own self-knowledge deepened with each conversation" (p. 46). This active listening relates to the desahogarse (let it out) mentioned by Flores et al. (2018). In Colombia, with friends or family, las conversaciones permit sharing our concerns or thoughts and listening to each other, which lifts a burden off our shoulders. Sharing and listening to each other are other essential characteristics of the conversaciones I attempted to have with the research collaborators.

Las conversaciones required for this study needed to be affective, welcoming, fluid, and spontaneous, and they attempted to produce information, not extract it. This understanding of conversaciones aligns with what Ortiz and Arias (2019) defend. They elaborate on the *conversar alterativo*, a concept proposed by decolonial scholars that entail such elements. It is a conversar that welcomes the Others, protects them, and aims to inspire a decolonial way of living. While conversing, the subjects form an "emergent collective for learning" (Ortiz & Arias, 2019, p. 14). It is "a dialogue of knowledge among equals, sharing and carrying alternatives of change through a reflection together" (Ortiz & Arias, 2019, p. 14).

Then another critical characteristic of conversaciones is collective reflection. This collective reflection in the conversaciones is a thoughtful act that happens without expectations and welcomes all conversation participants (Ortiz & Arias, 2019). Such a characteristic may

empower a call to action. As explained by Flores et al. (2018), "the act of reflection showed its transformative potential and invited us to stay open to urgent action, to new ways of sustaining resistance, enacting collective solidarity, and to appreciate how pláticas~testimonios were/are reciprocated" (p. 44). This reflexive act may lead us towards emergent practices and other ways of knowing, feeling, and doing.

Context-dependence is yet another characteristic. Oral history scholars have discussed the importance of the context (Garay, 1999). The context—cultural, social, political, linguistic—affects the person talking, la conversación, the language used, the expressions, and the designing of the method.

Referring to the importance of the context, Portelli (2018) comments,

> The speaker may have told the story a thousand times before, but the interview context, the interviewer's challenge to the narrator to place their life in a historical context, and the very fact that the interviewer is not a member of the narrator's immediate circle of family and neighbours, generate subtle but radical changes, and the oft-told story comes out different anyway. (p. 8)

Conversar shall be distinguished from interviewing. Moreover, it does not align with the traditional positivist Western view of gathering knowledge. I argue it is imperative to investigate *with* those "under investigation"—that is, with the marginalized, with the people often excluded from the decision-making process—rather than about or against them. Research is a dehumanizing process, characterized by an extractive nature, that often reclaims local knowledge or disregards the people who provided it (Ortiz & Arias, 2019).

To conclude, conversaciones, as I have described thus far, presented opportunities to advance knowledge of teachers who have experienced situations of violence and silencing. Also,

this study adheres to what is demanded by Mignolo (2018), Godinez (2006) and Flores et al. (2021) and hopes to become a venue to theorize, in this case, from the life experiences of teachers living and teaching amid violence. As Mignolo (2018) argued, "removing the mask can only be done by thinking, arguing, doing in communal conversations wherever and whenever we can engage and help to create what the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality prevent us from doing." (Mignolo, 2018, p. 151).

Conversar to Learn about Teachers' Living and Teaching amid Violence

The goal of this study was to know the life stories of teachers, to learn about the violence they have endured, their understanding of violence, and how they have interacted with it. In concrete, I aimed 1) to describe the contexts of the teachers who experience violence in Colombia, 2) to encourage critical dialogues about living and teaching in areas amid violence, 3) to share the transcripts of the conversaciones with reseaerch collaborators to reflect on the experiences and discuss applicable knowledge, and 4) to develop principles for trauma-sensitive pedagogies valuable to teacher education programs and policies in contexts affected by violence.

As previously discussed, conversaciones entail multiple characteristics that make it a suitable way to learn about and with teachers whose lives and teaching have been intersected by violence. The study's context, collaborators, and topic required a way to gather knowledge not based on scientific hierarchies or pre-established structures. It called for ongoing reflection, attention to emergent knowledge, and horizontal interaction between the mediator and research collaborators. It required questions from the research collaborators, a dialogue between equals about silenced information, and, most importantly, sharing and bringing alternatives for change through reflection (Ortiz & Arias, 2019).

For this study, it was of utmost importance that I, as the mediator, did not interpret the information alone—this would be just another form of violence affecting the research collaborators and the communities where they come from. Consider the colonizers who arrive in foreign lands, extract what they need, and then generate profit just for them—a relatively common form of violence. Also, these conversations required that the research collaborators and I were placed within the same context and to respect and understand each other's backgrounds. In some cases, belonging to the same context (i.e., geographical, professional, linguistic, etc.) often helps to initiate, sustain, develop, and conclude la conversación.

Violence in education has been mainly addressed to explore and improve the conditions of students. When the needs of teachers have been considered, the researchers have analyzed their experiences and development from an identity-based approach (Cohen, 2008; Haddad, 2019). This approach, as I outlined in my discussions on may disregard teachers' individual characteristics, conditions, and contexts. Conversar, as described here, is an appropriate way to approach the life stories and knowledge of teachers affected by violence. Engaging in conversaciones with teachers about their struggles with violence is both just and urgent.

How to Analyze the Conversaciones?

For the analysis, I considered using phenomenology, precisely "the method of phenomenological attitude" (van Manen & van Manen, 2021, p. 1076) with the research collaborators. This attitude guided us to reflect constantly and gain insights into the violence as lived and understood by teachers in some areas of Colombia. During the conversaciones, we analyzed and reflected on what it means to live and teach amid violence for each of them, using phenomenological approaches. We also reflected on what teachers recognize impacts their professional lives, and subjective constitutions. The teacher collaborators and I brought violence

into focus to reflect upon the *living meanings* (van Manen, 2017) of the teachers' life experiences. Given that "[p]henomenological analysis does not involve coding, sorting, calculating, or searching for patterns, synchronicities, frequencies, resemblances, and/or repetitions in data" (van Manen, 2017, p. 813), the analytical aim was to reflect retrospectively on, to talk about, to retell, and to question the living meanings of violence as lived by the teachers.

For this study, the conversaciones and experiences shared by the research collaborators were considered *phenomenological examples* and *methodological devices* (van Manen, 2017, p. 815). These helped us reflect on the teachers' lived experiences with violence, highlighted the value of their knowledge, and displayed the singularities of their experiences. Van Manen (2017) defends that,

> Examples in phenomenological inquiry serve to examine and express the exemplary aspects of meaning of a phenomenon. Examples in phenomenology have evidential significance: The example is the example of something knowable or understandable that may not be directly sayable. An example is a singularity. […] the "phenomenological example" provides access to the phenomenon in its singularity. (p. 814).

He indicates that phenomenological reflection and analysis aim at the eidetic, primal, or inceptual meanings of the phenomenon and the lived experience. For this project, the primal meanings were what teachers understood as violence and how they interacted with it. Van Manen (2017) invites us to subject the phenomenon to questions such as *Is it like this? Like that?* (Eidetic method), and to wonder how the phenomenon shows itself. He reiterates that "phenomenological inquiry proceeds through an inceptual process of reflective wondering, deep questioning, attentive reminiscing, and sensitively interpreting of the primal meanings of human

experiences" (van Manen, 2017, p. 819). After the analysis and reflection, I went back to the transcripts of our conversaciones, and edited them with the intention "to make visible the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes" (Molley et al, 2018) of the research collaborators. Then I shared the abbreviated transcripts with the research collaborators to confirm this intention was achieved.

How Did the Conversaciones Happen?

As I have stated throughout this piece, this study required that I, the mediator, collaborate with teachers who wanted to participate in critical conversaciones on violence and education and who wanted to talk about their teaching experiences as affected by violence. Policy and research often ignore the teachers' voices, the contexts described by them, and the communities where they come from. Teachers' stories are then a critical and needed resource to know their voices and learn about the contexts where they live and teach (Macías, Hernández & Gutiérrez, 2020). The conversaciones sustained in this study gave teachers a place to be listened to, and, at the same time, they shared their knowledge of teaching, being a teacher, and violence.

This research relied on the teachers' experiences with violence, the contextual conditions that nurtured their experiences, and the mediator and reseaerch collaborators' skillfulness to coauthor the information. I reached out to teachers who considered themselves to be experiencing or have experienced situations of violence triggered by their profession and the contextual conditions and who were willing to commit to this study. Research collaborators collaborators were never seen as sources to collect information (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I also gathered and discussed violence-related documents and other relevant public representations of violence against teachers (e.g., social media postings, radio interviews, news, etc.) to describe the contexts where the research collaborators live and teach (Hernandez, 2023).

Seven teachers accepted my invitation. To gather information-rich and in-depth teachers' experiences with violence, I had one-on-one and group conversaciones (Fierros & Delgado, 2016) with them. One-on-one conversaciones allowed the retelling of each teacher's experiences. It was a space to get to know each other first and then to share what we have been through as teachers. Also, I shared with the teachers how their experiences, what they were telling me at a specific moment, were affecting me—I allowed myself to react.

It is relevant to mention that at the end of the one-on-one conversaciones, I asked them if they had news articles, photos, or any document that could help in describing their contexts and the violence they had experienced. Some research collaborators mentioned they had photographs of their schools, and one mentioned a letter from the school discussing her case of work harassment. Other teachers told me they could share something they had authored: one shared a poem she wrote to express her frustration as a teacher before our conversacion; another teacher shared a drawing he made to complement our conversacion; and another teacher shared a short story he wrote, given the story writing groups experiences he had when he was in university. All these documents provided by the research collaborators should benefit from understanding the violence and its consequences on their constitution of teacher subjectivities. I will present these documents and the reseaerch collaborators' stories in my dissertation.

Afterward, we met in groups. I started by asking if sharing and commenting on what they had told me individually was okay. I understood that "examining and sharing our inner selves with each other, moving beyond self-reflection and self-inquiry toward an engagement of our life journeys" (Flores et al., 2018, p. 44) was central to our conversaciones. We reflected on some parts of the conversaciones that I had previously chosen—two moments they shared during our one-on-one conversación. These moments either caught my attention, were not fully discussed,

or explained, or could motivate a conversación with the other teachers in the group. Teachers were also encouraged to share, reflect, and elaborate on their desired aspects.

The conversaciones sustained with the research collaborators were not thought of as "a question-and-answer session, but [as] the offer of a narrative possibility" (Portelli, 2018, p. 7). And my task was "not merely to extract information, but to open up narrative spaces" (Portelli, 2018, p. 5). After we finished our last group conversación, I shared the transcripts with the research collaborators. Then, I cleaned and edited our conversaciones, trying to be just to their voices within the constraint of the page limit of my dissertation. I will present these conversaciones in the following chapter.

Teachers' life experiences are firmly embedded in and respond to pivotal societal issues across settings. Conversar about their experiences generated a space for in-depth accounts, which helped us describe how they experienced being teachers and teaching amid violence. Consequently, the research collaborators and I are interested in sharing the conversaciones we had to inform others about the conditions in which teachers work and live. Given the evidence of political hate speech and violent attacks against teachers (Hernandez, 2023), it is urgent to share and learn from their experiences, know their viewpoints and their understandings of violence, and seek action to improve their conditions.

Who Am I, and What Sparked my Interest in this Topic?

Thus far, I have discussed the settings of this study, its methodology, and my understanding of conversaciones. Now, I find it necessary to explain my positionality. I am a teacher and researcher from Colombia. I have a BA in TEFL and an MA in English language teaching and didactics. I am pursuing doctoral studies in education and am interested in exploring how teachers constitute their subjectivities amid violence(s) or different forms of

violence. In Colombia, I worked as a primary and secondary school teacher of English, and Biology and Mathematics in English. While studying for my MA, I worked part-time for the teacher education program at Universidad Surcolombia. While listening to colleagues and student teachers, I learned about teachers' daily difficulties. I understood why some teachers would travel to the schools where they teach, overcoming untold challenges.

This project aims to study violence *with* teachers. I argue teachers, school parents, policymakers, and people related to education must learn about the routines of the teachers teaching and living under conditions of duress. Others should know the stories of teachers dealing with adversity and violence and the daily challenges teachers face to stand in front of their classes. As a teacher who taught only in a mid-size city in Colombia (about 360,000 people), I did not notice the reality, nor the working conditions, of the teachers in rural areas or some disadvantaged sectors in big cities.

It was not until I started talking with some teachers that I began questioning the definition of teacher and teaching as established in official documents. I started as well to reflect on the violence that targets them, how media represents them, and how teachers interact with their communities and vice versa. Conversar with teachers, knowing their viewpoints on the violence that affects them, and more importantly, knowing how they have resisted or dealt with violent events or violence may lead toward better working conditions for teachers and toward raising awareness on the violence and challenges that affect them. Now, I will conclude by elaborating on three relevant aspects of this study's development: How to prepare yourself to talk with teachers who have experienced violence? Can research and the researcher cause violence? When should we stop the conversaciones? I hope these following lines spark questioning and reflection in researchers/mediators, scholars, and teachers interested in the violence that affects educators.

How to Prepare Yourself to Talk with Teachers Who Have Experienced Violence?

Researchers should prepare to talk with people who have experienced violence. To prepare myself, I read *Recomendaciones para entrevistar a personas afectadas por el conflicto* [*Recommendations to interview people affected by conflict]* (Castrillón, 2016). This chapter elaborates on the importance of narrating memory in Colombia. It offers vital principles for talking to victims of conflict in Colombia, some tips to advance such talks and contribute to memory, and strategies on how and what to ask the victims of violence. Reading this resource brought me closer to how victims of the violence in Colombia have been previously talked to and made me aware of particular social and cultural aspects that shape the conversaciones with people who have experienced trauma.

In addition, I studied the *Trauma- and Violence-Informed Interview Strategies in Work with Survivors of Gender-Based Violence*, developed by the Learning Network at the Center for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children. This issue explains trauma- and violence-informed interviews, systemic violence, and gender-based violence. It offers strategies for safe interviews, ongoing consent, and, quite significantly, how to recognize and support resilience and coping.

Can Research and the Researcher Cause Violence?

I argue that the research process and the researcher may cause violence to the participants during three different moments: a) the interviews, b) the analysis of information, and c) the conclusions. First, in the Colombian context, I have seen and read how researchers and journalists often ask victims of violent events (e.g., displacement, kidnapping, extorsion, etc.) the questions they need to advance their purposes (i.e., leading questions) and show indifference to the purposes and conditions of the interviewee. Interviewing victims of conflict is a complex process. I had to document myself about principles and recommendations for talking to people in

these conditions in Colombia before I could embark on my task. However, I already understood how issues of power relation, gender, traumatic experiences recalling, and space safety were critical for guaranteeing the research collaborators' emotional and physical well-being.

Second, violence often occurs during the analysis of information when the participants' stories are partitioned or dissected. It happens when the researchers take chunks of information, the excerpts, as their focus of analysis and not the person's story and experiences. Imagine that a victim of violence—any form of violence—accepts to talk to a researcher about a personal, intimate, traumatic experience. Then, the researcher, an outsider to the experienced trauma, decides what is best to share, what the problems are, and how the person affected should deal with such problems. A person reliving a traumatic experience so that a researcher can extract their information *is* a form of violence. And this form of violence resembles the systemic violence Zizek (2008c) describes. This form of violence is not attributable to concrete individuals—researchers are not judged or penalized for approaching research in such a way, and many may not do so with the intention to harm research participants. But the academic or research system have made removing the stories from the people who experienced them a norm. Moreover, in many cases, research participants never get to see what happens to what they shared or see any benefit to sharing their stories. For this research, participants reflected and analyzed on their lived experiences of living and teaching amid violence. Then, they read their transcripts and confirmed these evoked their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes towards the forms of violence experienced.

Third, particularly in research that includes vulnerable populations, violence happens when participants are excluded from the reflecting and decision-making stages. Historically, teachers in Colombia have been excluded from making decisions that impact their lives as

teachers. Government and foreign consulting firms exclude them from reflecting and theorizing on their own lived experiences. And although researchers have tried to help the situation, “La metodología de investigación no propicia el conversar y no nos permite transformarnos por medio de la conversación” [The research methodology does not encourage conversation and does not allow us to transform ourselves through conversation.] (Ortiz & Arias, 2019, p. 12). Research methodology in this terms demonstrates a systematic practice that causes violence. Teachers and their conditions need transformation. To deter teachers who have experienced violence from reflecting and taking part in decision-making, to deter them from transforming their own conditions, *is* yet another systematic act of violence.

When Should We Stop the Conversaciones?

In qualitative research, saturation is a standard for stopping data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2017; Leese et al., 2021). Reviewing the literature on data saturation, Saunders et al. (2017) found that this concept has been defined as a) the point in which the analysis of information does not help the emergence of new codes, b) when new data does not help to develop already identified codes into themes, c) when the data collected is sufficient to illustrate the theory or d) when new data becomes redundant and does not necessarily reference the theory underpinning it.

This study did not take a rigid approach to saturation and redundance. Redundant *data* was not expected considering the number of collaborators—seven— and the different viewpoints and multiple factors (e.g., age, gender, workplace, race, students, community, time, etc.) that influenced their life stories around violence. Moreover, with each conversación, I wanted to bring richness and depth to the understanding of being a teacher and teaching amid violence. To that end, this study aimed to present “many-layered, intricate, detailed, nuanced” (Fusch et al.,

2018, p. 24) knowledge and information. Instead of finding patterns or themes, the research collaborators and I agreed to share these conversaciones so that other people could learn from their experiences. Also, the research collaborators hoped to encourage readers in their own teaching or educational journeys.

However, it may be possible that data saturation is a strategy that reduces the personal lens during the collection of information (Fusch et al., 2018), as long as data saturation is viewed as the result of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2015). This was the case of this research project. The information found was made richer by using multiple sources of data collection (images, authored texts, illustration, conversaciones), which led to more in-depth accounts.

Chapter 5: Conversaciones

The following chapter presents the short version of the six conversaciones I had with the research collaborators. I talked to teachers individually, except to Sandra and Alfi. They work and live together and wanted to talk to me together, as well. Each conversación is unique and discloses the story of a teacher, their experiences in their contexts, incidents with violence, and other very personal moments. I invite you to read them and approach with respect and a critical gaze. The research collaborators and I agreed that people should know more about what teachers face. They also agreed that these *conversaciones* were helpful because they needed to talk about what has happened to them. Hopefully, you, the reader, find their stories helpful and we can start a collective to build a common ground to change the difficult and violent conditions in teaching.

Conversation 01 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/8/2023

Start time: 1:10 PM

Duration: 141 minutes

Participants: Celeste and Wilson Hernández

Female teacher | 36 years old | Elementary rural school | San Vicente, Huila

Celeste: Well, let me tell you a little about myself: I've been in teaching, I've been in the public sector for approximately 5 years, I've been in home-based daycares for four years, three more years in... in private schools and many... uh... many teacher replacement contracts, so to speak. Right. I am a university graduate. I am a pedagogue. I have a degree in Childhood Pedagogy, with an emphasis on psychology.

It was not a career that I chose because I had to, but because it was really something that came to me [emphasis, accentuation], it was something that… that I decided, you know? Let's say that teaching for me was a vocation.

I am 36 years old. I have dedicated 5 years to working only in rural areas.

I have had countless colleagues, both, let's say, co-workers and colleagues that you meet along the way. Then, you start hearing and knowing millions of stories. [page 2]

I remember that when we started, the preschool teacher was known for: "She's the one who's playing, she's the one who takes care of the children," you know? Because that is the term that was used back then, "the preschool teacher is the one who takes care of the children."

[T]hat is a very big problem with teachers, primary school teachers, preschool teachers, more than anything, right? Because the concept of a preschool teacher is that she is the one who

spends her time playing. Yes, we play. I'm not saying we don't, but they are not games without purposes. We have eight hours of class. Well, eight working hours. We have to be in the school six hours: five with children, and one in the school doing something else. Let's just start with the schedules. Do you follow me? I do not have a right to a lunch. Uhum! How is that possible?

Wilson Hernández: You don't have the right to have lunch?

Celeste: No. For example, the children in secondary school have the right to an hour of lunch, so teachers leave the school to have lunch too. They go and have lunch and return to finish their day. Not me.

…

If you read the new reform or the functions of teachers in Colombia, within the functions they tell us that we must be with the children during recess, which is half an hour, and then at lunch. We must be with them; we must be with the little ones [elementary school children].

[T]he principal and the coordinator at that time told me that I was lazy for being a preschooler, so that's why they put me, eh, yes, literally, that's why they put me on the Preschool Committee, so that I could figure out what to do with my time. I didn't tell them anything. I let them sign me up for whatever they wanted.

Wilson: Are those, those types of accusations frequent?

Celeste: Yes. The admin staff and directors refer to the teachers with synonyms like "he is lazy", "he doesn't like to work…"

But then what happens? The admin staff and the directors come to a point, when they don't tell you that directly, no, they don't tell you "Oh, she's lazy." No, they come and say, "oh teacher, well, you were assigned to that committee." And you're like, [Celeste makes a puzzled face]. But they meet with, with certain people and begin to make comments like "oh no, she

doesn't like to work", "and he doesn't like to work because…". I have experienced such commentary from some colleagues.

Wilson: It is interesting how those roles begin to be redefined within the school, generating a distance, a division among teachers, but let's say that to my surprise... You mentioned now in the conversation, I was wrongly assuming that this came from outside, that this was caused by stakeholders who did not know the school, who did not know teaching, when in reality it is being promoted from within. [page 10]

Celeste: Who should you please first, the parents who want more homework or the ones who don't want homework? And then they begin to, to, to create an idea, a fantasy, that the teacher… In principle, the teacher was an authority, who was respected and was the one who knew, am I right? After the pandemic, I noticed something very particular and [page 11] is the fact that parents, since they were locked up for so long, did nothing but be on the Internet and the Internet disseminated new, new theories, you know?

Figure 1. Celeste on her way to school. South of Colombia. Photo taken by Celeste. 2023.

Before the pandemic, in rural areas, it was very difficult to find a house with internet. If there was one, it was that of the teacher who had bought satellite internet, and it cost about 200,000 [Colombian] pesos, so, well, the farmer or the one from the rural area couldn't afford it because it was very expensive. But it turns out that during the pandemic countless Internet providers arrived in the rural area because kids needed to study virtually, you see?

Then parents begin to notice and receive information. For example, on Facebook, it is very common to receive information, and this phrase stands out to me very much, I have always had it in my mind: "It's incredible that now they take a four-year-old child and teach them to write and read knowing that they are torturing them"; "Preschool is not for reading and writing." [page 12]

So, parents grab any piece of information and weaponize it. And they come to the institution with that information in their mind, and they say, "No, my son should not write, my son should not do this, my son should not do that. I read about it. I read that the theory of…" I don't know who. And one listens to them, and one says "Excuse me? You are wrong."

…

So, it turns out that [after the pandemic] we found kids cutting themselves, seventh graders, eighth graders, that is, 12, 11, 13-year-old kids, max, super young kids. So... and kids who came with vices like drinking, when we had never seen that in the "vereda". I mean, yes, some of them drank on the weekends, but kids never came into the institution drinking. There were boys who...

Wilson: Are we talking about sixth, seventh grade children now, or older?

Celeste: No, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh. [Laughter]

Wilson: Yes. In other words, the entire high school, the entire high school, was doing the same thing.

Celeste: That was… that was terrible because, of course, they did it and the little ones wanted to copy them. Then they started a trend of bringing "frutiño" [Similar to Kool-aid or Tang] and eating it with their hands, but it turned out that the "frutiño" they had was crushed, or mixed with, what is that called? Aspirin, with aspirin, that thing that makes them... [page 17] Like a medicine. And they mixed it and started licking it, and of course, they went crazy [high] doing that. When you realize... We had...

Wilson: Are we talking about borax? [I asked because I'd heard about the link between borax and sexual abuse].

Celeste: No no, no, no, not borax. It is a medicine…

Wilson: Anyway, all these, all these conditions in the rural school?

Celeste: Exactly. Look at what happened and what was unleashed when these guys started getting information from the Internet, you see? I mean, that's the critical point I'm telling you.

Wilson: Ok, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Celeste: So, when all these people, both parents and children, living in the "vereda", began to read information on the Internet, they began to replicate the things that, [page 18] years ago, we experienced in the cities and which are the least concerning problems, because right now in the cities it is much worse—We saw what happened there.

…

The other parents in the "vereda," from my class, started telling me what [some moms] were saying. So, that's when I decided to go to the coordinator and tell him, "Look, this is what's

happening, the parents are telling me this, and I don't know to what extent it is true." So, I told him, "Let's have a meeting." In that meeting, only the three of them and the one with the boy who wet himself, there are four of them, are the ones who raised their hands and mentioned they did have a problem with me.

…

A year and a half ago, everything was calmed down until one day when the person who had been a pastor came to "frentearme" [to face me down] in my classroom. He is a big man, I'd say he's around 1.75 m. And I'm really tiny, I'm short, and since I'm chubby, I look even shorter. So, I'm about 1.53 m, maybe 1.55 m. And that man, well he is about 1.75 cm tall, also fat, big, dark, "aindiado" [An expression used in Colombia to describe someone with native or First Nations features: dark skin, straight black hair, etc.]. Well, imagine that: He stands at the door of my classroom and smacks me, he tells me, "You are not welcome here. You are a person who has no morals, you say you are a Christian and you are not, you are a bad element for society." I was like... I burst into tears because, obviously, how could a person I didn't even know say that to me, I had never dealt with that person or a similar situation. [page 21]

Wilson: Wow! Forgive me for asking… regarding the context, so I can get an idea of the school... Is there an entrance, is there an entrance, a fence, a gate?

Celeste: Okay. It has no fencing, it has nothing, I mean, anyone, even the dogs and cats come in because no, there is nothing, I mean, it is simply open. That's it.

…

Figure 2. Celeste's school. South of Colombia. Photo taken by Celeste. 2023.

Then they told me, “That’s why we have to take turns guarding the school.” Then we began to implement it because it didn’t just happen to me that week, but that week parents began to arrive with several horrible complaints.

…

[School mothers] said that [the female students] were being groped and that they did not want to come to study. Of course, we know that [a] girl was raped. She came from…

Wilson: … in the classroom or...?

Celeste: No, outside the institution. The truth is we don’t know what happened to her, but someone dragged her into a coffee plantation and abused her. And she came to school like that, attacked, crying, I mean...

Wilson: That’s horrible!

Celeste: I didn’t realize what had happened until hours later because I was with the kids, we were doing an activity, when one of the teachers arrived, all scared [to tell us what had happened to the girl]. So, [...] I told him, “No, don’t tell me more. I’m going to stay out of this, but everything you’re saying, write it and send it to admin now, because, well, if you keep this to

yourself, you'll get into trouble. Please do me a favor and write it." So, he wrote them, yes, he indeed wrote a letter. He signed it, he sent it to the director's office. So, the director, what he did was, with that letter, send the girl on a motorcycle, with a teacher, because we couldn't do more, to the nearest clinic where they did the evaluation and it was true, the girl had been abused. [...] We began to hear a lot of comments that the area [where the school was] was becoming dangerous because there were people who were driving by and taking people away. [page 23]

At that time, I also had an accident, exactly one year [ago], and I was in sick leave for 15 days, due to that problem I had... Well, I was riding my motorcycle to school, I fell, and, obviously, I had a miscarriage at that time. I lost my baby. So, I didn't want to go back, because I said, "no, I, I mean, the truth is, no, I don't want anything to do with this [school]." Then they gave me 15 days of disability.

…

[There was a girl whom I] was very strict with because she was chatty, I called her my little bird. She was always jumping, running. She never sat still. On May 13, she disappeared at 7 p.m., they kidnapped her from the house.

Wilson: A student of yours.

Celeste: Yes, a student of mine, a student of mine. She... they took her from her house, I remember so much that it was a Friday, May 13. No, I'm lying, it was on a Thursday, May 13. On the 14th they were looking for her and found her dead, [...] wrapped in a garbage bag. They found her... It was very hard for everyone [...] I had just lost my baby, and now I had to lose a student. That was very hard. It was like losing another child.

…

In July, we had another problem in the classroom, at school, I mean, incredible. That year, last year, was very hard on a psychological and social level for us. We had a colleague who had come in sick and had been from sick leave to sick leave, but, well, she never told us "Look, I've been diagnosed with cancer" or anything. Nor did she undergo treatment. [What happened] was that in 20 days the cancer killed her. It killed her. On July 13, the teacher ____ died (Celeste mentions the name of her deceased colleague). I mean, it was horrible! For us, it was like everything was collapsing. We came from burying a little girl.

Wilson: A student.

Celeste: A student. A teacher is now dead. And we began as a collective of the institution to think about, to what extent we have come to value ourselves as human beings [so little] just to fulfill, like, a job so that they don't talk ill about us. [page 26]

Wilson: It is very sad to recognize and listen to you describe the context where, where you teach where… where you live.

All these situations that you mention here [I had to pause and take a breath]… Are they special, are they particular, are they "part of the landscape"? If we could put a name to that, what would you name it, what do we call that?

Celeste: The truth… Evidence.

Wilson: Evidence of what?

Celeste: Not evidence, experience.

Wilson: Experiences?

Celeste: Experiences.

Wilson: Oh! Okay. Experiences of what?

Celeste: Our own experiences.

Wilson: … of teaching? Your experiences? [page 27]

Celeste: Of teaching... No, about teaching, because this, I mean, this doesn't just happen to me. This... I'm telling you my context, but if you talk to another teacher from another area of Colombia, I think he will tell you many similar stories.

70% of Colombian teachers have lost students because they are murdered, because they die in accidents, because they commit suicide or because the guerrillas take them away. This is something that I experienced firsthand, I experienced it a year ago, and I can say that it is the hardest thing for a teacher. Look, when, in the month of… at the end of May, well, that's the other thing, the Indigenous Guard discovered who did it [raped and killed the girl], on Monday the 17th they already knew who it was.

It was a man very close to the girl's family, a man we often saw in the "vereda", a man who many times entered the school. Then you're left with something like [She puts her hands on her head, like pulling her hair, like what happened is still hard to belief], you see? I mean, what happened? [page 28]

…

Wilson: You, let's see, I am obviously researching this, and I would love to know, how you define... what is violence?

Celeste: …The violence, the truth is, is so broad. I would say that it is everything that hurts another human being.

Wilson: OK. And what you are telling me today, everything we have talked about: the behaviour of the students, the problem with that family, this person comes and shouts whatever he wants to you, you have to stand guard, there is raping, there is a kidnapping, there is, er, a

miscarriage... on the way to your school, the disappearance of a student who is later found dead. Does that hurt a person?

Celeste: Everything. It hurts a person in every way. And I think the way it hurts a person the most is psychologically.

Wilson: So, we can call those experiences of the teacher, or of teaching? are they experiences of teaching? particular experiences? violent experiences? …are they the violence of teaching? Or are…

Celeste: No, they are violent experiences within a teacher's work environment. In other words… because, let's see, if I decided to be a teacher and they assigned me that school, maybe I would have experienced the same thing somewhere else. That's what I always tell myself: maybe I would have experienced the same thing somewhere else, or it would have been different. I mean, that's the question that some of us always ask because teaching is so humane. In other words, we, unlike engineers or architects, we are such a human profession. We have so much to do with feelings, that I believe all of that affects us, right?

And I am coming to face such a reality without tools, because that is the relevant aspect of what I am telling you, I had no psychological tools to face such a reality again. [page 29]

Wilson: When, when you say "psychological tools", what are we talking about, support from…?

Celeste: Emotional management.

Wilson: When you finished your undergraduate degree, when you left your degree and went there or started working, did the school administration do any preparation for you before you started working?

Figure 3. Teachers in Celeste's school doing gardening work. South of Colombia. Photo taken by Celeste. 2023.

Celeste: Never, and that's what I say, why didn't they prepare us? None of us has been prepared. No. None. You come out of your undergrad program with a blindfold like that [she covers her eyes with her hand as if resembling a blindfold], do you understand me? In other words, you graduate believing that with what you learned from Vygotsky, Piaget, Montessori, Crowder, that's all you will work with in the classroom. But no one tells you that when you step foot in a classroom you are going to find hungry children, you are going to find problematic children, you are going to find problematic teachers, you are going to have a work environment...

…

[In the month of October] the lady came back [the lady from the village who accuses her of mistreating her daughter] and we got into an uproar. I don't know why, but she got upset in a way that she started attacking me and holding meetings outside the school, so I had to call the school director at the last minute [to inform him], and I told her that I didn't want to have legal problems with her. Well, you... have you seen what has happened? I am one of the firm believers

that, in the Colombian villages, even if they don't say: Red Zone [War zone], there are militants included amongst people. I am one of the firm believers that you have to know who you are talking to and what you are talking about. So I told her "Look, I'm going to tell you this just once," and I told her in the meeting: "If you keep talking shit about me and something happens to me, you're going to be the one to blame, and I say it here, publicly, in front of everyone, why? Because you are going to have me killed with so much gossip about me outside the school. Can you imagine if someone goes and tells that to a guerrilla member... and that person won't care about coming and inquiring [about what's going on], but just shoots me twice and sends me to the cemetery instead. And all because of what came out of your mouth." [page 34]

…

We often sat down to talk with my primary school colleagues and asked, "What do we do?" Because this affects us all psychologically. So…

Wilson: You are affected by the situations we have talked about, the death of a colleague, or everything we have discussed.

Celeste: Exactly, I mean, all that falls on top of it.

Wilson: And when you say, "what do we do," what did you mean? What did you talk about in those conversations you had?

Celeste: We chose to, and that was something we did and continue to do, although sometimes we forget, due to the same stress, to meet in the afternoons, sometimes some of us who stay in the "vereda", to have a cup of hot chocolate with bread, to have a social life. A social life where suddenly we all support each other, you see? So, there is the colleague who says "I feel bad about this", so we tell her "We feel bad too, but let's move forward"… "Let's encourage ourselves and support each other."

Wilson: Yes, yes, well, if you don't do it, the admin staff is not going to do it for you.

Celeste: Exactly! And if we don't start...

Wilson: And neither will the parents.

Celeste: And we start to vent among ourselves, share stories with each other and give each other advice "C'mon, but look, you are a good teacher. Don't worry. Do what you have to do." Do you understand me? "Don't worry about that"; "I just don't like the director doing that"; "Look, woman, take it easy," something like that. You know? Those little support encounters, right? Like celebrating birthdays, special dates [page 35], a meal, going out to eat, or making a cake, it feels like we are a family, although we often end up crying the whole meeting.

…

Wilson: Is this your daily life? Is this a typical day or are these exceptional days? ... are these situations...?

Celeste: From here to La Plata [A town in the department of Huila, in Colombia], it will take me two hours, two and a half hours depending on who I go with. Two and a half hours, I arrive in La Plata. What is a beautiful day? A day when I arrive and find transportation to the "vereda". In other words, on a perfect day, I arrive, and a car is waiting for me to go straight to San Vicente [the name of the vereda] and get there at 8 o'clock in the morning, that all the children were there, that it didn't rain that day… that it didn't rain, and when we have no other type of setbacks. That the children did their share perfectly, that none of them fall or get hit and that at one in the afternoon, everyone is gone...

Wilson: I'm curious about what you say, I don't know if you noticed, but you are mixing the good day with the beautiful day. [page 38]

Celeste: A good day is if something happens. One begins to think "and now what is a parent going to say?", "And now, how do I tell the parent that his child fell?" "And now the director has already started to request stuff." I mean, it's almost uncomfortable because if we were, I mean, like... I sometimes compare my job, and I say, if I had chosen to be a secretary, I think my job would be just to sit from 8 to 12 and from 2 to 5, organize files and then go home.

Wilson: And that's it.

Celeste: But I don't have that luck. Our work is not like that. [page 39]

Wilson: Well... So, before, before I forget, and now that we enter the, the final stage of our conversation, I wonder if all this that you have mentioned to me, and, and I am sorry that I assumed that what had happened before were the bad days. I said "oh, well, we talked about the bad days", I assumed that those were the bad days, but I don't know if you see them that way, I don't know if when the student disappeared, when that girl arrived and said that she had been raped, when this man came in and mistreated you... Do you see those as bad days?

Celeste: They're bad, they're terrible.

…

Many have resigned. And I think that all those psychological situations… as I told you, I had the opportunity to talk to the former teacher I told you about [here she is referring to her former colleague who resigned to dedicate himself to playing in a Mariachi group]. He gave up his salary, the teacher salary, which helps us to survive and pay debts, because it really helps us. The minimum wage in Colombia, currently, you can't get by with that.

Celeste: So, I said "but, the thing is, how much longer do I have to stand that nonsense? I mean, this makes me sick. So, I [page 42] told the counsellor, I told her "I honestly don't think I'll come back… eh, I'm tired, I'm sick, I'm… discouraged, I'm…" And precisely, two days

before I got sick, it was the meeting of the Board of Directors and she [the parent that had problems with Celeste] came up with the story that I had charged students for their diploma when I have never charged for any of that!

Wilson: Incredible! Look, we've been talking about issues affecting teachers for two hours, and yet we have not talked about teaching, we haven't talked about how to teach a class under those circumstances. We have not.

Celeste: I am aware that we, as beings, as workers, do not have psychological support, and I believe that is very important for us.

But I think that, more importantly, there should be one day a week, even one day a month, for each of us, when we can talk and be listened to, when a psychologist talks to us, gives us therapy, you know what I mean? To do something like what we are doing right now.

Wilson: Uhm. [page 44]

Celeste: Regardless of everything, it also helps me, that is, it helps me on a personal level.

Wilson: Yes.

Celeste: So, what I was telling you was that this [conversation] also helps me because, I say, venting to someone and having someone listen to me is very important.

Wilson: Actually, it is... well, I'm not going to say worrying, but it does make you think a lot about what teachers have to go through, what some teachers have to go through in some areas of Colombia. I still haven't talked to… to some [teachers] that I'm going to talk about from Bogotá, but I briefly talked about it. I told them, "It's not that bad. Well, at least you are in the capital," and they told me "That's what many believe." So, when I talk to them...

Celeste: You're going to realize it will be very similar.

Wilson: That is worrying, that is, could it be that these, these… experiences begin to intersect [resemble] with, with the others, with those of other teachers regardless of the place where, where they are working?

End of Conversation Highlights

Conversation 02 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/9/2023

Start time: 6:59 PM

Duration: 150 minutes

Participants: Alfi, Sandra, and Wilson Hernández[5]

Sandra: Female teacher | 47 years old | Vocational school | Medellin

Alfi: Male teacher | 55 years old | Vocational school | Medellin

Sandra: I worked as a medical representative until 12 years ago, and now, due to the current conditions and so on, I could not get a job in medical laboratories. So... because an economic recession also hit at that time, in 2009, and I focused [on] how to get into the SENA [Colombia's National Training Center], I focused, I focused, and then I applied and, well, I was hired. I worked for a year and a half in Caucasia [Municipality in Antioquia].

We had three mining strikes there, at that time. It was a complicated situation, very complicated, because it is a situation of violence where not even at home one can be saved from the bullets. They come shooting indiscriminately. That's what they [armed groups] pay young people for, to go and shoot.

…

Well, at the trading center, I was hired with the exclusivity of working for *La Comuna 8* [a popular area or neighbourhood in Medellin]. I worked for 10 years in *La Comuna 8* and now I am in the trading center downtown, precisely because of the threats and persecution, you get it? Because of the signs of violence. [Page 2]

[5] As stated previously, Sandra and Alfi decided to converse together with me, since they are a couple and know each other's work and life conditions and histories.

Wilson Hernández: What do you mean by signs of violence?

Sandra: Oh! Well, in *La Comuna 8*, well, *La Comuna 8* of Medellín is one, one *comuna* where many displaced people arrive who come from different parts of the country, such as Chocó [Department in Colombia], and maybe from Bajo Cauca, maybe from the Magdalena Medio [Regions of Colombia], there are a lot of Venezuelans, there are a lot of Guajiros [People from La Guajira—a region in Colombia], there are a lot of people from…

Alfi: From Córdoba [Colombia].

Sandra: …from Córdoba. So, these displacements they have lived through make these places also very violent, because each one of them comes to protect their people, and to hold their ground, and, and many conflicts are generated from that attitude. [Page 3]

…

[...] to go on strike. For example, Alfi is a boy from the area, so the miner says to Alfi, "Do you want to participate in the strike? I'll give you one hundred thousand [pesos] a day, and I'll give you the milk for the tear gas and... do you want marijuana? Do you want *perico*?"...

Alfi: On top of everything else!

Sandra: "Do you want to shoot? I have a gun for you," or, "Do you want to throw rocks? Bring me your backpack so we can fill it with rocks." Then, the miner brings trucks loaded with men, trucks loaded with stones, trucks loaded with, with men who are guerrilla members so they can shoot. And apart from that the miner uses the young people in the neighbourhood. And women participate, young people participate, parents participate, why? Because it is a job for them, so they say, "Mining strike, mining strike! Teacher, it smells like money to me" [Sandra says while rubbing her hands like when one sees a meal].

Wilson: Of course!

Sandra: Because the miner sits in one place and has his bags full of wads of bills. I saw it.

So, whoever wants to earn his money, stands in line, and the miner gives it to him. "Give me your ID," says the miner, and then they give the young man a gun, confiscate his ID, and later the young man will have to return the gun to get his ID back.

…

Alfi: And what the media reported, [what] happened with the kidnapping of more than 70 ESMAD [Anti-Riot] police officers, the death of one of them… In a video, it is observed that, from a mountain peak, there are guerrilla members with long-range rifles. So, the so-called humanitarian siege, as the Minister of the Interior named it… they always use the peasants, the indigenous people, but behind it is the guerrilla. So… something similar happens in Bajo Cauca, only now there is the Gulf Clan, who are drug traffickers. So…

[...] Another factor that caused violence [Page 4] in the population of *La Comuna 8*, of Enciso [the official name of *La Comuna 8*], was when the Medellín Cartel was dissolved, when Pablo Escobar died, then the Medellín Cartel was dissolved and remained headless. Whenever this happens in a criminal organization, the lieutenants, the leaders, those who are the closest to the boss, begin to fight for power.

And they begin to recruit young people from the neighbourhoods. Er, if we add the lack of opportunities to that, lack of opportunities that were very frequently experienced and [still] are, the young person is growing up in a culture of quick money, quick enrichment. Then, the ten or twelve-year-old boy...

…

Sandra: [Smiling, continues the conversation] Look, when I arrived at *La Comuna 8*, as I told you when we spoke before, I was very impressed that it was a squatter area, a squatter area where the houses are made of mesh… that green construction fence mesh used to separate the buildings… [they are houses] made of cardboard, of wood… and then when I got there, I said "My God, how are we going to make these people really want to study?" "Is it even likely that they want to study?" These questions motivated me to be there. [Page 8]

Alfi: [Other teachers] resigned. What happens is that she [Sandra] has thick skin because she was raised in... [At that moment, Alfi thinks about what he is going to say and looks at Sandra as if waiting for her to give him permission to say something] ... yes, in an environment more… challenging.

Sandra: More difficult.

Alfi: She has thick skin.

Sandra: But when I saw that it was, err, a squatter area, I said, "no, here there must be [Page 9] many people who do want to study and who want to take advantage of this opportunity," right? "[people] who want to join the SENA to learn how to work". So, when, when I started the class, imagine, a group of 17 people, 17 kids who were very young, fresh out of school, but really good. And then, over the years, after two years, or three years, we began to receive and deal with these youngsters who arrived, even much more violent. It became more common to hear, "Don't say anything to me", "save us the sermon"; that kind of thing. One time a student told me, "I just have to talk to you", I answered, "Tell me, tell me", "No, but right now, let's get out" [Sandra imitates a strong and raised voice], and I told him " No, tell me here once and for all what you are going to say to me," the student responds, *"A mí no me vaya a decir nada porque ni en mi casa me dicen nada y, ¿sabe qué?, conmigo tiene problemas". Entonces yo*

cogí y abrí la puerta del ambiente [así les llaman a los salones de aprendizaje en el SENA], "Venga pues, tengamos problemas afuera para que haga el reguero afuera. Venga pues, salga, salga pues, que vamos pa' afuera", y se quedó así mirándome [Sandra abre sus ojos y suelta a reírse]. "And you are not going to say anything to me! Not even my parents say shit to me at home. And you know what? You will have a problem with me." Then I opened the door to the *environment* [that's what they call the classrooms in the SENA], "Come on then, let's get to it outside, so you leave the mess there. Come on then, let's go outside, get out, let's go outside." And he stayed like that, looking at me [Sandra opens her eyes wide and starts laughing]. [Page 9]

Men face problems with other men, so I thought of him [points to his partner, Alfi] and I thought of Jefferson, the other co-worker we have at the center. So, there I was, when I said, "No! I can't be that irresponsible and stay here, because I can also put them at risk" ... You know? That's why we left.

Alfi: Of course, then, as a teacher, you have moments of tension and... in other institutions, there were suddenly moments of tension because, partly because of my experience, partly because of how one goes, let's say, moderating, managing emotions and because there one comes across intolerant students. For example, someone once told me, "You just call me on the carpet and ignore all other students! You have it in for me." And then…

Sandra: The norm also generates a reaction, it generates violence.

Alfi: Exactly. In fact, the institution tells the student, "You have to adapt to these regulations, these norms, otherwise you cannot be here." In fact, culture and education are an institutional or, as they say, umm, a legitimate form of violence. [Page 12]

…

So, we were in the pandemic, the idea came to me when we were in the pandemic, well, in my opinion… and it turns out that we had to do a sales clinic, starting from the application to get your sales permit, and students had to sell... An apprentice had to sell to the other, and so on. The activity had been announced with very good anticipation. And we had already done demonstrations in the video sessions, and I had also shown them videos of previous sales clinics. Then, [he recounts his experience stating that he called the first five students to present the activity, but they had not prepared it. Alfi left the session upset and saying goodbye half-heartedly. The student representative contacted him a few minutes later expressing his and the students' disagreement]. Then, I explained to them [to the students in the next session] that this was a form of symbolic violence. So, that, that made me think and I said, "We instructors generate violence." [Page 14]

So, here we discuss a situation when the instructors, the teachers, felt the violence of the apprentices [students] and, also, the violence we generate. [...] You had another question, how had we…

Wilson: No, you answered them for me. One was how we notice that violence, what types of violence, and what are some examples. You mentioned some. And then, how we omit or reduce that violence. You started by saying that you have reflected on your actions, I don't know if that is in principle a way of doing it, but it seems like it does to me. [Page 15] When you start saying, "Look, what I just did does seem like an act of violence, what can I do?" And then you say that you spoke with the students, the student representative intervened, and you apologized to them, and that displayed a more conciliatory act between you and the students, which is something that, as teachers, we should learn to do. Because, well, when we assume the teacher role, we learn to be a certain type of teacher. One of the theories defends that one learns to be a

teacher according to how one sees other teachers teaching. And, well, we always saw our teachers with authoritarian power. One entered the classroom and saw a dictatorship in which the teacher said "You, the homework"; "You, the answer"; "You, stay quiet"; "You, do this or that", right? And then one believes that when it's my turn to teach, one will do the same, but you arrive in Caucasia [where Sandra taught], and you can't act very authoritarian like that, because you will be kicked out of the town the following day.

Alfi and Sandra: Yes! [And they laugh]

Sandra: Yes, and I'll explain why. Within the analysis, er, that we have done and with the literature review we did for the investigation and personal reflections (Sandra refers here to the research project they had conducted about violence against teachers, and teacher-generated violence against students), [we concluded that] our culture is totally violent, we the *paisas* [people from the department of Antioquia]… we are not conciliators; we get things done. And that's a family thing. The same discipline with which we were raised, causes us to generate violence against another being. And violence is generated because, for example, many of these kids are raised alone because their parents work all day. [Page 16]

…

When you explain to the apprentice (this is how students are called in the adult education center where Sandra and Alfi work) that there are rules here, he is already rolling his eyes up, he already started to look up in despair, and he is already turning away... "No way! Then we leave. This is discrimination! I mean, it's just that here... it's just that we can't be here. I'm going to leave". "I don't know about you, but I'm going to get out," comments from them, especially the women. So, that generates violence and spreads violence. [Page 17]

Alfi: Education is a change in habits, a change in behaviour, and every form of education involves a certain degree, some degree of violence.

Wilson: And then, let's define… since we define education and we are close to defining the other concept that interests me, what is violence, then?

Alfi: Violence…

Wilson: Hmm… for the purposes of this conversation.

Alfi: For the purposes of this conversation... It is a way to resolve an internal conflict, many times, without mediating, let's say, an agreement, without mediating or negotiating. So, it is imposing my way on others, without giving room for negotiation, dialogue, understanding, agreement, or mediation.

We were educated, well, we in this generation [he points to himself and Sandra] were educated with *rejo* [a cattle whip stick]. She [Sandra] says that she was beaten with shovels.

Wilson: No way, Sandra! How come?

Sandra: They beat me with shovels [Sandra says while she laughs].

Alfi: But there was always respect for authority, so, we respect the elders and look at them respectfully. Whether they were... they would spank us, that is, the father, the mother... whether an uncle, an aunt or an older brother scolded us, one respected that, that rank, that hierarchy. Er, not at that moment, of course, the moment of the fight [while they were being beaten]. Well, one day I said, I was very little, I said, "I want to be free." And my mother came and took me by my ear and threw me out the door, "You're free now," and she closed the door, and I started crying.

[We all laugh in unison] [Page 18]

Wilson: And then I start, I start to write a formula that you began to discuss in this conversation: A forcedly imposed change of habit leads to a violent act, which then comes back as a violent reaction. [Page 21]

Sandra: Yes, Wilson, look. Even before we did the master's degree, I did the analysis of why the groups were increasingly more violent and why the women. It was not the men who were violent in the learning environment, but the women among the women themselves, and with me. So, one day I started thinking about it, thinking about it, what shall we do? First, [having] a violent environment, because I was being authoritarian, well, it didn't look [good] either, did it? No, there was no learning. There wasn't going to be any learning. It was even going to produce higher desertion.

Wilson: Exactly!

Sandra: So, it didn't work either. So, I said, "Well, here we have the solution with the SENA itself." I began to structure a plan two or three months before registering new students. I made a call, and for everyone who signed up, we had them study complementary courses in assertive communication, leadership, life planning, and conflict resolution. All the sensitization workshops, right? And very pragmatical, it was not theory, we did not need theory, we needed psychologists who worked with them, who cried, who jumped, who did what they had to do with them, so that the students built that awareness and they realized, first, what the SENA's methodology was, the opportunities the institution was offering them. [Page 25]

Alfi: But something very curious happened there. One of the few events in which a man verbally attacked a woman...

Sandra: Verbally.

Alfi: But... he was, he was surrounded by women, and he was like a leader to them, so they supported him and attacked the other student.

Sandra: They attacked the other student!

Alfi: That is, those sides are formed...

Sandra: Violence comes from women, from women!

Wilson: Yes, it is also very curious that I hear you mention that this violence comes from women, and from women towards you. Towards you, Sandra! And I wonder if suddenly we can head there, that is, let's answer a question, and then we head towards that event of violence that you were going to tell me about. And if we can't talk about that event of violence anymore, because we suddenly got lost, it's normal for it to happen... why do women generate violence against you? Why women?

Sandra: Because women are violent towards each other by nature.

Wilson: Ok. Men among men, right?

Alfi: They are more territorial.

Sandra: We are territorial, we are critical, we are gossipers, we are envious because we always have to be aware of the other, we have an inferiority complex. That [Page 27] complex will not let us go. And that is cultural. Women from the same family attack each other.

Alfi: And there is another form of this phenomenon: men are privileged; it is already a product of a patriarchal inheritance, of a patriarchal culture. Er, for example, to the men of the house, you save the best for them. The mother treats daughters with contempt, with a different demand, and she does not demand the same from men as she does from daughters. That happens a lot. That happens a lot. I don't know if it's typical of…

Sandra: …of our culture.

Alfi: …of the Paisa culture or subculture, I don't know.

Sandra: That's from the culture.

Alfi: Which is something very patriarchal, very, very sexist.

Sandra: …and they are women… and they make their groups, and they create invisible borders in training environments. And that is what we have to start working with. [Page 28]

But [with] the previous [groups] we achieved and gained a lot, we gained a lot because they also realized: "the schedule, I have to respect the schedule so that they let me enroll in this class." It was the incentive: to participate in the training and to do the activities. If suddenly I disagreed because I am trouble, well, I would have to change my habits. It is an invitation; it is more of an invitation than an imposition. How can we build order and a change of habits with strategies that do not seem violent to them?

Wilson: Have teachers received training, have they taken part in workshops in that sense: assertive communication, conflict resolution? [there was a 4-second silence in the conversation] Don't they offer teachers these workshops?

Sandra: No. I have suggested it to the boss, and we have also suggested it in the articles that Alfi has published, that we would need to have a very different preparation. Rather than teaching students that there are norms to be followed, they must be diagnosed, [Page 29] they must be characterized, and we must also identify what we will offer them, correct? Take away the criticism and take away saying "Ash! They are good for nothing", "Ash! More of the same", "Why do I even bother with them!" Am I right?

…

Wilson: We must find other spaces for these students. Commonly, students with drug addictions are denied access to certain spaces or activities because they are high, because they consume drugs, or…

Sandra: Exactly. Then, the next day he comes back, and he is high. Well. [I tell him] "Stay there, sit down. You are going to complete the worksheets." I already know that he is high. Do I have to fight with him? No. He is sick, and I have to understand that. If not, it's me who is in the wrong place, it's me, me as a teacher.

Wilson: Bravo! You understood something that surely affects and changes the lives of your students: how to teach without having to do it through force and imposition. This is something that teachers need to do because perhaps we can avoid or we can help reduce, or minimize, that violence, which also affects teachers or that sometimes teachers also generate. We must take part; we must understand that we are to change too.

Sandra: … we are the change.

Wilson: Obviously, that physical violence, in which we are attacked, or the violence of weapons, or the violence of exile, of discrimination, that type of violence requires a posture, obviously, a little more vertical—I'm not going to beat a bullet with words, to put it another way. But all this other spectrum of violence that we have discussed, all these other types of violence that we are reviewing, er, we can prepare ourselves to deal with it. And we, teachers, can prepare ourselves to heal from them. Yesterday, I was talking to a teacher who doesn't want to teach anymore, she doesn't want it anymore, and that's why, because of how [Page 30] society has denigrated her. And she doesn't have anything to turn to, she doesn't know where to turn. She doesn't. She… and she mentioned it to me several times, she told me, "Psychological help", "psychological intervention", "support", "I need therapy". And I said, "Darn, it's a shame not to

be able to have those, like, those tools as a teacher, isn't it? They assume that the teacher, because we had that authority, which we no longer have, we are strong, and nothing happens to us. But many of us are more broken inside, because dealing with students who are in trouble also breaks you.

Sandra: Yes, yes! [Page 31]

Wilson: And I wonder about that, you see in the environment, let's say, in Golondrinas or around Golondrinas, or in *La Comuna 8*, or in Enciso... in that environment where you are teaching, do you see any violent events that could affect you? [And] to you as teachers, what makes you change your way of doing things?

Sandra: Yes, the last one, the reason why we left.

Wilson: Well, before you tell me what the last event was... See, it's like you've been describing an action movie to me. If I tell people from Canada, or Sweden, or the North about what you've told me here today, they are going to say, "But how the hell has that lady not gone to another country seeking asylum? [Page 36]

Sandra: Whoa!

Wilson: Sandra, you've told me: about the conflict, you've been threatened, you left Caucasia, you told me that bullets were fired while you were there. I mean, all that conflict around you, you seem to have pushed it away. In your story, in your narrative, that problem is far away. The same is happening with Alfi…

I want to tell your story as it happened, and I want to present your perspective, your way of seeing things. I do not want to come across as rude and say "Oh! Well, they didn't see X or Y, but I do see it." No, I want to say, "They did not see that [violence]. Period." But I want to be

sure that you are not seeing it, and if you are, I want to know if you decided not to see it. All this to ask you: are there violent acts in this environment, is there violence? [Page 37]

…

Sandra: [Sandra continues telling the story with a smile, very close to laughing] So, we had to shut down the training center for a week because a *dog* had the idea of killing a *rabbit* ("dogs" and "rabbits" are criminal gangs in the area). So, the neighbourhood leaders had to go look for the dogs, look for the rabbits and sign a peace treaty again. They shut it all down, everything: schools… everything, everything was closed, because the dogs and rabbits were rioting. Since then, well, nothing else happened. So, why does one feel safe? Because one knows that they exist, the gangs are out there, and they are not going to attack you because they know you are a teacher. [Page 38]

…

Alfi: I'm going to cut you off, "home" (Paisa regionalism that means "man"), I know you're closing now, but I want to add something to her response, but from my point of view, my perception too. Maybe you'll leave with the question still on your mind, and I look at the answer from a more macro level. The fact is that we Colombians got used to it, we normalize violence, and we see it as part of life because we are historically violent people who have experienced 500 years of violence, more than 500 years of violence, and that is inherited, and that is lived. And, particularly the black population, attending classes in our training center, is violent and excludes themselves socially. If there is someone who is racist, it is a black person. [Page 42]

…

Sandra: [Referring to another incident] And several times we had to seat the students on some stairs on the second floor because we couldn't use the learning environments [classrooms].

And the classrooms were empty, and not being used. We had to ask Kevin, who was the one who managed the building for us, “Let me use the first floor,” which was an auditorium type, and we would bring three groups together, and then I would come in and give the training to everyone. Pedagogically, neither we nor the students could stand all that.

Alfi: What happened was that there was a change in the members of the Community Action Board, and they elected a new president. Since we arrived at the center, she had control of the training environments. She wanted to see the classrooms closed and unoccupied. She wouldn’t let us, or any other instructors enter. In a meeting, the schedules and the use of the rooms were explained to her, and, in addition, she knew about our workshops and services, for more than ten years, because she was a beneficiary of the Golondrinas foundation. She had been an apprentice. However, this lady insisted that we could not use the classrooms certain hours, certain days. We believe that there was political interest as well. And she was shocked by the apprentices’ noise. For example, a colleague was giving training, she walked in, told them to “shut up”, turned off the TV the instructor was using to present and told them to leave. Another act of violence against us. They used violence against us.

Sandra: They [students] attack each other. So, it turned out that I once told Kevin, “Listen, I’m going to use the classroom. If that lady (the president of the Community Action Board) comes here, tell her to talk to me, not you. She must talk to me.” Then, I walked into the classroom and started my class, and she came in after a few minutes and looked at me angrily. So, I told her, “What happened, Mrs. Blanca? How are you? Is everything okay?” She came in, but she didn’t say anything to me, she didn’t say anything to me directly, but she did tell Kevin, yes, she did tell him. And she went to Medellin’s Mayor’s Office, which is the one that manages the training center and pays for the services, pays for the security and pays the salaries of the

administrators. It turns out that she went there to say that she needed the classrooms for the CAB, so the mayor's office sent me a letter saying that I could not use the classroom in that building anymore. And the man on the motorcycle chasing me had already noticed that we knew he had been chasing me for about three months, but I didn't want to play his game.

Alfi: He hadn't even said anything to me.

Wilson: But was the man a student or was he maybe Doña Blanca's friend?

Sandra: I think Blanca sent him because maybe she would think: "Oh! So, she isn't worried about me, so let's send him and see…"

Wilson: Maybe he could scare you away.

Sandra: Yes! Scare me away. [Page 45]

Wilson: What she didn't know is that nothing scares you. [We all laugh].

Sandra: I used to go like this [Sandra waves her hand as if greeting]. When I first saw that man, I looked at him, and I knew he was coming for me. I wasn't afraid, but I knew: "He's coming for me." And, my inner voice told me "Do not worry, let's meet him." And I went. So, first I said to him, "Are you coming for someone? Are picking up any of the young men, the students? Are you waiting for someone?" Then he made a face at me. I went on, "Are you coming for me? Tell me, why do you need me? Who sent you?" At that point, he accelerated the motorcycle. Then I went out to the street, and I said, "Come on, tell me, why did you come? Who sent you?" I was sure it was that Mrs. Blanca. So, when I got the letter, I said, "Well, maybe things can escalate, and others can get caught in this too."

Wilson: Exactly.

Sandra: I said, "No, I can't put [the] men at risk." So that was when I told Alfi, "Alfi, this has been happening for so long, we have to leave the neighbourhood."

Alfi: We gotta go.

Sandra: With great sadness, we had to leave.

Wilson: I know.

Wilson: Did you spend 10 years in Golondrinas?

Sandra: Yes, ten years. Ten years ago. When I got there, the houses were made of wood and bahareque. Now there are four and five-story buildings. Where the mountain is no longer a mountain. Now, it has roads, it has staircases. The people already have electricity, they already have potable water. That wasn't there when I went the first time. [Page 47]

End of Conversation Highlights

Conversation 03 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/14/2023

Start time: 1:40 PM

Duration: 111 minutes

Participants: Clío and Wilson Hernández

Female teacher | 41 years old | High school | Bogota

Clío: Well, I studied for a degree in social sciences at Universidad Distrital, here in Bogotá, er... I think I always had a lot of inclination for education from a very, very young age, there were even teachers in my family. The women in my family have been the teachers, so that puts a mark on you, right? I tried to study another degree, but, but no, I ended up going for what I had initially said, which was the degree in social sciences because I have always been interested in history and... Finishing my degree, well, I worked for more or less two years with *Gimnasio Iragua*, here in Bogotá, a very traditional, very Catholic private school. After that, I worked at *Nuevo Campestre*, more or less another two years. At that time there was a teaching competition, and I got the opportunity to work with the public district school board, here in Bogotá, in a school called *Alfonso López Pumarejo*. I was then 28 years old, 27 years old, and since then I have been in the same school. I [Page 1] started working in the afternoon shift and, in 2015, I moved to the morning shift. Let's say that's like my work history. And professionally, well, in addition to my B.A. in social sciences, er... later I had the opportunity to study a master's degree in aesthetics and art history and well, I focused a lot on the scientific, naturalistic images of the Botanical Expedition [The Botanical Expedition of New Granada was a scientific undertaking that took place between 1783-1810] and the school of artists, because, well, I don't

know, it seems to me that it encloses many of my interests. First, the archival work, that scientific aspect, as a historian I am very passionate about science, about logical thinking. [Page 2]

…

Wilson Hernández: [L]et's talk about learning.

Clío: Yes, well, look, I'm a very strange teacher [Clío laughs]. I think. A colleague [Page 3] told me "Clío, your way of thinking is mainly scientific." She was a biology teacher: "You have a very defined scientific thinking." I do believe that one must see things from my area, which is the social sciences, one must see the phenomena, one must study them, one must analyze them, one must quantify them and draw conclusions from that.

The problem, I mean, well, let's say, the population I work with... hmm... I don't know how to say it, it is a population that does not have a reading habit. So, reading is burdensome, it is a burden, it is a pain in the neck! What the heck! Instead of seeing it as the tool that makes things easier for them, they see it as a problem because you "have" to do it. [Page 5]

Wilson: Interesting. Let's talk, then, a little... Now let's go to the context where you are, okay? So, let's talk about the school where you are, let's describe the school, what type of students you have, what families you have...

Clío: Well, the school is located in the south-west of Bogotá, it is a public school run by the Ministry of Education. The school is not even that old really, compared to other schools in Bogotá. The school was founded in 1989.

It was created to train students from the area in technical programs. First, the school was the one that provided that technical means, it had its workshops. Since it was founded, there have always been three types of workshops: the mechanical workshop, the food workshop or food

processing, and the electricity and electronics workshop. But around 2000 or so, 2005 let's say, an agreement was made with the SENA. So now the students not only graduate as technicians from the school but also as technicians from the SENA, and they continue the training process there.

The technical school, you know, does things differently from a classic high school, right? For example, some subjects have more weight, such as technology, computing, technical drawing, and natural sciences, you know? The emphasis is on those subjects because they are areas that strengthen the school programs. [Page 6] It is a school, well, relatively small. It has a capacity for about, I estimate, about a thousand students per day or twelve hundred students per day. [...] Elementary and secondary school, from 1st to 11th.

It has two campuses, which are relatively close to each other. They are within the locality of Kennedy. One campus is for the little ones, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first and second grade—something like that. And the other campus hosts the students from third grade onwards. It is where I work and where the workshops are. The population of the school is, generally, the population in the area. They are children who live in nearby neighbourhoods. They come to the school on foot. They sometimes do not even need to take public transportation or bicycles, and very few come from distant places.

Wilson: How do you feel at school? Do you feel well? Comfortable? Have you considered other options?

Clío: [Clío thinks for a moment] What happens is that this is a job of many emotions, so I… this is a Russian roulette and you don't know when you will get a bad day. Sometimes you won't know if the entire year will be a bad one. Let's say, one day you are fine, and you feel motivated and the next, for some reason, you are not. It is hard. Hmm, in fact, these days I was

talking to my family that people can't imagine the effort we make to take care of the children. Yes, people will believe that teaching is like going to school, staying for six hours, and leaving and that nothing affects you.

All of this takes a lot out of you and tires you out, but hey, let's say that sometimes I also feel…, this year, for example, I have felt, more than other times, that I can enjoy my work. Because I had an intense crisis, to be honest. I didn't want to… I didn't want to go back [to work], I didn't want to go back. I thought, "what should I do?" But, well, I don't know any other job either, so, well, that makes you stay. And the salary and job security in the public district school board motivate you to stay. But these were hard years because I didn't… how to say it? You get up and say, "What's the point of getting out of bed, what's the point of going to work?" It made absolutely no sense. So, that's why I told you it's like Russian roulette: sometimes you get good days, sometimes good weeks, and sometimes good years. The last three years were terrible. This year the situation is already improving a little, let's say, personally, for me.

What made me not so bored now? When we returned from the pandemic, it was very hard because the children came back without schooling habits. I mean, we didn't stop working, but we worked like this, from home, alone. And I even told them in the virtual meetings "Wake up! Stop lying there asleep. I know you have those cameras off because you are lying there in bed, and you don't even care about me." They lost their study habits. [Page 8]

…

Clío: I don't know how to paint an everyday situation for you… There was a boy who did not let other students study in the classroom, and then when he no longer had anyone's attention he began to say rude things and shouted them at the students, at me or at the teachers who were in class. That last year was horrible, horrible, horrible! It was like the turning point. Many

children failed the year too. In other words, you'd say about some students: "My God, it's not that you want to fail them, but I have no way to prove that this child is prepared to go on to the next grade." I don't want this to sound ugly, my God [Clío laughs]… It was like a cleansing, a cleansing where the children who were not contributing or were repeating a grade and had a bad attitude had to leave or lose their spots because repeating a grade twice at the school was not allowed. [Page 9]

My colleagues also comment on it, we have talked about it like "No, we do feel that those who stayed, continued strong and those who are repeating, they are doing so with a better attitude," you see what I mean? I don't mean that repetition when you see that the student comes back unmotivated, that he doesn't want to talk to anyone, that he doesn't want to do a task. No! I mean, we see that there are children who are very motivated and are even considering early promotions.

…

Clío: I heard about this student who did something to a female colleague. Without thinking twice, the student picked up a banana peel and bam! He threw it at the teacher's head. There in the middle of class, while she was reviewing her notebook. The student threw the banana peel at the teacher from the trash can, and the teacher just stood there speechless. She then headed out to find the logbook [where teachers keep a record of students' misconduct] and to breathe because she, well, I think she wanted to strike him. And, and when she came out, he started shouting, shouting: "Who was the…, Who is the worst teacher at school?" And then he shouted the teacher's name. And all the other kids started to, like, cheer him up. They called him "cachetes" [big cheeks], I remember that they chanted, "Cachetes! Cachetes!" while the teacher was walking away, listening to that whole situation, that humiliation. That was a terrible

humiliation. They called the student's mother, and she said, "Well! But that teacher is very annoying."

…

Clío: I [Page 12] have always found school administrative tasks very taxing, to tell you the truth. Well, I do it, but God! No way. Surviving this, the schedules, the routines... that control mechanism that always has to do with schools. It bores me. I mean, I, I am one of the people who gets desperate with such a strict schedule, and you never change your routine: You see the students at the same time every Monday; The breaks are always at the same time; and you do the same thing and even almost have the same breakfast every day! C'mon! I mean... [At this moment Clío touched her face with her right hand, perhaps as a sign of frustration, or fatigue]. This is extremely repetitive [She laughed]. So, that very marked routine has always been strenuous for me. And maybe, well, I reached a moment when I already felt exhausted from the routine. I think that could have been it. I was like "My God, I don't want to go back. I don't want to go back to teaching. I want something to happen, so I don't have to go back to school." And when, coincidentally, that started to happen to me at the end of 2019, and in 2020 the pandemic hit us, and we were locked in. I mean, I was the happiest person, I'm not going to lie to you. I was happy behind the computer. I mean, at that moment I lost my empathy for children, for education, for all those things that one says, one gives very nice speeches about: education. Not me! I…I didn't care about that at that point. I was happy to not have to see the children again, or see my colleagues again, or be at school again, or endure the cold weather, or those routines. I wanted none of that… What could, suddenly, what could suddenly… have exacerbated this crisis? The noise.

Oh! Yes. I... it may be silly, but, for me, the noise was terrible. Hmm. I'm trying to remember and, on that date, nothing bad happened with the students. In fact, in that year, in 2019, they were in seventh grade, finishing seventh grade. Now, I have them in grade 11. And I have them in grade 11 because… because there was a connection with that class. I have taught them all throughout high school. But I was tired of… like that confinement. The thing is that the school is like Foucault says, it is a prison and...

…

Wilson: Was there support? Was there a guide you followed? Did you tell anyone, "Look, I'm feeling like this"? [Page 14]

...

Wilson: Have you ever suddenly checked if there is recognition for all the extra work you were doing, let's say, at least recognition, at least, what's legal [payment]? In the contract, it says that you are responsible for doing that and it has been acknowledged by the board, I suppose, but something symbolic, an email telling you, "Teacher, thank you very much for having done this…"

Clío: Well, there were children, there were families who, who did do it, but, but no, I didn't feel appreciated. And, let's say, we, in the public teaching profession... I mean, this is so complex! You don't know who your boss really is, so there isn't a person who is the authority and calls you "you, teacher Clío Quiroga..." Nope. No. That doesn't go anywhere. That does not exist in the contract. But because it was a contingency and we were public employees, we had to see how we supported the system with our bare hands. But there was never any recognition for what we did. We had to cover all expenses ourselves, they didn't give us a mobile plan, nobody told us "Teacher, go pick up a computer since you will be working from home." Er... what I'm

telling you, it was the children, there were many children who, and families, who wrote to us [Page 15] “teacher, thank you”, You see? But beyond that, nothing. So, that also added, it added to that hopelessness that I had in education, that boredom.

Wilson: Boredom… It is interesting how what you describe, which occurred during the pandemic, is what many teachers also tell me they experience teaching in rural areas. It’s... they escaped the walls of the room. They are doing this “networking” all the time: they call one student, they call the other, what happened here, let’s try to work around this issue, they make bazaars, they sell vegetables, they bake bread, hmm...

Clío: We teachers were the ones who supported, in some way, the educational system, but we did not have the tools to do so. We did it out of conviction because we considered it was our obligation, our... Even though one was bored, even though one was unmotivated, even though we didn’t know how to do many things. Some teachers didn’t even know how to use the computer at all, and at that moment they had to learn how to make digital lesson plans, how to host a virtual meeting, how to make presentations, how to use different software that we use for online teaching... Even if the students wouldn’t learn, we tried to catch up. But one felt that it was like nailing Jell-O to a tree! No matter how much one tried and planned. There was no support for the children either, you know? It is not the same when you talk about a private school. In the [private] schools in Bogotá, of course. [Page 16]

The children didn’t log in, they didn’t show up. Few did a task or two by hand, took photos and uploaded them. So, you kind of said, “Well. So much effort was made here.” You sat at that computer to talk to them for an hour and without knowing if you were being listened to. Maybe one or two listened to you. So it was like an accumulation, an accumulation of all of 2020 and half of 2021 of, er, of, of trying in vain.

Nothing that you see in a bachelor's degree, and I think all teachers agree on this, nothing that they teach you in a bachelor's degree helps you face everyday situations in a classroom. Nothing, nothing! There is no such a subject. The only thing that I feel that the university does give [us] is knowledge. I mean, when you know something, and you can use that knowledge, you master it, and you show the students that you know, you demonstrate to them that you know, it makes one acquire a kind of… of authority. For me, that is the way to show authority, it is not by shouting or... That's not the way. Instead, you can try saying, "come on, I'm going to teach you something, I'll show it to you because I have studied it and I know it, or I have read it, and if I haven't read it well, I will learn it first myself, I study it", am I correct? But, but besides knowledge? No. Nothing else.

With my colleagues, those who are still in the universities, we have made networks. These are support networks, built on very, very close friendships. So, "Folks, who can provide us with some space so that the student teachers [Page 18] can go to do their practicum…?" And one says, "Me! I'll do it." I'm always in for those extra activities that give me more work and no money. Oh well! [Clío laughs]. So, I tell them, "Let's do it. Send me the student teachers," And then they come.

Wilson, the issue I was telling you: the routine, the schedule... one has to learn that… we must learn that when we are studying for a Bachelor of Education, don't you think? One... I… or I don't know if I was very naive, but when I was at the university, I thought, I mean, I thought about school so differently... And then I am hit with this, with what I'm telling you: with the schedules, with those strict things, with the bell—which I hate—all those everyday things... Wow! [makes a sound of frustration, of fatigue] It is so shocking for me that perhaps we are reaching that conclusion today, I am discovering here as we talk, that it was an accumulation of

fatigue, of things that do not suit me, that do not go along with my way of being, with my spirit, well, to put it romantically, the free spirit that one has [Clio laughs]. I would like something a little less structured, but hey, you get used to this. But it would be very cool if the students could learn that dynamic... Although I did my teaching practicum, which was very demanding, considering the level of a public university, it was not enough because it did not involve classroom work, planning, establishing authority, setting teaching standards, or overseeing a course. When you oversee a course, you understand well what the classroom is about. But as a student teacher, you go around three times to school, teach a cool lesson there, do a little game for the students and bye. You're gone. You completed your assignment. But that's not how the practicum should be. [Page 19]

…

Clío: Many teachers put up with the public teaching profession because they have debts, because they have commitments... And the teachers who are governed by the 2277 decree, I don't know if you know this, but they, unlike me, can continue working and still receive their pensions. I don't know if someone who is 70 or 65 years old is fully capable of understanding such new generations and dealing with that generation gap that exists. [Page 21]

…

Wilson: [What is] your opinion regarding violence in Colombia[?].

Clío: Political violence, violence, well not bipartisan anymore, but let's say the guerrillas, well, it affects us, it does. Structural violence also affects the school and more so the public school, I believe.

In addition, we receive displaced children. Right now, I am getting to know a new girl in the school who comes from a small town, I always forget her name, but I understand that the

town is near the Montes de María [A group of mountains near the northern coast of Colombia, historically known for its breathtaking landscapes and ceaseless violence]. Her father is no longer alive, her mother has been here in Bogotá for three months with her two little sisters, who are younger than her. A small girl, well, you can tell that she is malnourished. And she hasn't told me "I'm displaced," but, well, one infers that kind of thing, right? I can deduce that from what I've talked to her... hmm, and there are several displaced children at school. And we are in Bogotá, where people think that is less common. [Page 24]

…

Some things are, are not acceptable, you know? And I think this structural violence is evident in the quality of education provided to children. When, for example—I am going to get into a controversial topic, but I want to do it because I have that complaint—when, for example, a teacher selection process [*concurso docente*] is held, teachers are hired to go to work in public schools and, well, teachers demonstrate their abilities on paper. But when you see them up close, you notice they don't know how to manage students, are rude, presumptuous, mistreat their students, and so on. And I wonder, why do we have to go through that? Even worse, they mistreat their colleagues. They do not procure a minimally cordial working relationship.

Yes, I think that is structural violence. Take the PAE [*Programa de Alimentación Escolar* / Schools Meals Program] as an example. When a state does not guarantee a right to students, there is structural violence, because it also takes away money from the treasury. So, they do not allocate it correctly, they pretend to invest that money in noble purposes, but those noble purposes have a chain of corruption, you know? So, to me, that seems to affect the students' process, right? When you hire a teacher who does not comply or who does not go to work or who makes excuses or well, and, in any case, that teacher remains [Page 25] hired and continues to

demand his salary, that is a form of structural violence that we have naturalized, don't you think? But that is why it is structural violence, because the state exercises it. It is silent. And it seems that nothing will happen. But the truth is it is condemning a lot of generations to not having the educational quality that a private school student has. You see what I mean?

…

Clío: The other thing, then, is the violence that occurs at school. As Estanislao Zuleta said, "School is a field of combat." That's terrible there. It's terrible. There are egos, there are, there are alliances, there is an air of superiority. There is, there is everything. And [Page 26] there are also acts of violence generated, they can be verbal, or psychological...

Wilson: Are you talking about the teachers or the students?

Clío: Among the… No, I'm talking among the teachers themselves.

Wilson: And it is more expected of the students because they are in a training process, right?

Clío: Yes, and well, they [the students] also come from violent environments. Notice how everything permeates society. The children come… actually, today I was talking to the counsellor because we have had several cases of violence, and she told me, "Clío, I notice that this year, especially, the children are going through experiences of violence at home, situations of family violence, and that is being reflected here." So, of course, a child is not rude at school because I am the one who teaches him to be like that. He learned it at home with his father, with his mother, with his grandparents, where that is accepted, where that is naturalized. I mean, the students curse next to you, okay? Er... and I am one of the teachers who does not accept that behaviour. ... It's not because you don't tell them, but I think one should not accept that as a

teacher. So, “C’mon, teacher, that’s just how we talk to each other.” A girl and a boy once told me, “That’s just how we talk to each other.” [Page 27]

…

Wilson: [There is silence for about 5 seconds. It’s starting to be difficult for me to think about everything she’s telling me, not to give my opinions, to prepare the following question and to be present in the conversation].

Do you see what’s happening? At this point, the things you’ve told me begin to weigh on me and I begin to remember the other conversations I have had with the other teachers. I have to be honest. You are the first to talk about… well, no, it has almost been progressive. In the first conversation, the violence we discussed was towards the teacher, the second towards teachers too, and you, right now, have been quite open in saying: no, it seems to me that we have to make a mea culpa here, there is a lot we are responsible for, and we are doing things wrong. It’s, it’s, hmm, from the research point of view, it was important to hear that because, uh, well... Let’s see. It is necessary to listen to the points of view, and the differences that exist when discussing violence with teachers. We have talked about the types of violence that affect teachers, the types of violence that affect education, that types that affect children [students] and schools, but little has been said, little has been said about how the teachers also contribute, although maybe not to the same extent. Of course, we are not war criminals, we are not shooting, we are not attacking, we are not planting bombs, it is not the same [violence] that affects teachers in rural populations. But there are some things that teachers are doing wrong, and which must be repaired. There is also violence exerted from within the school, by some teachers, that is not coercive, that is not armed, that is not racial, but that is structural, as you said, well, and as you proved with those examples. So, I start to think... how to say it? How to say it in the best way? Because, well, you

know that when teachers read or listen to this are going to… you know? They're probably going to want to crucify someone.

Clío: These are unpopular opinions. [She laughs]

Wilson: But totally valid. And valid and, and supported with [Page 30] clear arguments. So, sometimes it is good to hear those comments from within the school because, if we analyze what's happening, the image of the teacher has been weakened, er, parents and other sectors of society don't think highly of teachers, and this can, this can begin to explain why.

Clio: … Everywhere in this country! What I'm telling you, we are all affected by violence somehow. And that is the daily practice... here you solve problems with violence. There is no other way. On the road, crossing the street, buying the, I don't know, the groceries, at work, not just in my job, but an [Page 33] office job, how do you demand rights in this country? Shouting! There is no other option here.

…

Wilson: Of course, if in Bogotá, I walk behind a woman for two blocks, she will change sidewalks, or take a bus, she will do something, you know?

Clio: Yes, yes! I do the same with a man or woman, too. I mean, what I mean, it's not an issue of being a man or a woman, it's an issue that we are all full of fear. So, that is always very common, as you say, we are always ready for action, I mean. And we always have an answer for everything. That is why there is no scenario where there is no violence. And all of us, in one way or another, unfortunately, at some point, have exercised that violence. All of us. And if you don't exercise it, then you already see yourself as, I don't know, as weak, as an idiot, like: "So you did nothing? C'mon say something, fight back!" And what do I get by doing that? Sometimes I find

myself in discussions about, well, a thousand things. Ugh! And why do I wear myself out? … "But I fought back" And what did I get out of that? [Page 34]

End of Conversation Highlights

Conversation 04 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/16/2023

Start time: 5:12 PM

Duration: 128 minutes

Participants: Jagomo and Wilson Hernández

Male teacher | 41 years old | High school | Bogota

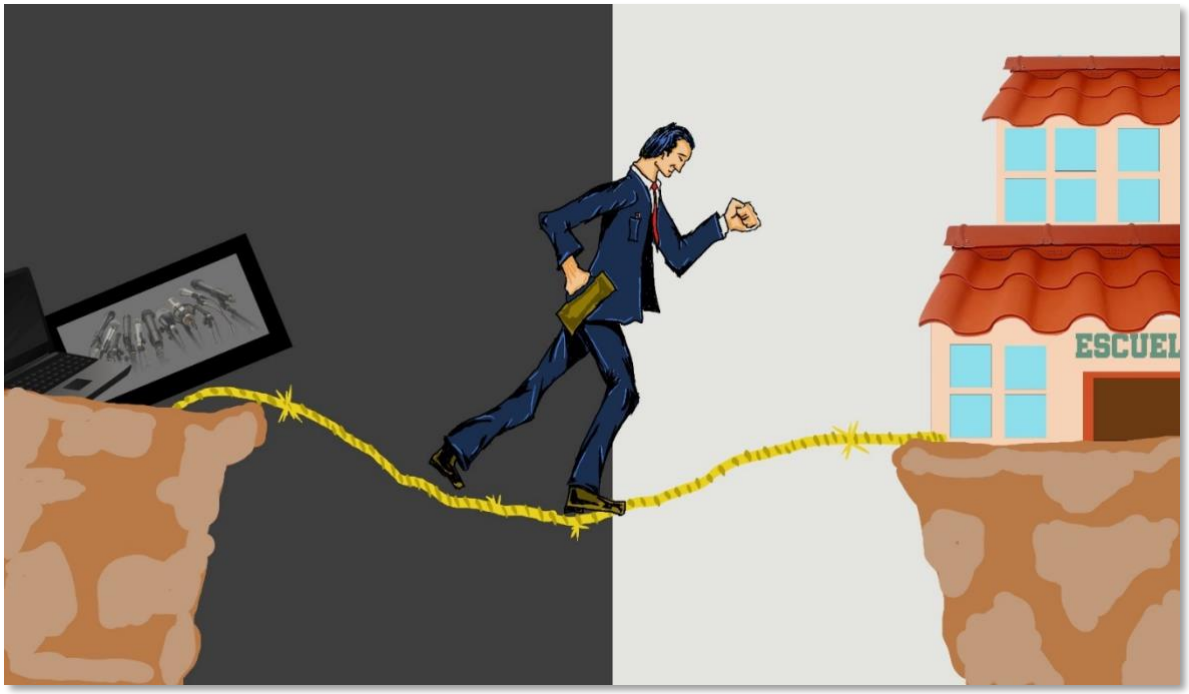

Figure 4. Teachers on a tightrope. Illustration created by Jagomo. 2023.

Jagomo: Alright. Well, I have a bachelor's degree in social sciences from Universidad Distrital and a master's degree in philosophy from Universidad de Santo Tomas. That's where I got my master's degree. I have been in the public education sector for more than twelve years and on May 26 I will complete twelve years in the same institution.

[Page 1] [Now] I am... the school is located in Kennedy [locality in the southwest of Bogota] ... hmm... but for now everything has been quite manageable.

[In] my life, I've been interested in, I don't know, things like art or music… But I saw that, that what I could seriously opt for was teaching. But I had to choose between mathematics [and] philosophy. Well, the intention was always philosophy, but the closest thing was social studies. Due to economic issues, I had to accommodate, you know, but, but, yes... teacher, I wanted to be a teacher, and fortunately, I think, I chose the right area for me. [Page 2]

…

[The media] has done us a lot of harm because they have stigmatized us [teachers] quite a lot. In previous years, we had some strikes, quite extensive and quite strong, and we were quite stigmatized. I feel that, in the eyes of society, the role of the teacher is not a fundamental role. So, that image that we had many years ago of... of the teacher—or at least from the time when I studied—when the teacher was a fundamental part of... of society, who had to be respected, who had to be listened to, that is long gone! Well, it is not, it is not as, as well regarded as it used to be. Nowadays, the teacher seems..., society thinks, that the teacher has other roles more in line with taking care of, watching over students, and not really educating.

Well, when you look at the historical trace, I feel that going from a constitution as long as that of 1886 to the constitution of 1991, that transition was not so, so smooth and the [Page 3] school did manage that transition well. Teachers had a little more freedom to... to demand. But there were also other cons. For example, subjects such as religion, such as ethics, which is very much associated with religion, were very dogmatic. So, although teachers at that time gained prestige, it is also true that education had its difficulties in terms of freedom. In other words, we gained freedom in matters of teaching, but we have lost a lot in terms of respect.

Wilson Hernández: What changed that respect?

Jagomo: There is a change in the goals of education. Education is not something that really works, and that comes from... from state guidelines that did not work as, as a, as a structure to really form the student to be critical. Education became more of a, it is a space where you throw a thousand students, I am talking about the public sector, [Page 4] you throw a thousand students in, and it does not matter the conditions they are in, what matters is that they are there.

In addition to that, what I was telling you, the media, for example, the media, uh... put a lot of emphasis on, on the fact that teachers had a lot of benefits, I'm still talking about, about the public sector. Legally we have six teaching hours [daily] and two hours for preparing classes [daily].

…

Jagomo: So, students form their opinion from how the parent thinks, from the news, especially in the context of strikes, which tell them that the teachers make their wages very easily. They hear and read that the teachers only work half a day. For example, some people complain that teachers who work from 6:15 to 12:30 work for only half a day.

We heard those arguments even during the pandemic, once a father wrote to me and said, at five in the morning, "Why don't you answer me?" I replied, "It's five in the morning! Why would I answer you?" And he said to me, "You earn your salary very easily." And I, but, but… I simply said, "Don't talk to me. If you have any questions, talk to the [academic] coordinator, and if you have any complaints, then take it directly to him".

…

Jagomo: We have to deal with the student who has not eaten all day, with the student whose father is in jail, or who lives with his aunt and uncle because his parents left him, I mean, these situations are not recognized, you know? We are only seeing a small part of it, and they have been judging us hard for a long, long time. So, all that, all those factors in the imaginary of, of society, leave us a [Page 6] little bit in a bad position in front of, in front of them.

I think that of the areas that have been most stigmatized, I think it is the one I belong to, social sciences and philosophy. Even in previous governments, they were sending bills where the freedom of teachers had to be limited because teaching certain parts of history were forbidden. Because they said that what we teachers did was to dogmatize. Then they began to pass bills to try to filter and have a little more control over what is taught because according to society, well, according to the media and some political sectors, what we teachers do is to dogmatize and that that has been our job in recent times, to set civil society against others. This is contradictory because those who really have the power to control society are some powerful sectors, because they have a lot of things in their control, they have the media, they have information, they have a lot of things.

…

Jagomo: This lack of unity [among teachers] has also cost us, has cost us dearly, because in one way those [teachers] under the [decree] 2277 of 1979 (this decree establishes a special regime to control the conditions of entry, exercise, stability, promotion, and retirement for teachers at the various levels and modalities that comprise the national educational system of Colombia) are trying to defend the little they have achieved and those of us governed by the [decree] 1278 of 2002 are proposing better conditions, even better than those of 2277 (These two decrees govern the teaching profession in Colombia: Decree 2277 of 1979, which was in effect

from January 1, 1980 to December 31, 2002, and decree 1278 of 2002, which governs the teaching profession as of January 1, 2003). And this generates internal difficulties within the, within the, within the school, because of this lack of unity, this lack of criteria, we are not all thinking in the same direction. Some are obviously thinking, and it is natural, about their own well-being, about their pension…

…

Jagomo: Through our unions, we delivered, for example, today, uh... like a, a demand letter, and the secretary of education did not want to receive it. So, all those things that we do not achieve and that go unnoticed generate particular hostility towards the, towards teachers. And probably if the teachers, [Page 8] already aware of many situations like that one, decide to go on strike, then what people are left with is the fact that they are on strike, protesting just to not teach and do nothing. That is like the, the image that we have within society.

Wilson: So [we talked about] how, how the teacher is moulded by those agents who are external to the education world. But from the inside... how does the teacher present herself before society?

Jagomo: Well, we teachers try to, at least within our scope of, of the school, we try to be very close with the families, but it's, it's only one thing to try because the reality is that, that the students come [to class] but you don't even know their families. Look, I am going to give you an example. Just now we had, about a month ago, the first parent-teacher meeting in my group. There are thirty-three students, and only six parents attended.

So, one wonders, "Well, and the other parents, why don't they come? It's their children we are talking about! And that did not only happen in my class. [It] happened at a general level! So, for us, it is very difficult to have an authentic approach with [Page 11] eh... with the families.

I think we were closer to the families during the pandemic, because during the pandemic it was not necessary to have face-to-face meetings and the parents, well, they looked for a way and connected through Zoom. Somehow, they were connected, and, and they managed to attend virtual meetings. But now, it is very difficult to attend face-to-face meetings. I understand that they must work. I know there are jobs that do not allow parents to attend these meetings. But there are parents that you do not know until the end of the year. And at the end of the year, they come in and complain to all teachers because their child is not, is not doing well.

And you tell them, "But, but a report card could've let you know that, that your child was not doing well, and you didn't even come to pick that up".

…

Wilson: Playing devil's advocate here, could it be that the teacher is responsible, the teacher or teachers, or some teachers, are responsible for how they are presented in the media, how they are presented to society?

Jagomo: Yes, I feel that we are not, I don't know, as ethical as we should be. I mean, yes, there are difficulties, I mean, we do have some difficulties. I know. We do have very favourable things, the most favourable thing for a teacher is their stability. We know, at least [in] the public sector, those of us who are employed, that this stability is very difficult to achieve in other jobs, in other types of jobs. But sometimes, we also have to accept that we have taken advantage of those conditions. So, uh...

…

Jagomo: Teachers who suddenly start coughing… Here, well, just between us—I hope not many people find out what I'm going to say [Jagomo says sarcastically]—They start coughing on a Thursday and you say, "Oh, well, they are going to call in sick on Friday because

they have a trip coming up". So, one begins to see what colleagues are doing, because this job allows that to be done. So, we have also contributed to, to the fact that our reputation is not very, very well respected in the eyes of society, but let's say that this is something minimal, you can't generalize from this, it is something...

…

Jagomo: They ask us to achieve a lot, to accomplish many things, but they rarely realize that you are not in the classroom because you are elsewhere trying to solve a problem with a student who wants to bully another student. You say, "Well, what do I do here? What is the priority at this moment? That the students are in the classroom or that they [Page 14] don't go to attack each other on the way out or in the institution?"

Let me give you an example. In an interview, during the national strikes in Colombia, the journalists asked the president of FECODE [Federación Colombiana de Trabajadores de la Educación / Colombian Federation of Education Workers] a question in English, and he didn't know English so [the journalist] said, "You see? Well, that's the kind of education the students receive. Not even the president of FECODE speaks English". So, who listens to that, who reads that interview, the first thing they say is, "I mean, if the president of FECODE doesn't know English, then from there on down, all these teachers are ignorant". And society is in their [the journalists'] hands. So, yes, they have given us a hard time, but we have also contributed to these things happening. There are values that have been lost within the school. [Page 15]

…

Wilson: Teachers who must start their trip to school on Sunday afternoon, or get up early in the morning to arrive in town on time to leave for the "vereda" [This term is close in translation to a township, but with significant social and economic differences], and on Friday

afternoon go back to their homes, I mean, they spend five days there, some can rent a room or an apartment near the school, others live at the school. And yes, it is a condition of the teachers in rural areas, who deserve not to be treated this way. These people should, at least once a year, I don't know, receive a little greeting on the radio thanking them for what they do.

Jagomo: We are about to have a new teacher selection process for public schools, it is already being executed and [the] new teachers are ready to start soon. This process has already opened up the possibilities for anyone to apply to be a teacher. You no longer must be strictly a teacher education graduate. You can come from any discipline, so an engineer can apply to teach mathematics, and a biologist can apply to teach biology…

But it goes back to what we talked about at the beginning. Some teachers are really teaching out of conviction, and there are other teachers who, due to life contingencies, turn out to be teachers without wanting to be there.

Before, to be a school director, you had to have a certain amount of time as a coordinator, you had to have a certain amount of experience. Now, the most important thing is to have a certain amount of experience, but it does not have to be a lot of experience as a coordinator, it can be experience in any administrative position. They must know more about administration than pedagogy. [Page 16]

Wilson: Can you imagine that? The teachers I have talked to in the last few days tell me that they receive a very productivity-oriented treatment, very results-oriented, but very little humane treatment from the administration of the schools where they work. They told me that if they are sick, they are asked, "but, what are you complaining about?"; "But you see that you are not doing what you must do. You are really lazy!" This is how coordinators and school directors

talk to the teachers I have talked to. So, imagine when a person who has been working in a more dehumanized or industrial sector comes in.

And let's say, this lack of tact, of ethics, of assertive communication, let's say that it cannot be the strong suit in some disciplines, and I say this because I have worked in other areas [referring to the oil industry]. The first thing that, that gave me a hard time when I was working in another country in that area was the treatment. They treat you like shit, you know? So, I wonder how that will work out for the teachers. And the last comment before moving on to a question I would like to ask you about productivity. We've talked about how we are measured in terms of production, we are demanded in terms of production, and we pass that production, that productivity to the, to the student.

So, we have established schedules, established tasks, and percentages, and we are all getting exhausted, from the student to the teachers. And it is interesting to see how, how we have not won the fight against neo-liberalization in teaching, in the schools, how we have not…

Jagomo: We are a violent society. We are a violent society and... we repeatedly relay that violence through, through the grade or mark. That is, "Ah! You. You were late." And it doesn't matter why the student was late, "You don't attend my class now, you don't enter the classroom". We often have strong reprisals for students and [for] us, our weapon has been, unfortunately, the, the mark. Once I told school teachers, "Well, what would happen if, I don't know, one week we decide not to give marks to students?" [Page 17]

…

The problem with education is that it has not changed. I don't know. We have been doing the same thing for more than 200 years, where someone, who is supposed to know everything, stands in front of a group of "ignoramuses" and that group of ignoramuses simply tries to get the

information that, that, that wise man has. And we have not realized [that] education is not about that. It is about interacting with others. It is about a person who knows something that others can learn from. But as long as we continue grading as we do, as we continue to believe that the grade or assessment is not to diagnose [Page 18], but to classify, that will continue to condemn us within the, within the school and that will bring a lot of violence because it is a form of exclusion, of segregation. Here are the good ones, here are the bad ones; where humanity is lost to give a student, not a title [a name], but a number.

This is something that I think is very difficult to stop, but it is something we need to think about. So, unconsciously, the teacher is promoting the, the stability of the social classes [Page 19].

Wilson: And since we started to talk a little about the issue of violence in, in Colombia, you mentioned something that I found very interesting: the mark as violence. The mark becomes like that, that symbol of the teacher's authority to be able to exert pressure. I think you also used the word pressure there, to control, so that students stay still or so that they attend class, or so that they do not leave, etc. So, I wonder, what other type of violence do we see there in the, in the school or permeating education? Or what other violence or forms of violence do we see in this area?

Jagomo: In the institution, parents have arrived very upset to talk to some teachers. There are times [when] we make the mistake of not having a clear understanding of the students' processes and the parent arrives and says "Well, why is my child failing this class?", "Well, he's failing because he does" or "He's failing because he didn't turn in such and such assignment"; "No, but he did turn it in", says the parent. And since no one has that clarity [about] those processes, there are some gigantic clashes. But there is also, there is [a] nature of parents who are

very prone to, to clashes. Last year, on the last report card day, a teacher gave the report of a student who had flunked out of school that year, [and] the father, I don't know if I had told you at some point, the, the father said, "I don't mind going back to jail for smashing your face". And I mean, for him to say that, to me that seems extremely dire. [Page 21]

This leads to other types of violence. We teachers sometimes make mistakes in the way we make demands and how we grade.

Many times, we lack a bit of tact in handling certain situations because many of them can be stopped before they get out of hand. I have been working for several years with the school's coexistence committee, and there we try to, to, to propose strategies to prevent these things from happening. [Page 22]

…

Jagomo: And probably the teacher obviously achieved the, of... it caused her discomfort, but the lady did not solve her problem via the mechanisms that we have developed to solve this type of issues within the school. Many times, we believe that, that the most direct way is the most effective and we do not realize that there is a procedure and that there is an established action plan that... that we have to follow. [Page 23]

I mean, there's a factor... I remember the case of a colleague last year. Uh, there was a girl, and the girl was in the classroom and then [he] asked her, "Well, what do you have there?", a seventh-grade girl, and the girl says, "No, I just have... I don't have anything". He went on, "Yeah, you got something there. Let me see what you got there." And the girl took a kitchen knife out. And she stays like that [Jagomo acts as if holding a knife] and says "A voice… a voice told me that I had to kill you". Obviously, that's too alarming!

[For her right to education] she must remain at the school, maybe with other kinds of strategies and with, and with other kinds of, of schedules, but we still felt that, that having her in the school was like a time bomb.

Wilson: And what about the teacher's right to protect his life?

Jagomo: No, well, in that case, the child's right is the priority… what they said, the, the, the... the officials from…

Wilson: ... The rights of the children are of priority concern.

Jagomo: Let's say that nowadays he is a little more relaxed, but let's say that the, the... well, feeling that I can be killed at any moment, well, it is not easy for anyone. Even if it is a girl, she is a girl, but, but she has the intention of attacking someone.

…

Wilson: Can the teacher do something else, or can the teacher be educated, or can the teacher be trained to resolve these small conflicts, to de-escalate, to use these action plans better and to avoid direct conflict with the students, or with the parents?

Jagomo: At the office of the Secretary of Education, there are, nowadays, some, [Page 28] uh, I don't know, like some guidelines that are designed for that, to tell teachers how to mediate in conflicts. One of the guidelines is called HERMES, and it is about, uh, training a group of students together with the teacher for conflict resolution and then those students will become peace managers, they will be mediators. [Page 29]

…

And then, what the students do is to start talking badly about the teachers. Last year, they even talked about killing a teacher, or doing something else to him, a teacher in the afternoon shift. So, what seems very funny to them, what seems a childish game on Facebook, well, it also

begins, in a certain way, [to] border on the, on illegality. Now, what is the problem? There are new forms of violence, so to speak, that are being produced in the school, and which we do not, we do not handle because we are used to the internal [armed] conflict.

…

Wilson: In Colombia, labelling... labelling someone, giving someone a title [Page 30]... we have easily seen many cases that lead to death. Someone is called gay in the street, or accused of being a bad teacher, or for being called unfaithful, without due process, someone just goes and attacks them. And I see, then, all these different expressions or forms of violence, the ones that the teacher has been subjected to, and look that in the beginning, I thought, "Jagomo is maybe going to tell me one or two cases," but I already counted six or seven.

Jagomo: And you have to consider that the environment I am in is way too friendly.

Wilson: So, these are the nice stories.

Jagomo: To tell you the truth, I feel that the measures taken by the school board, for example, regarding the case I told you about, the one about Facebook [in which students wished the death of a teacher], have been quite, quite light. No investigation was done. In fact, the Facebook page still exists. If you go to Facebook, search for "Curtiendo al Alfonso López Pumarejo", and you will see the Facebook page. And everything is there. Comments about teachers are in there, and complaints among them as well. Obviously, that page is private, but a Facebook page that contains those hostilities towards teachers, I would believe that, easily, a legal claim could be filed, and the page would have to be, to be deleted. [Page 32]

Wilson: How do those social networks become or can at some point become a source for or seed of violence, which later may become a physical attack? Because you said that it is something that starts [Page 33] outside and then explodes inside the school. Since the student

does not want to say it in front of the teacher, the student finds strength outside, finds support outside in a social network and then comes to the school, to the classroom and stabs a teacher, or hits her with a stone or punches her, or toss her in a trash bin like in the video you saw (previously, Jagomo described to me a video he came across in the social media, where students grabbed a teacher and toss her in a trash bin at school).

Jagomo: We go head-on against computer tools, or we look for pedagogical ways to make adequate use of them. But, I think, for us, it would be easier to prohibit that, we should prohibit the use of social networks. Period. But I would think that denying that would also be denying ourselves as teachers of the possibilities of this time.

…

And many times, they even arrive in a herd to confront the teacher, and the [Page 34] teacher says well, if they have a complaint, I will gladly attend to them, but how can I attend to thirty [people], each one shouting. That is not the way to do it. So it has been quite easy to generate chaos, and I do feel that this can lead—if it is not re-examined—it can lead to something violent, tough, because, as you say, I mean, one thing is to bring issues inside the school to a halt, but another thing is that the student could get angrier at the teacher outside and bring this, this difficulty into the school.

Wilson: Lack of respect for the teacher's work; these idiosyncratic behaviours, characteristic, of the Colombian population which depict violence; the way to solve a problem is always by shouting or hitting; are these forms distorted, ill-intentioned, I don't know, are these a distorted, surreal presentation of what [the problem] really is? The teacher is presented as a lazy, lazy person... These social networks where small groups can dedicate themselves to "give their

opinion" about that teacher, well, they have a synergy that worries me because the teacher is in the middle [at the epicentre of all the criticism].

See how there is a system that allows, let's say, well, I am not saying that it is permissive with intent, but it does allow violence to be exercised towards the teacher. [Page 35] Technology and social networks may act as a mechanism that allows the strengthening of violence.

This other very alarming element of this system is the ridiculing of the teacher. [Page 36] After studying his career, he goes to work with a hope to change the world, and instead he finds that students want to ridicule him all the time.

Why continue to be a teacher under these conditions; why does Jagomo continue to be a teacher under these conditions? [Page 37]

…

Jagomo: "Well, if they achieve all those things, then, in a certain way I am there, present, in their lives plans." And that is what keeps you very active in this [job]. There are days when you say, "No, why the fuck did I become a teacher? There are many days when you say, "This is what I really wanted to do, and I don't think of myself in any other way." [Page 38]

Wilson: I don't want to sound so romantic, but hopefully, hopefully we can, I don't know, we can generate in the students the intention that they want to dedicate a few words to us on Facebook, words not like: "this teacher should die for being so shitty". I am also very struck by how I, as a teacher, with what I do, can affect my students, their decisions or their learning so that they can achieve certain, certain, goals or certain jobs. That's what really motivates me. [Page 39]

Jagomo: Teachers who disown this profession a lot, they manage to relay that to the, to the student, I mean, they relay their discomfort as teachers to the students, and the students

notice that, in a way, probably indirectly, but they do notice it. They notice that the teacher is not happy with what he is doing. [Page 42]

End of Conversation Highlights

Conversation 05 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/18/2023

Start time: 11:40 AM

Duration: 99 minutes

Participants: Pedro Pablo Martínez and Wilson Hernández

Female teacher | 37 years old | Elementary rural school | Municipality near Santa Marta

Pedro Pablo: Well, let's start. I decided to use this pseudonym partly because of my grandfather, Pedro Pablo, so it's as if he is... he is one of the people who taught me to move forward despite the difficulties. So, it is also like a tribute to him, through my pseudonym, in this conversation. As for my work as a teacher, I have been working as a teacher for 12, almost 13 years now. I have had the experience and the good luck to work both in the urban sector and to know the rural and extreme rurality, literally. Even though in the university they talk about rural education, and you may do a rural internship, you never imagine that you are going to find places where there is no cell phone service, where there is no... that until about 10 years ago there was no electricity, a proper electrical grid, where there are still people, in the 21st century, who use torches to live.

So, these things leave a mark on you, you know? But you learn from them. You realize the importance of a rural teacher in such a remote community, don't you think? As Gabriel García Márquez would say in One Hundred Years of Solitude, the teacher is the Melquíades, the one who transports things, the one who is in contact with the, with the outside [world], and who is very, very resourceful. That is a [rural] teacher. You would never imagine that your work can be so essential. And it is also the only way the state can be present in such remote places because

there, the state only reaches out at times of political campaigns, through the army and the school. There is no other way to say that the state reaches these very distant communities.

So, when you learn to live that reality, experience it, and belong to it after you arrive, especially if you are a 100% urban person, it changes you, it changes you a lot. And the lessons learned are great! I mean, no, I do not regret any of my experiences as a rural teacher. I think it has been what, in me, in my, in my profession and in my way of being, it has been what, what has filled me the most. This is the moment when I can say "Oh, yes! I studied for this, to work for a community that is far away, that faces countless difficulties, where the state, the government is not, is not, is not present but where I, as a teacher, my work is very valuable." And the advantage in the rural area is that the respect for the teacher exists, you see? In Bogota, like, I worked all my life in Bogota, it was almost ten, eight years working in private schools. And when you switch to work at a rural public school... I mean, wow! It was an absolute change. You know what I mean? Gratifying in many ways, and painful in others, but it always fills you up. It is a vocation. That's when you confirm if you are good at it [being a teacher] or not. That was like my apprenticeship, and now, well, I'm starting another experience. Here I go! [Page 2]

…

Pedro Pablo: Later, I began to learn about philosophy, and I fell in love with it. It was about asking questions, getting to know... I was lucky that an aunt of mine, who grew up with me, was in college, and I lived with her and with [Page 3] my family. She was part of the family, and she was doing a degree in languages, modern languages... she was my, she was my, my role model: she studied, read books… Then, she started to work, and she was the person with whom I shared more time while I was studying because she had the same schedule. She would head out, come back, and spend time with me. She would be there with me on weekends, and that was how

I started to see all the teacher's work. And I said "Well, okay, I like it. It's cool what a teacher does." It caught my attention, and that's what got me on the path to a teacher education program. [Page 4]

…

Pedro Pablo: I already knew the Sierra Nevada del Cocuy [a protected area from which 23 snow peaks rise surrounded by waterfalls, lakes, and *páramo* vegetation], I had been lucky enough to know it. But when I went to work, they told me "Yes, Chita is right there." But to go to work and try to find the school, well, I mean... I have a degree in social sciences, so I could find the location by map, you know? So, I first...

…

Pedro Pablo: That was an elementary school. Uh, I worked four and a half years as an elementary school teacher. Escuela Unitaria o Escuela Nueva [where students are not divided into classes, and one teacher teaches all students simultaneously. These schools usually have between 3 and 20 or more students]. I was the only teacher, with four students… four students: one in first grade, one in second grade, one in third grade and one in fourth grade. Those were my, those were my kids.

Eh... to get there from... from... I mean, you get to the municipality of Chita, right? And from there to the school, you still have a 5-hour trip, two hours by public transportation, in a bus that only runs one route in the morning and one in the afternoon. One way to Chita and one way back. That's all there is. And from where the bus drops you off, to get to the school, if you have horses, it's three hours more. And if you don't have any horses, it can take you four [hours] and a half. It really depends on your shape, your [Page 5] walking speed. And you start going down from 3,100 meters [above sea level], páramo, páramo, páramo, páramo until you reach the school

at about 2,100 meters above sea level. In other words, you go through different altitudes and climates. It was a beautiful journey. I don't deny it, I enjoyed it a lot, it was the moment when, as a person, I took advantage of it, while I was alone, I meditated, and I enjoyed the scenery. [But] If you had to leave school to go, for example, to a medical appointment in Tunja or Bogotá, you had to go, you had to leave school at 2 o'clock in the morning to be able to take the bus that took you to, to... well, it took you out of the municipality, but it did not take you to your exact destination. It took you to the nearest town, at that time.

Wilson Hernández: And you arrived on Sunday and left on Friday?

Pedro Pablo: Well, hmm... When I arrived at the school, I talked to the school director, and he told me that there were three schools to choose from. One was near the town and the schedule was Monday to Friday—regular schedule. The other schools, since they were so far away, those had different schedules. Since they were not easy to access, they were not easily accessible, so I had the advantage of working from Monday to Saturday, six hours a day, yes, the children had five hours a week, and they had five hours of class, but I worked six hours from Monday to Saturday, and I could work three weeks and have one week off. That was the week when I used to.... I could travel to Bogotá. At that time, the school had… there was an internet service called... "Punto Vive Digital" [Government definition: https://mintic.gov.co/portal/vivedigital/612/w3-propertyvalue-669.html; Newspaper description: https://www.eltiempo.com/tecnosfera/novedades-tecnologia/contraloria-encontro-irregularidades-en-los-puntos-vive-digital-221808] which was an antenna.

Wilson: Punto vive digital… I know.

Pedro Pablo: ... a satellite antenna where you could… when you got internet, it was not the best, it worked only when the sky was clear, but you lived near a paramo... so it was always

cloudy. Occasionally you couldn't count on communication because you couldn't even get cell phone service. [Page 6]

So, that's where we were, and obviously the, the school became much more distant and distant because of that communication issue.

When you start working with, with the government, at least the salary is higher, it is better paid, we are not going to deny it, eh... although it is not what it should be for such a distant place and for what you do, it is still poorly paid, but compared to the private sector, it is much better.

Wilson: Of course!

Pedro Pablo: Let's say that from a labour and economic point of view my life had a, like stability, or something. Cool. But emotionally it brought me problems, you know? I started to have psychological, depression, and anxiety problems. After many things, when you see yourself very lonely and distant, because, well, in the school in Chita, I was sharing all my time just with the children.

Wilson: I get what you mean.

Pedro Pablo: And that is hard. The closest neighbour was 20 minutes away from the school. So, when it was raining, I would work with my kids from 8 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon. [Page 8]

Look, if you have the possibility, search in, there is a, there is a website called "OpenStreetMap" [https://www.openstreetmap.org], search for, if you search for "Chipa Viejo, José María Potier", which is the school, you can find it there. I did the geolocation, and there you can see from where the road starts, to where you have to go. There, there you find it, there you see the route. It is very beautiful. And sharing with the community… This area, the area had been

affected… let's say that Chita and Boyacá were heavily affected by the guerrilla, yes, the FARC in particular, and that was an area where poppy was cultivated. And that was what worked, and that was what kept that area going. [Page 9]

Wilson: From Chipa Viejo to Bogotá, how far is it, more or less?

Pedro Pablo: It took me, if I went directly from my house to the school, it took me 12 hours to get there. 12 hours of travel, yes.

Wilson: 12 hours. That is: bus, then the transportation you told me about, and if you were on a good horse or, if not, on foot.

Pedro Pablo: Exactly! That's it. That's how it was. So it was: first, from my house to the bus station, then from the bus station to Duitama, from Duitama to the road where the bus dropped me off and from there, I walked for three or four hours. And that's how I spent 12 hours. But when I had to go, like, since nobody goes there, the teacher is the one who brought the PAE [School Meals Program], what, what they send us, what they send from the student meals program. So, I had to leave Bogota, go to the county seat, and pick up the groceries, which was not much because there were only three, or four children. They wouldn't give us much food. I would pick that up, and the next day I had to take the bus at 5 o'clock in the morning or else I could not get to school on time. So, when getting the meals, it took me almost 24 hours from Bogota to the school because I had to go all that way around. [Page 10]

Wilson: Pedro Pablo, I mean… Pedro Pablo, props to you, man! I mean, this is unbelievable. I don't know, I don't know how many can, could face that and, and not have given up. Four and a half years and you had the opportunity to go elsewhere [closer to home], yet you went to, to Santa Marta. What is the name of the place where you are now in Santa Marta?

Pedro Pablo: Right now, I am in La Tagua education center.

Wilson: La Tagua…

Pedro Pablo: You can't find it either on Google maps [we laughed]. My mission now is for people to be able to find it. To find it, search on Google, I mean, you can find "Punta Brava" or "El Escudo", Santa Marta.

Wilson: And that is how far from Santa Marta?

Pedro Pablo: From Santa Marta... Well, by public transportation, it takes you two hours. I, let's say, I was looking for a place with much easier access [than Chita], where I could hop on a motorcycle and get there, and it takes me an hour and a half from Santa Marta to get to the school. [Page 11]

Another aspect that interests me a lot… Here I have taken up again, let's say, my nature along with working in rural areas. Eh, now my problem is that I am working on human rights, democracy, and this is an area where, if on the other side we had the guerrillas—they were approaching Chipa Viejo, in that area of Chita, the ELN (Ejercito de Liberación Nacional / National Liberation Army. The oldest and one of the most powerful insurgent groups in Colombia) was getting stronger. You could already see boys here and they are passing by with a rifle and rubber boots, near the school! I'd go, "Oh well." Never, let's say, never in the Chipa Viejo area, they never approached me directly like: "Hey, come here, I'm from such-and-such group..." No, but you would see them going by on horses, they would come your way, and you would greet them, "Hey... Have a good day. Thanks. You too." A quick greeting and that's it.

Wilson: You had to say hello.

Pedro Pablo: And if another one passed by, "Have you seen anyone around here?", "No, I was working, I haven't seen anybody." You never…, but well, let's say, but it was the presence of the guerrilla. Here [in La Tagua] it happens, yes, and you are in an area where it is totally the

opposite. I entered the [Página 12] post-conflict teacher selection process (This was a selection process managed by the National Commission of Civil Service (CNSC for its acronym in Spanish) of Colombia to hire and place teachers in areas affected by the armed conflict. This program started in 2019 after the peace treaty signed in 2016 between government and FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejercito del Pueblo)). This was the post-conflict process, you know, in the areas that were the most affected [by armed conflict]. And the group that I meet up with here is "La Organización". That's how they are called here, to avoid [problems]. "La Organización" is Los Pachenca, a paramilitary group. And I arrive, as you can see, well, I am "mechudo" [unkempt], although I have my hair up now. I am "mechudo", bearded, and a social studies teacher. I mean, in no way was I part of their politics.

Wilson: Yes, yes, I know! I think they see you and... [I laugh a little because Pedro Pablo looks like the typical arts and humanities student at a public university in Colombia] they see you and, all of a sudden, they say "Huh! public university." Do you have a mochila [a typical indigenous bag that students in public universities have], Pedro Pablo?

Pedro Pablo: Yes, look [Pedro Pablo shows me his mochila, which he had behind him]. I always have it with me, always. And I have all kinds of colours, all kinds! I always carry a mochila, I'm bearded, bearded, and mechudo.

Wilson: So, they single you out right away.

Pedro Pablo: That's true. The school director, especially. When I arrived, and she met me, she tried to, to, to, to give me some comments and tell me "Hey! Profe, try to trim your beard, try to cut your hair." And I would reply, "well..." Honestly, I meditated on it, I discussed it with my, with my family, with my close friends and I came to the conclusion that I was not going to change because that would mean they got power over me.

Wilson: Could it be that the school director suddenly made that suggestion to try to protect you?

Pedro Pablo: Mmm... well. I think she did it as advice, to prevent me from having [Page 13] problems. But what, what… in my perception, I have noticed that she agrees with many of the policies of La Organización and the way they act.

Wilson: Is that so?

Pedro Pablo: Her relatives belong to La Organización, you see? Eh, her grandchildren. In the school, there are children of those people who are in La Organización, because it is the only school in the area. They have children, they registered their children at this school, and they are from the area. So, for example, last week I had an argument with a student who was bullying another student, and I said, "Hey! mister, let him go," and he let him go. And then I said to him, "come on, what happened?" He said to me, "teacher, you don't know who you are messing with." And I said, "I don't know, I don't know because I'm new here. I know that you are a student, I don't know anything else. But here, in the institution, I am the one in charge". But then the teachers come and tell me, well, that this kid is the son of the second in command of La Organización. You wonder, "Okay, so what, what am I getting myself into?"

Wilson: And imagine, how could you prepare for that?

Pedro Pablo: It is very difficult! And you, for example, you know the story of the, of the school director. She was a woman displaced from her school, literally. She is from La Tagua, she has always taught in La Tagua. Now she is the director of the school because she is a woman who, I'm not going to lie, from what I know, has worked a lot for the community. But also, the groups from one side or the other have ended up displacing her. She tells me that she spent two days in the school, with the children, because armed groups were shooting at each other, from

one side of the school to the other. On one side was the army, on the other side were the paramilitaries and on the other side were the guerrillas. And the school was in the middle. And she, along with about four children, had to spend two days there, hiding. And when they came out and there was no one around, [she] had to go to the ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute], in Santa Marta, to leave the children so that the parents could pick them up later because, at that time, there was still no cell phone. I mean, imagine that! So, these are stories that have you say, "well, I haven't had to deal with it so hard so far." But, but it is not an area, it is not a very quiet area.

Wilson: [Here I smile when I hear Pedro Pablo use the word "quiet"] Pedro Pablo, listening to you brings like, like, like a warmth, like that, that calmness, as if we were talking about, about watching soccer at home with the families, you know? Where there is a moment of conflict because they are each supporting different teams, but they are in the, in the safety of the home, do you know what I mean?

I have two more sections I want to talk about, but I want to [Page 21] skip one section. I mean, I have two pending sections, but I want to skip one. I want to skip it to ask you one thing before. With the stories I have had it has occurred to me that, as they develop organically, one aspect leads to another, and I have found skills in the teachers I have talked to. One of them, for example, had drawing and designing skills. Another one had, had collected images, had many resources I could add to his story, so I wonder if maybe you could help me, I don't know if you like to write…

Pedro Pablo: Yes, I do!

Wilson: You do? Because there is a section here, where I want to describe what a day is like in, in your shoes. We talked only about rural areas, so, what a day is like, what it is like to

get to that school, I would like to, if you can give me a piece of writing about that. What is it like to get there, what is it like to live a full day, what is a good day and what is a bad day?

Pedro Pablo: Let's do it! Yes, yes, yes, yes!

Wilson: Great! As soon as you send it to me, I will add it to the story.

Pedro Pablo: Okay. It's on. Look, you, you, you help me. I am going to write a kind of story... In the university, I, I was lucky enough to participate in a storytelling club, a... like those wellness courses they offer, and let's say it was something I liked, and it was very good for my teaching too, you know? Because what I do in my classes is to tell stories, "and well 'pelaos' ['young people' in Colombian Spanish], well, imagine that today this event is going to happen, this and that, and it happened, and then these people were going this way, going down there, and oh my God..." Then the kids "se encarretan" [to follow along]. So, that was...

Wilson: That happened to me with this talk, Pedro Pablo! I'm very excited listening to you speak. So, I want to, I want to give the person reading this story that chance as well, [I want them] to be able to "encarretarse" as well. Because I have a way of talking, a way of telling things, but I do not want the reader to focus on points that you do not want them focused on, you know? I want to... I don't want to put my storytelling style into it either. I want to, if it was up to me, I'd share this conversation as is to the reader or to the teachers who are going to read it. [Page 22]

…

Pedro Pablo: So, to start writing those things that sometimes... because you don't have [inaudible], you can't express how you feel, right? For example, right now, I am living in the same house with the school director, and as I was telling you, her family also belongs to La Organización, some of her family. And they are people with whom, let's say, for whatever

reason, I spend a lot of time with, you see? So, there are times when I can't express everything I think, or want to say... And there are, there are things that sometimes get stuck in my mind, right? The psychologist told me, "Well, write, write, write. That way no one will judge you and it is personal". So, you gave me the idea and, of course, that helps me, helps me to produce a story about... about a rural teacher, what it is like to be a teacher in rural areas and how he lives his life. It would be interesting. Both with positive and not-so-positive aspects, not to say negative.

Wilson: But as I said, I would simply like it to be a bridge between those teachers who will read you. In other words, the more directly they read Pedro Pablo, the better. If they can see his strokes, his crossings out… all that is telling a story, right? In the, in the... in the... in re-drawing a letter, in crossing out a word because I better not say that. All that tells something.

…

All those factors and, suddenly, others you can think of: How [Page 23] can they affect a teacher's life? How can they affect a teacher's teaching and a teacher as a person?

Pedro Pablo: Wow, it's quite... It's harsh, it's harsh, it's harsh. First, because [a] person's weapon, whatever it is, a weapon always causes fear, causes fear, correct? Seeing a person who uses force or a knife or a blow or a firearm, it causes fear, right? It causes fear, it causes insecurity, it causes vulnerability... right? And what... let's say that when I arrived here in La Tagua, I began to listen to stories, I began to understand better this area, and I said, eh... "my first big class project is going to be 'democracy: a road to peace.'" Right [Sarcastically]. After two weeks already invested in the territory, I said, "No, if I want to stay safe, that is a project that is not going to happen yet". Talking about democracies...

Wilson: When you say "to stay safe", meaning...?

Pedro Pablo: To avoid problems with other groups, yes, with La Organización, as they say here. Because then, they start, both teachers and... it is something that is very… This is a region that stigmatizes you, "you are from Bogota, you are a socialist: Petrista [a supporter of the current president of Colombia Gustavo Pedro, who is a left-wing politician]". And I tell them, "Well, to be honest with you, I didn't even vote for Petro". I don't... I am a person who does not believe in messiahs. In fact, I don't. Neither Petro, nor Duque, nor anybody. It is social conscience, social organization, and social education, that will get us out of this mess where we are, don't you think? For example, you choose whoever, left or right, and you can argue that this man said he was going to build a road, but he did not fulfill his promise. Then we have all the right to bring him down and make him fulfill his promise, don't you think? That is what I think. But here, here they judge you: "and why don't you agree?"; "is it because you are...". And they attack you, they attack you. So, to be able to teach a class, to be able to say, to express, to listen... and for the students to express themselves calmly is very difficult. Because there is always, as Orwell would say, "a Big Brother", someone who is watching, hearing everything you say and do, and as I tell you they are the children and relatives of those people... who have the weapons. [Page 24]

…

Pedro Pablo: I want the parents to see that I did not come to... to stir the pot. "Oh no, this teacher started to say that this is good, and this is bad", when that's not how I do things! I usually say, "Come on, let's all talk about it. And not everything is what it seems. What you think is good, sometimes is not that good. And let's not talk about hatred, let's not talk from hate, let's talk about peace and construction." That's another thing. I… let's say that I go more along that line, you know? Instead of discussing the conflict in Colombia, let's talk about the peace process

in Colombia, and how to build peace in Colombia. Because we already know too much about conflict. And Colombia has important studies and masters in violentology, right? You go and look at all the, all the work done by the Universidad Nacional, and they have master's degrees on conflict, doctoral programs on conflict. You look at the Javeriana and they have their doctoral program on political violence in Colombia... All that is already out there. [Page 25]

Wilson: It is interesting, Pedro Pablo, how you come and talk less about the effect that violence has had on you as a subject, as a teacher, and talk more about what you can do. From the beginning of this conversation, you have been fixed in that position, you came here to propose and build.

And the, and the same thing happens, then, when you talk about violence. Violence "ah, let him do whatever he wants to me, let him do whatever he wants to me, let him, let him... in whatever form violence comes, I'm here to solve that violence. I won't let them intimidate me, I won't fall, suffer, or play the victim." Your position is: we have a problem, what are we going to do? Come on, let's talk. Come on, let's do something. I see that... it's recurrent in your speech. [Page 27]

…

Pedro Pablo: So, I say, yes, it is important that everyone sees that... that we all come here to contribute. And I think that is my philosophy of life, we all give, we all contribute and let's hope that, as they say, I am not going to change the world, I know, I am more than sure about it. I am going to die, and I am never going to see... It is sad to say, but I am not going to see a Colombia in peace. I am not. I am not going to see it. But at least in the space where I am, I want to make it beautiful. I say, "Ah, well, at least these five kids from the school took hold and are already working." The students I had in Chipa Viejo, in the school, my five dwarfs [as he

affectionately refers to his five elementary school students] were the ones who worked at the farm with me, we worked there (Pedro Pablo had access to a farm of one of the school's parents. He was granted permission to work the land to grow his own vegetables and also teach his students about it). [Page 28]

I don't know. It's what I'm telling you. I don't think I'm going to change the world, but my goal is that, at least, the five kids who are next to me treat each other with respect and see that they do something to help each other, right? If I'm okay with what they do, I don't know. But it's also something very critical, right? I mean, because I tell them to help each other, but I am not going to tell them how or what to do, because they are the ones who will make that decision. [Page 30]

…

The following story was written and shared to me by Pedro Pablo. He wanted to share it to help depict what his life as teacher has been like and complement the conversation we had.

En un régimen en el que el más explotado menos enuncia, el oprimido tienen que entablar una lucha contra los dominadores... (Freire)

¿Y hoy quien va a aprender?

Un día cualquiera abres los ojos y empiezas a actuar en la vida como un joven universitario, de una licenciatura en ciencias sociales, en un país de realidades inimaginadas; pero te enamoras de la utopía de educar en la pregunta para aprender.

Al día siguiente de repente te levantas y tu plan ha cambiado, en ese preciso momento en que escuchas la palabra cucho y se están refiriendo a ti. Allí te encuentras rodeado de unos

cuarenta y cinco estudiantes. Un salón de clase parece más una jaula. Trabajas primero en un colegio privado y solo porque necesitas experiencia para poder empezar a trabajar, recibes un sueldo que no alcanza un mínimo salarial. Pero aun así te las ingenias para que los estudiantes de un colegio ubicado en un sector abandonado por la inversión social de la capital de un país de fantasía, se eduquen para tener sueños colectivos y comunes, se pregunten por las injusticias vividas, y ellos mismos aprendan a generar sus soluciones; cosa que para algunos en este país, a esto no se le considera educar, y solo en un país como esté, un político de turno dice que los docentes que enseñan un pensamiento crítico se les debe considerar adoctrinadores de la izquierda.

En la mañana que continúa, te encuentras rodeado de un grupo de treinta estudiantes, activos al aprendizaje, acompañados de una familia que está pendiente de su proceso formativo, porque este colegio es privado en uno sector algo acomodado de la capital de un país casi irreal, en un ambiente propicio para el proceso educativo ya que esta es una educación privada de calidad. Allí buscas que los estudiantes se reconozcan en el otro, que se pregunte por qué sufren, y se pregunten por mejorar su situación, aunque en ese momento los mismos que están en el poder se encargan de silenciar a todo el que piense diferente.

Amanece y sigues haciendo tu papel como licenciado en educación, pero el escenario sigue cambiando, es la educación privada religiosa de la clase media baja de la capital de un país donde la realidad sobrepasa la fantasía. Allí, en un salón de clases rodeado de unas treinta estudiantes, tu misión como educador en un país donde se supera la ficción y sé vive en una cultura patriarcal, donde se asume como normal el empalamiento de una mujer; educas en el respeto a la mujer, llevándolas a preguntarse por la realidad en la que viven, para que aprendan a valorarse y construir redes de protección contra el maltrato a la mujer.

Pero en la mañana siguiente, te encuentras rodeado de un grupo no más de veinte estudiantes de la clase dirigente de este país ilusorio, y piensas que en ese momento tienes entre tus manos el cambio, para mejorar este país. Pero institucionalmente el colegio y tus jefes te limitan tanto en ese proceso formativo, y, aun así, logras educar a estas personitas en la realidad del mundo que los rodea, los llevas al mismo senado de la república, para que se pregunten por cuales serían las leyes que convendría diseñar, para que en este país todos seamos considerados dignamente en igualdad y derechos.

De repente al día siguiente, al abrir los ojos te encuentras completamente solo, en un paraíso mágico, siendo un docente rural de una escuelita en medio de las montañas de un país utópico, donde cinco estudiantes de primaria se asombran, de poder escribir su nombre, de tomar un texto leerlo y entenderlo. Donde ellos te enseñan de la naturaleza y la vida en el campo. Un momento de mucha felicidad en el ámbito laboral, pero en la soledad de tu familia, pero allí aprendes tú que el proceso educativo ha sido más para ti, que para los demás. Te das cuenta que este país va más allá de la desigualdad que ves en las noticias, porque ni siquiera ellas llegan allí. Logras enseñar en ese lugar, no solo a tus estudiantes sino a toda una comunidad la importancia de luchar por sus derechos y a preguntarse en cómo podrían cambiar su situación y aprender a hacer sentir su voz en busca de sus derechos.

Y hoy, cuando abres de nuevo tus ojos, ves en tu salón de clases niños, niñas, jóvenes campesinos e indígenas, en medio del paraíso de este país macondiano, donde se juntan las nieves perpetuas con el mar. Y preguntándote como enseñar a vivir en sociedad, donde en la realidad se ven grupos armados ilegales, que se toman la atribución de entrar a la institución educativa a convencer a los estudiantes a que pertenezcan a estas organizaciones armadas y no

puedas decir nada, porque te pueden desaparecer, porque ellos tienen las armas y el poder regional y ya te lo han hecho saber.

Y es así, que aún no sé quién va a aprender mañana, solo sé que este ilustré e hidalgo licenciado de la mancha, sigue vagando en un país, que ni en todos los libros que ha leído pudo imaginar el país que tenía bajo sus pies, pero aun así lleva en su mano un lápiz y un papel, no para educar, sino para preguntarse sobre su porque y su quehacer como persona y aprender a genera soluciones a todas esas realidades surrealistas que ha podido ver. Lejos de su familia, con miles de miedos y problemas en su cabeza, pero siempre buscando lo mejor para los niños, niñas y jóvenes que pueda encontrar en su largo recorrido por educar.

And who is going to learn today? [Translation]

One day you open your eyes and begin to act in life like a young university student, with a degree in social sciences, in a country of unimagined realities; but you fall in love with the utopia of educating others.

The next day you suddenly wake up and your plan has changed. At that precise moment, you hear the word *cucho* [Colombian term for old man] and they are referring to you. There, you find yourself surrounded by about forty-five students. A classroom that looks more like a cage. You first work in a private school and just because you need experience to be able to start working, you accept a salary that does not reach a minimum wage. But even so, you manage to educate the students at a school located in a sector abandoned by social investment in the capital of a fantasy country to have collective and common dreams. You ask yourself about the injustices they have experienced and want to teach them to come up with solutions. This is something that some people in this country do not consider education. And only in a country like

this, a politician in power says that teachers who teach critical thinking should be considered communist indoctrinators.

In the morning that follows, you find yourself surrounded by a group of thirty students, avid to learn, accompanied by a family that is attentive to their educational process, because this school is private, in a somewhat wealthy sector of the capital of an almost unreal country, and in an environment conducive to the educational process—this is the high-quality private education. There, you want the students to recognize themselves in each other, to ask why they suffer, and to ask how to improve their situation, although at that moment the same people who are in power are in charge of silencing anyone who thinks differently.

Dawn breaks and you continue playing your role as a graduate in education, but the scenario continues to change. It is now the private religious education of the lower middle class of the capital of a country where reality surpasses fantasy. There, in a classroom surrounded by about thirty students, your mission as an educator in a country where fiction is overcome and one lives in a patriarchal culture, where the impalement of a woman is assumed to be normal, it's you duty to educate them in respect for women, leading them to question the reality in which they live, so that they learn to value themselves and build protection networks against mistreatment of women.

But the next morning, you find yourself surrounded by a group of no more than twenty students from the ruling class of this illusory country, and you think that at that moment you have seized an opportunity in your hands to finally improve this country. But institutionally, the school and your bosses limit you so much in that training process, and, even so, you manage to educate these young children in the reality of the world that surrounds them, you even take them to the house of commons, so that they can dream what they would be, and dream about the laws

that one day they will write, so that finally, in this country, we are all worthy of dignity, equality, and rights.

Suddenly, the next day, when you open your eyes, you find yourself completely alone, in a magical paradise, being a rural teacher at a small school in the middle of the mountains of a utopian country. There, you have five primary school students amazed at being able to write their names, hold a textbook, read it, and understand it. There, they teach you about nature and life in the countryside. In a moment of great happiness in the workplace, but away from your family, you learn that the educational process has been more for you than for your own students. You realize that this country goes beyond the inequality you see on the news, because not even the news gets there. You manage to teach in that place, not only your students but an entire community, the importance of fighting for their rights and asking themselves how they could change their conditions and learn to make their voice heard in search of their rights.

And today, when you open your eyes again, you see in your classroom boys, girls, young farmers, and indigenous people, in the middle of the paradise of this Macondian(o) country, where the perpetual snow meets the sea. You wonder how to teach and live in a society, where in you see illegal armed groups, who take the responsibility of entering the educational institution to convince students to join them. And you cannot say anything, because you… you can just go missing the next morning, because they have the weapons and the regional power, and they have made that very clear to you.

I still don't know who is going to learn tomorrow. I only know that this illustrious and nobleman graduated from La Mancha, continues to wander in a country, that not even in all the books he has read could he imagine the country he had under his feet. But still, he carries a pencil and a paper in his hand, not to educate, but to help himself understand what his duty is as

a person and learn to generate solutions to all those surreal realities that he has been able to see. Far from his family, with thousands of fears and problems in his head, but always thinking how to bring the best for the boys, girls, and young people that he may encounter in his long journey to educate.

[Translation provided to fulfill editorial requirements. This translation does not attempt to reinterpret the emotions or meanings evoked by the original text written in Spanish]

End of Conversation Highlights

Conversation 06 | Abbreviated Version

Date: 3/21/2023

Start time: 11:15 AM

Duration: 110 minutes

Participants: Yara and Wilson Hernández

Female teacher | 48 years old | Vocational school | Medellin

Yara: A haven of peace [Yara smiles sarcastically] ... And from there I went to, oh well, I was working there, and from there I was transferred to Santa Fe de Antioquia [Municipality in Antioquia, Colombia]. And thank God because it was closer. I was there with my children, they were very young, and I was recently separated. I practically had to carry the books and the two mattresses and the, and the kitchen pots and pans. Because I can tell you that it was from here to there and from there to here, between that and other municipalities [she would move constantly from one town to the next].

So, uh... a paramilitary... I was threatened by one of those paramilitaries. A death threat that was, because he… it turned out that the Executive Office of the President was visiting us and they asked for the attendance list. In order for paramilitaries to receive the subsidy, they had to attend our classes, they had to sign our attendance lists. (In the peace agreement signed on 2003 between the Colombian government and the paramilitaries, they stated that the paramilitary members were entitled to a subsidy upon condition to attend school or take part in resocialization programs) And they, they hadn't signed our attendance lists, and they already had four absences. And we cancelled their enrollment if they didn't show up three times in a row.

Then, when I left, they visited me, spontaneously. In fact, it was the first time I had a visit with, with the presidency, they visited me spontaneously, they had never visited me. Really! I had already had many groups there, but they, they had never visited me. That day they visited me spontaneously, and they told me "Madam, [are] you the SENA teacher?", I answered, "yes". They said, "Please be so kind and help me by giving me the attendance lists", and I gave them the lists. They had not shown up. When they saw, when they already had the lists in their hands, they told me that they were from the presidency and that they were coming to review the reintegration program. They collected all the evidence, and as a result, the paramilitaries would not be paid, their salaries would be withheld. It was around 800,000 pesos [$200 USD] at that time, I think.

So, what happened? They got very angry, especially one of them. He called SENA, and I was out of luck because I was the one who answered. I mean, there was a receptionist there, and everybody answered the phone, and I never did. Anyway, I answered, and he asked for me. I told him it was me he was calling about, and he made a threat to kill me. He said, "You are Yara…" [he mentioned her last name too], and I said "Yes". He said, "You are a fucking b... piece of... You will not be able to come back to this town because I am going to kill you". Literally, he told me "I'm going to kill you, and I'm going to chop you up [Page 4], you piece of sh… Why are you such a snitch and you gave the attendance lists to, to those of the presidency? I'm going to kill you, and I'm going to look for you wherever you are, motherfucker." [Page 5]

…

Yara: In fact, I have been very disturbed by that fact, unconsciously. That is very much in my subconscious because, for example, there are reasons and there are times when I don't feel it that way [Yara makes a circle with her hands, in front of her face, representing something big],

so complex. But it is because I am like, well, I don't know, I am... I consider myself more sensitive than others because I have had conversations with other colleagues and they tell me, "Oh, how does that affect you? That's their problem. They'll see." Whatever. I don't. I do delve into the problem. I like to talk with them [students] about certain things... and I feel that I, I have felt emotionally hurt... umm… very affected, very affected. [Page 7] I have felt sadness for those cases that happened with them [the students], but at the same time, they become ungrateful. [There is] Ingratitude, a lot of ingratitude. There are other cases where I have been mistreated, for example, verbally, by the students. Students who have taken the exam, have taken a copy or the worksheet and... "Why this fucking worksheet?", and they throw it on the floor and, and step on it, or I don't know what. [...] I had a lot of pressure. A lot of pressure. A lot! From them.

Wilson Hernández: What did they demand from you?

Yara: To come where they were and check their assignments, to observe them in their internship, … They'd say, "but, how come you are only attending that group over there, and you do not pay attention to us?" Things like that. So, they put pressure on you and, and they are rude with words. So, that day I felt lightheaded, and that day I went to the clinic because I was vomiting too much. It was very strange. [What happened] was that some fluid in my brain had leaked. I mean, that day some fluid in my brain leaked and it was because of that [pressure]. I mean, I know because I was not sick, you know, I was fine, I was calm, I was... I was [Page 8] well emotionally. But I felt, I mean, almost two, two hours before I had left and gone to the clinic, I felt something, a, a wave of pressure of, of rudeness, of horrible things from them. There were many groups that I was attending at that moment and, and I tell you that, literally, I... that got to me. [After that incident,] I was on leave for almost fifteen days, uh... I did not speak, I lost a little bit of mobility in my hands, in my feet, and in my legs as well. [...] So, I said to myself, I

mean, you do so many things for these students, so much struggle, so much effort, I mean, like, like all the sacrifice, practically, that you make, all of that to hit bottom anyway. I mean, my body had to reach this state of, of, of... [Page 9]

…

Wilson: You mentioned Buenos Aires (an area in the city of Medellin). For someone who is not from Medellín, uh... how do we explain, of course, this area, the SENA, the educational center that is there, the students...?

Yara: Well, you know, it is a place that is uh, I think it is *La Comuna* [It's the term used to define an area of a city which groups different neighborhoods.] …what? I don't remember, I don't... I, I think it is *La Comuna* 12. It is *La Comuna* 12. And they are people of a lower class, well those who live in Buenos Aires... Well, that is a center that the SENA rented there, but really the students who come there, to that center, are not from Buenos Aires. If anything, there will be five [students] from Buenos Aires, in all the groups, and the other students are from, from all the *Comunas* of Medellín, from the lower-class *comunas* of Medellín, like, where there is more violence, where there is, suddenly, more vulnerability, where there is more poverty. [Page 11].

Right now, I am working as a therapist, and I am looking for, I am considering other options with consulting to be able to leave [teaching]. I want to leave now. I have completed my cycle, and I want to do other things. What happens is that, because I have three children, I am the head of the family, my children are in university now, I cannot afford to leave this job because this job is my main source of income. So, now I am... I am a little bit slowed down by that, but well, soon, I think that very soon the time will come when I give all this up. [Page 12]

Wilson: Mmm... Before going back to those, to those issues, and again... I mean, not again, I haven't told you, thank you very much for everything you are sharing with me right now,

if you notice that sometimes I am like, like when a web page is buffering, it is because I receive so much information that I don't know what to do or where to go [I laugh]... and because I also keep many, many comments, eh... because, well, sometimes it is so complex what happens to teachers that I go, "Damn! Wouldn't it be better if I looked for another profession too? [I laugh again] …or do I keep asking the next question?" So, again, thank you, thank you for being here talking to me. [Page 13]

…

Yara: Yes, we... we, for example, I was… that touched me a lot, a lot. Going to Camparrusia, for example, that's in Dabeiba [a municipality in Antioquia], where, where I arrived and saw many guerrilla members. They used to stop me at the door, with a gun like this [Yara shows her hands as if holding a rifle], to challenge me. I couldn't talk about economics, or politics, or anything. Only, well, the technical aspect of the class I was working in. But that place was a... those places are very, very impressive places, because, for example, from Santa Fe [de Antioquia], I had to leave at five or four thirty in the morning to catch the bus that would take me there, which took about five hours, let's say. From there, I had to catch another bus to take me to those villages. And since I worked on the whole issue of agricultural marketing, I had to work a lot in the villages [in the countryside].

There were students who would tell me, "Teacher, today I found a human head". They found heads, hands, feet, torsos... They [the students], they were human beings, so self-absorbed, anguished, sad, that they didn't speak. And one manages to communicate with them because of one's sensitivity and intuitive capacity, or [after] looking at them, I knew that, "Dang! This child has something, he has something," "this lady has something." [Page 14] I got to work in corridors, in corridors with a blackboard there [points to the wall]. And there, and there in the,

next to a bed of the, of the owner [the owner of the house where she had to teach], and making noise, in the kitchen, with pots and grinding corn and I don't know what else, and the cows passing… It affected me, too, because I didn't... And the distractions. All the distractions there were, because there was no place to work.

Wilson: How do you deal with that as a teacher, as a human being?

Yara: Well, as a teacher, you were clearly a limited teacher. I mean, say what you have to say about your area, but do not overdo it. I mean, don't, don't make paradoxes, don't make, let's say, metaphors because you... Don't make comparisons! Be literal, you know, be literal, say only what you have to say. [Page 15]

I think, in my professional life, everywhere I have had to work, it has affected me... because I have been sick. And those illnesses of mine have almost always been of the head, things that have to do with the brain, many headaches, things that have to do more with my psyche, with my, with my disorder, my disorders as mental disorders… of things I have lived through. In fact, I have them... many things I have in my memories, like in my shadows, I have them... That's why I think I also got sick. So, with respect to the question you ask me, yes, how does one feel? Well, completely run over. [Page 16]

I have had to see many things, [Yara tries to control her tears]. Well... things that, it's not the case, but I lived through many very hard times, with the students. So, it's like, er, I start to analyze and now... like, now that we are talking about this topic, all those memories have come back to me. Just now, for example, when I was telling you... because everything is bilateral, everything is and vice versa. Just now, when I was telling you about the students who are rude, who do not do as they are told, who sometimes tear off the material... One of the cases is I remember is of these men, there in Frontino [municipality in Antioquia]. They were drawing,

they were drawing weapons, human beings covered in blood. I would ask them, “What are you doing?” They would take out, for example, the gun and put it there [on the desk]. So, it was a way of challenging me, as if to say, “Eat shit, old fuck.”

Wilson: In class?

Yara: In class! But I never felt afraid. I felt afraid when that man called me, and yes, I did feel afraid, because of course, I saw the weapons and they laid them out there. So, I, I told them, “Would you do me a favor and put that away? [These men would reply] “Ah! But that doesn’t do anything, or what, or what? Are you afraid? What?” Then they would ask the other students, “Are you afraid of this? Are you?” As people get used to living in this collective unconscious, then they, the students, keep quiet. Well, those who were not paramilitary were afraid, too, because they were also afraid. So, well, finally, they [the armed men] stayed there, they said, “Alright, teacher. Alright. I’ll put it away. There, teacher. Done. [Page 17]

…

Wilson: I have seen, I have seen in, in this conversation, that particularity, Yara. I see the issue of managing emotions, eh, I see that teaching is, let’s see, because of the relationship we establish with people, right? It creates an emotional commitment that you have towards others and, unfortunately, in that transaction you also receive emotions. The problem is that we do not know the quality of those emotions, do we? We receive, we can express respect, we can express, uh, fear, hierarchy. We can be intimidating also. The teacher does that. But in what you have told me, you said that you referred to yourself as a very sweet person. And then you also said that you have received fear from others... interpellation, accusation, mistreatment...

Yara: I could say that between the student and me, there is a relationship that could be bilateral, bilateral. You contribute to me, and I contribute to you. But that is a lie, that is a mental

paradigm that we have and a... and a belief system that [Page 20] we teachers have, that we have to expect something from the student. The student does not give you anything, and this is what I call the wound of the soul. Injustice is one of the soul's wounds the teacher gets when he is in front of students because they are unfair when speaking, when expressing themselves, and with their actions. They arrive, for example, and they do not greet you, they are disrespectful with the greeting, with a thousand other things. So, another wound, eh, let me think, of abandonment, for example, when they arrive, and you tell them, "Well, the first group is going to present", [the students answer] "Hell, no, I'm not going to present anything." And they don't do it... and they just leave. So, I mean, they abandon learning, they abandon me... they abandon the company of their, of their classmates and mine. I am the hierarchy of the classroom, so…

Wilson: It is a constant confrontation, Yara?

Yara: It's a... betrayal, that is the word. Betrayal is something we live with. The student who calls their teacher, "This old bitch, this piece of shit, this I don't know what, this old fuck..., Look how she assigns all this homework, how annoying she is, how strict she is, this old bitch...". I mean, they'd come at you with everything they got.

Wilson: That language! [Page 21]

Eh, then, I want, I want to assume and ask you, I see that, that there is a need to detach ourselves. You said, "break the paradigm." So, should I, as a teacher, understand that there is no reciprocal, reciprocal transaction, that I do not express... emotion, respect, and I should expect to receive the same? And maybe that acts as therapy so that I do not feel sad, affected...?

Yara: Yes, that is the reason, that is the, maybe, that is the, that is the understanding that a teacher has to have. I don't know if you are finding like other points of view in this conversation, because I think that, with the majority, also, of colleagues that I have talked to, they always have

to expect something from the student. No, I believe that I, as a teacher, have to make this catharsis so that I don't feel so unhappy when, when they make me feel fear. I have to be prepared for that. And I have to do something for them without expecting a response in return, positive or negative.

…

Wilson: Maybe their emotional intelligence?

Yara: They do not have emotional intelligence. They don't have the capacity to, to be in a higher state of consciousness, I mean, I am like…

Wilson: Of course! If at home, if in his daily context, the student does not recognize what respect, love, assertive communication, or the need to communicate is, then he will come into another space and he will not care about anything, I mean... [Page 23] One: Can we talk about these two [violence cases] a little bit more? And two: Which one affects you more? Because I see that you were afraid there, but you broke down [you cried] talking to me right now when you told me about the second one. I don't want to leave [this conversation] assuming that the invisible [violence] affected you more than the armed violence. I don't know, that's why I'm asking you.

Yara: But it's true, but that's true! But that's true. Because, to say something, mmm, uh, uh, gosh, how do I explain it? That depends on what you have lived. Let's see, when I was a child, I had a very big trauma with my father, because my father was very calm, very loving, very calm, calm, calm, calm, and loving. He loved us very much, he hugged us, he gave us little gifts. Well. But when I was 16, 15 years old, my father realized that he was adopted, that he was adopted and that he was given away and all that. Right then, my father was in shock. That very horrible thing happened, and my father became violent. Very violent with words. Look at what I

am telling you so that I can reach the conclusion of what you are asking me, of the question you are asking me, at this moment. If they put a gun to my head and told me, “I am going to kill you, you fucking bitch...”, I would, I would, I would tell them, “Kill me already. Do it!” I, I don’t think I would be afraid. What’s more, I, I, I’ve been on buses, and I’ve been robbed... with guns! And I’m not afraid of it! I’m not afraid of it... In fact, I am almost never in fear. In my life, I have lived more in sadness, but that way... [Page 24]

Wilson: Is that why you and Sandra [the other teacher I talked to for this research] get along so well?

Yara: Yes, I think so, because that one is feistier than me. And then some more.

Wilson: The term is “*frentera*” [person who says or does things bluntly and straight], isn’t it? You’re *frenteras*, both of you... Because I know I wouldn’t, I’d be scared shitless.

Yara: [Yara laughs] But Sandra is more *frentera* than me, and she is feisty. I’ve told her, “Sandra, how could you do that?” And she said, “Well, I could. Those little bastards...” I... I have done it, but not as much as her. But, as I told you, right now, you know? It affects me, it affects me, it affects me, it affects me in a way… the invisible violence affects me more. It is as if you were stabbed with a dagger. One of the reasons is that, like, what I am telling you right now, when a student treats you badly, when you… when you are approached with that... it is that, it is the word, it is what comes out of his mouth that affects me, like that.

... And because it is also that memory that I have, that shadow of a father that, that after the age of fifteen yelled at you, verbally abused you, because it was always verbal abuse and in fact my father, I understand him now, but my father is still brave, my father is very brave. And, and I feel that it still, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it, it affects me with great violence. And I feel very sad when my father yells at me, he still yells at me, he still yells at us his children. So, I have that

mark in my life, and I feel that in my process, well, in my professional process, at my work, when I have lived it, it affects me, it makes me sad, it gives me a lot of pain, it gives me anguish, it breaks my soul, yes. More than the other things! I don't know why, but, but, I mean, definitely because... like when they were standing there, when those gentlemen were standing there, with those guns, well, "Agh! Let them stay there. Whatever. They want, they want to do something to me, let them do it right now. Well, this way, this way, they come to..." But no, but other things have affected me more.

Wilson: Could it be that, could it be what you mentioned, you made the analogy of "it is like a dagger"? A shot, because there is also the analogy, "if I am shot in the head, that's the end", but with the dagger we are affected, we don't know if we are killed or if we are left with a scar and that's it. You mentioned the word scar, too, before. So, this invisible violence, of which you speak, is more recurrent, it is more frequent, it is harmful, yes, it lets you live, but it leaves you affected.

Yara: Are you talking about the, the, the, the...?

Wilson: Of the invisible, of that violence your students do to you with the [Page 25] word.

Yara: Of course, because, because it is a completely impulsive violence. That is, you, the one who does it to you does not measure, does not measure, is not cautious in measuring what he is doing to you, what I as a student am doing to you. You are not cautious, you [the student] what you become is incautious, "I couldn't care less if this lady feels anything." Moreover, if you were to get into my thinking, you are also doing it unconsciously. So, who is it that has to have the strength, the courage, the knowledge, and maybe the emotional intelligence tools? It is the teachers. Ourselves. Maybe, I could say to myself, I could say, that would be one of the great

recommendations that you would have to make there... to say, “it is you who has to strengthen your mentality”, because they are, well, fuck, they, they, they... they go, they go after everything, they attack you... Eh, hmm, I have a word, just this weekend I wrote a poem about pain and I wrote down a word, they “arremeten” [to lunge] at you. Because what about...

Wilson: They, the students?

Yara: Of course, they lunged at you... the violence is so great that the violence they do against you goes to the unconscious of us teachers and that violence stays here, in our brain... hidden, here it stays stored, hidden. That is why if you as a teacher do not know how to overcome that, you go on and on and on again, and then you become... autoimmune, they do this to you, they do that to you, they do the another thing over there, they do the another thing over here and you, like, hum, feel nothing. [Page 26]

Wilson: Interesting. That’s interesting. I see something, something interesting, and that is that there are two different actors: those of the armed [violence], well, we already know who they are. But the students are the perpetrators of the invisible violence. You mention that we have to know from the beginning that... that there has to be a detachment, correct? There has to be an understanding that this relationship is not bilateral. With the, with the armed actors, we already know that, right? One knows that they are enemies, that at any moment they will shoot at you, and that is somehow easier to process, right? That they will harm or do violence to you. But, with the students, there is still a kind of enchantment. We are there out of conviction. Some teachers or many teachers are there out of conviction. There is a, it is believed that the student should give [something] back to you, which is what you mentioned, right? And that is why I ask myself, is that why it hurts us more, it affects us more the invisible violence, because it comes from a person in whom we still believe? [Page 27]

Yara: No, I mean, we also have to understand that we should not make so many bonds, because bonds generate many expectations in the mind of the human being. It is very important to understand that ties are harmful, the expectations that one generates mentally are harmful. So, the teacher, to answer your question, you must understand that you cannot generate that link of reciprocity, you cannot generate that link of expectations or that link of motivation of the student towards the teacher. Forget it! "Wow, teacher, wow, what a class, wow, how cool!" No, the student attends the class, and that's it! Maybe it was the most spectacular class you ever prepared and that... I mean, they didn't say anything to you, so what? It's like a husband, you make yourself pretty, you fix your eyebrows, you, you fix your hair, and he doesn't tell you anything. Why, because you... it's the expectation. "So, you got nothing to say to me?", "And why?", "Can't you see I put on makeup?", "Yes, love, but I hadn't noticed."

Wilson: Yara, you're reminding me of problems at home, man. [Yara and I laugh]. No, but, but it has... look, I think it is, honestly, you're bringing very important arguments. We have to generate a disengagement between the teacher and the student, because sometimes we believe, sometimes we give a lot, and we receive nothing. And the teacher and, and every human being should receive something, if they are giving a lot, right? How do you think, then, that it can affect teachers if they are told this?

Yara: [Page 28] As a teacher you go ahead and give everything you got to give. On top of that you are being paid. But, what's the issue? Don't expect to receive anything, because he who supplies receives multiplied, and will not be in need. You are not necessarily going to receive a response from the students.

Wilson: The expectation hurts us more.

Yara: And if they don't give it to you, what do you care if they don't give it to you, I mean, well, it's like I tell my children…

Wilson: Let go of the expectation. Do not expect anything.

Yara: Let go of expectations. Expectation breaks you. It eats away at your life. The expectation, the ego, it ruins your life. And why do you have expectations? Because of the ego,

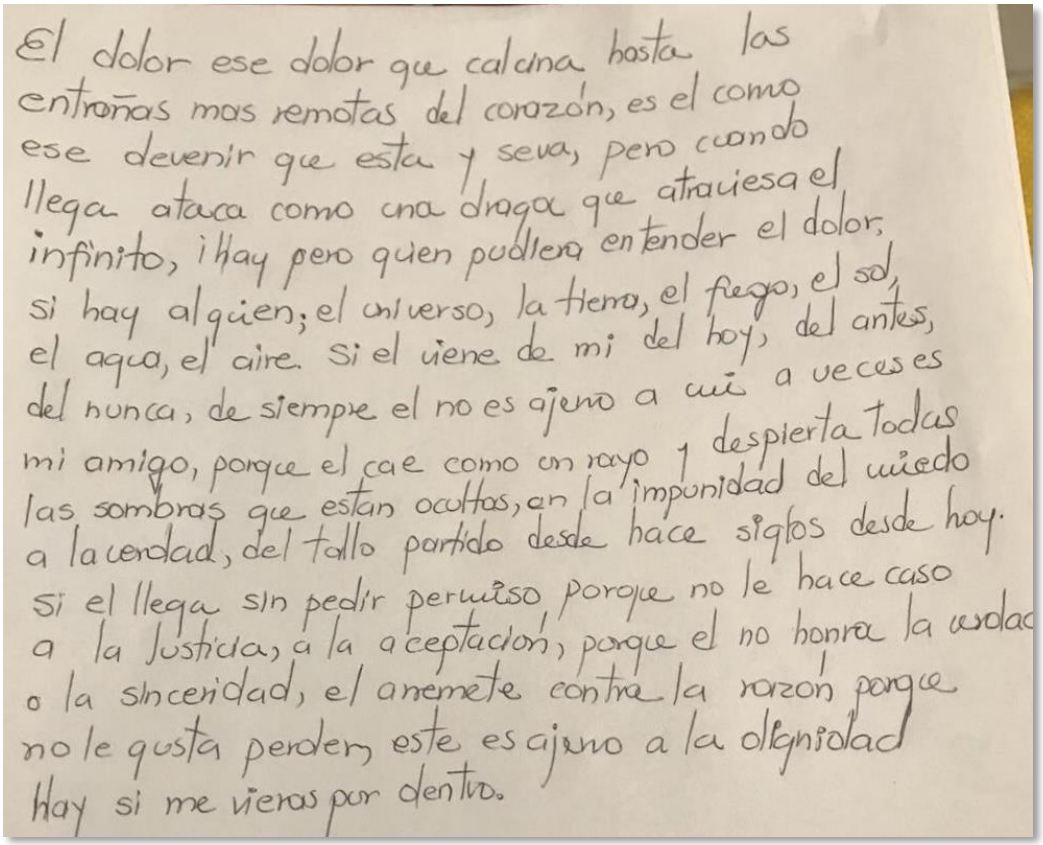
El dolor ese dolor que calcina hasta las
entrañas mas remotas del corazón, es el como
ese devenir que esta y seva, pero cuando
llega ataca como una droga que atraviesa el
infinito, ¡Hay pero quien pudiera entender el dolor,
si hay alguien; el universo, la tierra, el fuego, el sol,
el agua, el aire. Si el viene de mi del hoy, del antes,
del nunca, de siempre el no es ajeno a mi a veces es
mi amigo, porque el cae como un rayo y despierta todas
las sombras que estan ocultas, en la impunidad del miedo
a la verdad, del tallo partido desde hace siglos desde hoy.
Si el llega sin pedir permiso porque no le hace caso
a la Justicia, a la aceptacion, porque el no honra la verdad
o la sinceridad, el arremete contra la razon porque
no le gusta perder, este es ajeno a la dignidad
Hay si me vieras por dentro.

Figure 5. Poem about Yara's experiencing pain after being at the hospital. Written by Yara before our interview. 2023.

because of the egoism, "Ah, no, how come, but I gave you…, how come you... how come?" It's because of your own egoism, your own ego: "you have to thank me, because..." [Page 29]

The pain, that pain that burns to the core

Most remote bowels of the heart, he is like

That future that is and goes, but when

It comes attacking like a drug that goes through the

Infinity, Oh! But who could understand the pain,

If there is someone; in the universe, the earth, the fire, the sun,

The water, the air. If he comes from me, from today, from before,

Of never, always. He is no stranger to me. sometimes he is

My friend, because he falls like lightning and wakes up all

The shadows that are hidden, in the impunity of fear

In truth, from the stem broken centuries ago today.

If he arrives without asking permission because he does not pay attention to him

To justice, to acceptance, because he does not honor the truth

Or sincerity, he attacks reason because

He doesn't like to lose. This is alien to dignity.

Oh, if you saw me inside.

[Translation provided to fulfill editorial requirements. This translation does not attempt to reinterpret the emotions or meanings evoked by the poem in Spanish]

End of Conversation Highlights

Chapter 6: Reflection and Conclusion

I want to begin this section by thanking the teachers who agreed to talk to me for this research. It was thanks to their commitment and willingness to speak to me about their experiences with and understanding of violence that I was able to learn more about the violence that affects teachers in Colombia and how they deal with it. Thanks to them, I could learn about the conditions of the contexts where they teach and live. Thanks to them, I conducted this research and can now write these conclusions. The *conversaciones* presented in the previous chapter evidenced my genuine interest in learning from them and about their stories. Also, those *conversaciones* contain knowledge that has the potential to positively affect teachers' living and teaching in conditions of duress.

Five questions were at the core of this research. The first one was: to what extent do the modes of violence (i.e., subjective, symbolic, and systematic) affect teachers in Colombia? The research collaborators narrated experiencing situations that relate to the subjective, symbolic, and systematic modes of violence Zizek described. For instance, subjective violence was present in the life stories of Sandra, Celeste, and Yara. Sandra described how a stranger stalked her and waited for her outside the center where she was teaching. An identifiable subject, this man chased Sandra and intimidated her, trying to make her leave the center or maybe do something even worse. Celeste experienced a similar subjective violence. A man, one of the school's parents, yelled at her and warned her about what could happen if she got into a problem with him. Yara, on the other hand, described when armed men stood up by the door of the classroom where she taught and when another man called her and threatened to kill her if she did not leave the town.

Symbolic violence was also evidenced. Jagomo discussed how the institutional system permits violence to be exercised towards the teacher. In social and traditional media (e.g., radio and television), a mechanism is put in place to allow that violence to happen and become stronger, to the point that it turns practical and takes the form of bullying or ridiculing the teachers. Such mechanism is built on language and imagery that represents the teachers as communists, lazy, problematic, useless, etc. (see chapter 3), and which turn teachers into entities undeserving of respect, praise, and even fair working conditions.

In the stories of Pedro Pablo and Clio, they recognized themselves to be both indirect and direct victims of the systematic violence of the State. They were victims indirectly when they had to teach their students and show positive results even if their students did not have enough to eat, access to information (e.g., internet or libraries), safe access to schools, academic support, etc. And they were victims directly when the State did not guarantee their safety in the schools. Not only accessing the schools is dangerous for some of the research collaborators, but teaching in some of their schools brought Yara, Pedro Pablo, Clio, Sandra and Alfi closer to an everyday reality of the possibility of armed attack, displacement, and stalking. I must call attention to the fact that Pedro Pablo started taking anti-depressants, when his luck could have been different had the Ministry of Education supported him, or the school administration had guided him on how to succeed teaching and living in a rural school.

However, Zizek's paradigm seems insufficient given the more nuanced forms of violence the research collaborators described. His three modes of violence do not help explain the depth and layers of the research collaborators' experiences with violence. Moreover, Zizek's modes of violence would need to be *fragmentable* (Spanish definition: capable of breaking into smaller

pieces) to account for the deeper, more adaptable, and multiform understandings of what it means to teach and live amid violence.

I invite the readers to consider that the conversaciones recall forms of violence such as harassment and abuse from students and school parents towards teachers, physical abuse of students against teachers, deliberate mocking of teachers in social media done by students, mandated social isolation and lack of support or resources on how to cope with it, neglect, lack of support from school administration and ministry of Education following a teacher's miscarriage, contextual violence, cultural violence associated with violent culture, among other forms that are beyond my scope.

Zizek's paradigm would need to consider these other nuanced forms, which, at least in their particular combination, may be unique to the Colombian context, to capture the full force of the violence teachers experience there. In other words, simply saying that harassment and abuse from students and school parents towards teachers fits within the mode of subjective violence—given there is an identifiable instigator—would be insufficient to comprehend the violence the teacher experienced and would likely not do more than just labelling the mode of violence. Instead, if researchers and stakeholders are aware there are more nuanced forms of violence and consider the different, multiple layers of the phenomenon, they could understand these forms of violence better and build actionable reflections and solutions.

Also, I must say that the research collaborators did not recognize the "modes" of violence as such or associated them exclusively with each mode. Instead, they referred to acts, forms or expressions of violence that affected their teaching and living. Sometimes, the research collaborators did not even refer to specific experiences as violent until we elaborated on them once they mentioned the issue during our talks. "Modes" of violence could lead researchers and

teachers toward an unclear and limiting discussion on violence and would not prepare teachers to act upon violence's varied expressions. Indeed, the research collaborators had multiple understandings of the meaning of violence. Centering our *conversaciones* on these three modes would have limited the definitions the research collaborators provided and the experiences with expressions of violence they shared during our *conversaciones*.

In Chapter 5, one can read how violence manifests through different expressions or forms: lack of support from the government, miscarriage, in-school violence, physical aggression, poor working conditions, etc., as I briefly mentioned it before. In the cases of Celeste, Pedro Pablo and Yara, there was sound evidence of how the violence experienced at work has radically affected their personal lives. These three teachers had to seek professional help, receive therapy, be hospitalized, or take a leave of absence because of the expressions of violence they faced. Violence has affected Clío, Alfi, Sandra and Jagomo somewhat differently. Their experiences with violence affected their life decisions, teaching, and commitment to education. They had to untangle diverse situations caused by their students, the school parents, and some that were particular to the environment where they taught. In all cases, expressions of violence, in different degrees, influenced the teaching, the intentions to teach, or the lives of the teachers.

The second question explored what teachers understood and recognized as violence in Colombia. In the *conversaciones* sustained with the research collaborators, I noted different understandings of the meaning of violence. For instance, I recall how Yara, Pedro Pablo, Sandra and Alfi described their interactions with armed men as a violent yet ordinary activity, as something they did not react to—they did not run away or ask for help. Two teachers informed their institution's administration about these encounters with armed men. The others thought it

was just another day. The research collaborators may have perceived some expressions of violence as common aspects of the contexts where they teach and live or as different levels of violence. As argued in the theoretical framework chapter, these varied understandings of violence may add to the complexity of understanding the meaning of violence. Violence is a complex phenomenon to explain, and the research collaborators understood it as vast, multiform, quotidian, and ubiquitous. Their reaction to violence may offer a general idea of how these teachers approached forms of violence.

Now, allow me to share the particular understandings of violence of three teachers. Yara described a very introspective understanding of violence. She recounted how, "violence is so great that the violence they do against you goes to the unconscious of us teachers and that violence stays here, in our brain... hidden, here it stays stored, hidden." She understands violence as something damaging, invasive, and long-term. She continued to describe the further consequences this form of violence may cause: "if you as a teacher do not know how to overcome that [violence], you go on and on and on again, and then you become... autoimmune, they do this [act of violence] to you, they do that [act of violence] to you… and you, like, hum, feel nothing." Yara indicated this was psychological and emotional violence.

Jagomo detailed a case of how social media violence may lead to physical violence. He narrated how students in his schools posted on Facebook about killing a teacher. He titled this as new forms of violence that are being produced in the school, and called into question how teachers were to handle such situations if they mostly focus on armed conflict. Jagomo also showed concern for the teachers who use grading and assessment to diagnose and classify, which he believes is a form of violence against the students that leads to segregation.

Clío highlighted how violence happens in the school. She said, "School is a field of combat. [It]'s terrible there. It's terrible. There are egos, there are, there are alliances, there is an air of superiority." She mentioned verbal and psychological acts of violence that can be empowered by the domestic violence students experience. Clío pointed at an omnipresent violence that has an initial source—in this case egos or culture—but which extends and posits in other entities and continues to cause violence against people. (Is this a sort of self-sustainable violence?) I still hear Clío's words asserting how everywhere in Colombia, we are all affected by violence.

Another question that led to my research was: How do teachers constitute subjectivities when affected by violence in Colombia? In the second and third chapter, I discussed how some teachers constituted their subjectivities when facing friction against their environment. Teachers fall into a type of abyss, similar to the one described in the Hero's journey in literature. There they realize they have different conditions and want something other than what society has planned for them. They contest what is expected of them. In this abyss, teachers reject the identity, desires, goals, conditions, and other attributes set previously by society and strive to embody any teacher subjectivity they need or desire. The process explained in the theoretical chapter can be compared to the experiences the research collaborators shared.

In the *conversaciones*, I learned that the research collaborators faced numerous repercussions when they consciously questioned their conditions, decided to raise awareness in their students about social, economic, political, and environmental issues, or invited their students to question their living conditions. In the reflective parenthesis in the second chapter, I mentioned that teachers in Colombia frequently experience persecution, displacement, and

silencing as consequences when crossing the abyss, when questioning the identity imposed on them.

And yet, I observed other more routine aspects that make the teacher's journey through the abyss just as painful and damaging, if not more. The research collaborators experienced isolating themselves in remote locations, enduring comments about their bodies and lifestyles, arguing intensively with students, parents, and people in their communities, listening to degrading comments about teachers on the media, and more. These were some of the repercussions the research collaborators faced when questioning the identity imposed on them and performing liberated teacher subjects. Just by looking at the life experiences of the research collaborators, one can comprehend the difficulties and violence they have been through when they embraced the constitution of their subjectivities.

The constitution of teacher subjectivities is a violent process. When teachers challenge or rebel against the fundamental principles and standards that society has set for them, they face situations like those described by the research collaborators in the *conversaciones*. Some members of society contest teachers' actions since they perceive them as a threat—to particular groups of society and their goals or society in general. As the research collaborators described, this contestation usually comes in numerous forms of violence. Some of these forms of violence were bolstered by different actors: the State or the system, the school, the armed groups, the parents, the students, the media, and the politicians. All these actors limit and reshape what the teachers can be and do. And the teachers stood in the middle of it all, sometimes without support and guidance from their school administrations or other pertinent organizations.

In the *conversaciones*, I also recognized a lack of value for the teaching profession and a complete disregard for the expressions of violence experienced by teachers. I consider it

necessary to highlight how the *conversaciones* show, in some cases, a lack of support from the immediate community where the teachers work and live. Research collaborators mentioned how the school administration, school parents, or, in some cases, their own families did not support, guide, or listen to their side of the story or take what they had to say seriously.

The fourth question leading this research explored how teachers resist violence. I elaborated on a fragmented, nonlinear, timeless, and adjustable resistance in the second chapter. In it, I explained that teachers have faced various forms of violence in their work and have developed unique ways to cope and fight back. I argued that their resistance is not a single approach, but rather reflects the fragmented nature of the violence they experience—it is adaptable and ever-changing. Furthermore, I invite others to view and approach resisting as anything teachers do to battle against the individualizing domination of the subject. In other words, anything they do to counteract the expressions of violence they described in our *conversaciones* could be considered resisting.

While talking to the research collaborators, I learned they have resisted in different ways. Resisting is multiform. The research collaborators designed resources, gave talks, participated in bazaars, and helped the communities around the school by buying from them, doing raffles, etc. For instance, Sandra and Alfi contested the expected image of an uninvolved teacher subject by working with their students and advancing programs to give them a chance to get work experience in well-known companies. They resisted the forms of violence executed by some people in their community and instead focused on bringing opportunities to their students. They encouraged students from marginal neighbourhoods to work hard to improve their skills and find better jobs. For Clío, she engaged in everyday conversations with colleagues. When she felt unmotivated and unclear about teaching due to distress, she talked to colleagues, built networks

with former classmates, participated in projects to learn about new strategies she could use in class with her students and continued growing as a teacher.

Resisting is multidirectional. The teachers did not perform resistance as a direct response to a form of violence. They did not act only when they observed the form of violence directed their way. As Celeste shared, some teachers came together, sat in groups, drank hot chocolate, shared a piece of bread, and talked to cope with some difficult moments that had happened recently in their school. In these encounters, they listened and encouraged each other, offered advice, vented about the problems they had, celebrated each other, or cried.

Resisting is not about contesting violence; it is about transcending and transforming it. The research collaborators explained how they wanted to treat the cause of the forms of violence they experienced. They did not want to respond to violence. Rather, they wanted to transform the cause of violence in the first place so that they would not have to experience dealing with that or any other form of violence in the future. Resisting was no longer the teacher waiting in the abyss for the attack to happen. It was not about contesting the attack right away, either. An example of this is Pedro Pablo's case. He decided to teach young students in remote locations about democracy and peacebuilding in places where these topics are not well received or allowed by illegal armed groups.

He wanted to transform the cause of violence, but he understood he had to wait until people in the community became used to him, and he had to find subtle ways to address specific topics. He said, "I want the parents to see I did not come to... to stir the pot. 'Oh no, this teacher started to say that this is good, and this is bad' when that's not how I do things! I usually say, 'Come on, let's all talk about it.'… And let's not talk about hatred, let's not talk from hate, let's talk about peace and construction." He wanted to transform those people who caused violence

against him. Pedro Pablo tried to make them think, question their actions, and equip them with strategies to build peace in the community. I have the vivid memory of when he told me that scholars and researchers have talked so much about violence, but he did not know about an actionable plan to build peace and heal from our violent history.

The last question I aimed to answer with my research was how teachers managed existing violence and prepared for future forms or expressions of violence. In brief, the research collaborators shared moments of resistance that illustrated how they had managed expressions of violence—as shown in the preceding paragraphs and the *conversaciones*. Nonetheless, what I found most concerning about possible violence management, training, or preparation was that the research collaborators unanimously agreed that they had never received or participated in anything of this nature. This fact caught my attention because the violence teachers have experienced in Colombia is documented. The numbers showing teachers affected by violence are precise and indicate there should be programs to prepare in-service teachers (i.e., professional development training or workshops) and pre-service teachers (i.e., undergraduate courses, seminars). What is more, the research collaborators mentioned that the teaching programs where they studied never mentioned teachers could face such forms of violence and distress and did not prepare them for what to do if they faced violence.

The research collaborators allowed me to learn from their experiences as teachers with expressions of violence. They shared with me what it means to be a teacher in some regions of Colombia and what it is to teach in populations where teachers are not well-received by some members of the communities. I learned about the different expressions of violence that affect teachers. I also learned that teachers must react to them differently. This research experience allowed me to see the urgency of having these *conversaciones*. Talking with teachers to learn

about their teaching and living conditions may help education stakeholders to know what teachers need to stay in the profession and succeed. Thus, I invite researchers and education professionals to continue talking to teachers in the field and explore their life experiences of living and teaching amid violence. However, we should acknowledge the urgency of structuring applicable strategies to help teachers' situations.

An unconventional choice of data analysis

I maintain it is imperative to investigate with those "under investigation." In this research, I analyzed with the research collaborators. They are teachers who are often excluded from the decision-making process. I defended constructing knowledge from their local experiences and understanding. I welcomed them into the research as providers and essential actors in this issue in light of what Ortiz & Arias (2019) advocate researchers do. I did not interpret their experiences alone. A phenomenological analysis of the teachers' experiences with forms of violence is recorded in the live conversations. The research collaborators and I exercised a "phenomenological attitude" (van Manen & van Manen, 2021), which allowed us to reflect on what they understood as forms of violence that affect teachers.

Thematic analysis and other more conventional analysis approaches have proven invaluable in identifying patterns and themes within data. However, when applied to the sensitive and complex realm of violence research, they face certain limitations that can hinder the depth and richness of the findings. These conventional approaches can inadvertently reduce the complexity of violence narratives, objectify survivors' experiences, and potentially contribute to re-traumatization.

One of the primary limitations of these approaches in trauma research is its tendency to reduce complex experiences to simplistic categories. By focusing on identifying overarching

themes, researchers may inadvertently overlook the nuances and intricacies of individual narratives about violence. Also, overlooking the nuances and particularities of each story can lead to a loss of depth and richness in understanding the teachers' experiences. For instance, a study examining the experiences of survivors of sexual assault might identify themes such as "shame," "powerlessness," and "anger." While these themes capture some aspects of survivors' experiences, they may not fully convey the multifaceted nature of their emotions and coping mechanisms. Each survivor's experience is unique, shaped by their personal history, cultural background, and the specific circumstances of their traumatic experiencing. Conventional analysis approaches may struggle to capture the full complexity of these individual narratives.

Moreover, conventional analysis approaches can inadvertently abstract from the reality of people who have experienced violence by treating their experiences as abstract data points or dissecting their stories into chunks for subsequent systematic analysis. These approaches can be particularly problematic when dealing with sensitive and emotionally charged topics. By focusing on identifying themes and patterns, researchers may overlook the human element of violence. People who have dealt with violence are not merely data points; they are individuals with unique stories and experiences. Processing their narratives through conventional analysis can potentially erase the personal and emotional impact of their life experiences. For example, a study examining the experiences of people who experienced domestic violence might identify a theme of "isolation." While this theme accurately captures the sense of loneliness and disconnection often experienced by victims of violence, it may not fully convey the emotional toll of isolation on individuals' lives.

In addition to the potential for reductionism and objectification, conventional analysis approaches can contribute to re-living violence. When analyzing life stories amid violence,

researchers must be mindful of the potential for both triggering and disregarding painful memories or emotions for survivors. The process of coding and analyzing data, if done together with participants, can inadvertently evoke traumatic memories, primarily if focused mainly on the violent act or reaction, leading to distress and emotional upheaval. Evoking traumatic memories is particularly concerning when working with teachers who may already be struggling with the psychological effects of forms of violence. In addition, a conventional approach may tend to disregard or overlook painful memories or emotions because these may not be generalizable, sorted, calculated, or repeated in other stories (van Manen, 2017). To mitigate the risk of re-living violence, researchers must exercise caution and sensitivity when handling life stories amid violence. For this project, I collected informed consent from research collaborators, provided support services, conducted member checking, engaged the research collaborators in the live analysis of their life experiences, and ensured the research process was conducted safely and in a supportive environment.

In conclusion, while conventional analysis approaches are valuable for qualitative research, they face significant limitations when applied to the complex and sensitive realm of violence research. The tendency to reduce complexity, abstract from the experience of participants and potentially contribute to re-living violence can hinder the depth and richness of the findings. To address these limitations, I considered an alternative approach—phenomenological analysis, which I described in the methodology chapter. By adopting a more nuanced and sensitive approach to research on the forms of violence against teachers, I aimed at capturing better the complexities of teachers' experiences and contributing to a deeper understanding of what teaching and living amid forms of violence mean. However, several noteworthy emergent themes in this research warrant further exploration. As discussed in the

reflection and conclusion section, the research collaborators described a range of experiences with forms of violence, including physical and verbal violence, psychological harm, psychological violence, emotional and sexual abuse, threats, criminal harassment, and political and mediatic violence. These themes demonstrate the multifaceted nature of violence within educational settings and highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' challenges.

Limitations

There are some limitations in the current study. First, more teachers need to share their experiences with forms of violence. Seven research collaborators were as many teachers as possible I could recruit, given the time and budget constraints of the project. And to provide better support to the teachers in the field who are or have been affected by violence, we need to welcome more voices in this discussion. Having seven participants revealed a great deal of diversity of experience with forms of violence. Still, more voices and life experiences will help design more context-based, detailed, and adaptable guidelines to support teachers. In addition, while phenomenological analysis aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals—in other words, the living meanings (Van Manen, 2017)—a different data collect and analytical approach could complement this approach by capturing a more generalizable picture and opening the possibility of more practical solutions.

Second, research bias is still a possibility. As the researcher, I know that my subjective interpretations and experiences may have influenced the conversations and the attention I paid to some topics. To mitigate this, I employed conversations and member checking and offered a relatively unprocessed version of the research collaborators' accounts. As I have previously explained, the conversations provided a more horizontal, less hierarchical interaction, where the

research collaborators could freely ask questions, reflect on previous experiences or what they had previously stated, add to complement previous arguments, and more. Yet, I recognize that my presence in the conversations and my research goals may have biased the interaction with the research collaborators and, therefore, affected some of the information gathered.

Third, this research elaborates on forms of violence in the Colombian context. The research collaborators in this project shared the same cultural and contextual background. This project did not attempt to transfer the experiences of the research collaborators or draw conclusions that applied to other populations or contexts in which teachers are experiencing violence. However, I believe teachers and other education stakeholders in different contexts will read these conversations and find forms of violence, contextual elements, and even life experiences that will resonate with them. This study, while focused on the Colombian context, offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of violence experienced by teachers. By understanding these experiences, educators and policymakers in other contexts can identify commonalities and develop strategies to address similar challenges and promote a safer and more supportive learning environment for all.

Lastly, ethical considerations have always been a concern in this research project. Research involving sensitive topics like violence presents ethical challenges. I carefully followed the ethics protocol to account for participant confidentiality, minimize harm, and provide appropriate support services. While these measures were taken, ethical considerations remain a study limitation. Given the traumas suffered by some of the participants, more could have been done in some instances; however, the research collaborators did not ask for support services or other type of help. Also, the ethical protocol required an anonymous interaction with the research collaborators—I was not allowed to know their real identities. This condition ended the

possibility of expanding the discussion with and further support these collaborators. Despite these limitations, the conversations presented in this study provide valuable insights into the lived experience of teaching and living amid forms of violence.

Chapter 7: Contributions

In Colombia, numerous research projects have invited teachers to discuss the implications of armed conflict on education and students. In the literature review, I mentioned how previous research projects facilitated teachers' discussions on teaching historical memory in the classroom to develop peacebuilding resources (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2018, 2019) or allowed teachers to retell their stories to elaborate on armed conflict, dynamics of repression, and aimed at designing resources to avoid repeating violence (Chávez Salazar et al., 2016; Novelli, 2009a,c; Novelli, 2010; Ortegón, 2017; Osorio González, 2016). Other research explored how political violence influenced teachers and their trade union organizations (Novelli, 2009b) and how memory can be used as a teaching tool to respond to violence (Becerra et al., 2012). However, while these projects made important contributions, many of them failed to adequately address how teachers reflect on what it means to be a teacher and teach amid violence, nor display their unique experiences with forms of violence other than the armed conflict. These projects did not allow a co-construction of the meaning of "teacher" or "violence," nor discussed how teachers have dealt with forms of violence beyond how they have suffered them. In this section, I present the contributions of this research. First, I explain why I focused on voicing the teachers' experiences. Second, I broadened my gaze on violence to include forms beyond armed violence. Third, I call for a redefinition of violence in official education documents. Then, I suggest a framework to analyze violence. Lastly, I bring attention to emotional saturation.

I understand the importance of and support the initiatives that aim to develop pedagogical resources to teach peacebuilding or conflict resolution to students in areas affected by violence (Historic Memory National Center, 2018; 2019; Ortegón, 2017). However, this research project focused on how teachers understand and experience violence. It aimed at voicing the teachers' experiences with violence to get education stakeholders and the public interested in the

complexities of the teacher profession and understand why someone would desire to become a teacher even when the social and contextual conditions do not seem to support such choice. This research project wanted to shift the focus of the current research onto the teachers and explore ways to help them navigate the challenges they may face in their careers.

When I proposed this research project, I assumed that teachers in Colombia experienced mainly one type of violence: subjective violence (i.e., armed conflict). However, as I advised in the reflection and conclusion section, the research collaborators elaborated on other forms of violence. They described nuanced forms of violence, such as physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, and political violence, as well as emotional abuse, threats, and criminal harassment. This thesis signals the importance of shifting our focus to the other forms of violence that may affect teachers and have an impact on the teachers' lives and their decision to teach. Government institutions, including the Ministry of Education, have designed protocols to assist teachers who face persecution or threats. Still, little is being done to tackle the other forms of violence described in this thesis. In addition, the solution to the persecution and threats against teachers is usually relocating the teacher. Yet, psychological and emotional support are rarely offered to help the teachers process such a difficult situation.

The definition of violence needs to be updated to help teachers affected by these broader forms of violence. If we acknowledge these other forms of violence, education stakeholders, teachers, researchers, policymakers, etc., should widen their perspective on what is affecting teachers in Colombia and advocate for an update of the official definition of teacher and violence so that teachers can receive the support they need and deserve. This thesis contributes to that aim. By showing examples of how these other forms of violence are affecting the lives of teachers and what teachers do to cope with them, it calls education stakeholders, especially the

politicians and education policymakers, to redefine what violence against teachers is so that the teachers can receive support through the workers' compensation insurance. Once the administrative institutions recognize the value of this semantic and legal update, more practical solutions will take place: workshops, seminars, support groups, resources, protocols, communication channels, etc.

It is also important that education stakeholders should collaborate to ideate a framework that guides us to understand how forms of violence affect the teachers, how these forms interact with each other, and how they are fostered. I concluded that Zizek's framework of violence (2008c) was insufficient for the case disclosed in this research, but it can help us move forward and provide a useful point from which to begin. There are two important aspects to be considered. First, there is a need to identify the forms of violence affecting teachers. Second, it is necessary to shift the attention to *conditions for violence*.

First, education stakeholders should identify forms of (subjective) violence. Identifying forms of violence against teachers will permit teachers in the field to know how to proceed when they face a particular form of violence. Yet subjective violence varies in form, degree, execution, etc. Thus, education stakeholders need to welcome into the framework these nuances since they are characteristic of the multiple forms of violence against teachers. To achieve this goal and deepen our understanding of violence within the context of teaching, education stakeholders must understand that forms of violence are *fragmentable,* capable of breaking into smaller pieces. This concept implies that form of violence is composed of interconnected elements that can exist independently or be recombined in different configurations. Acknowledging this fragmentation allows for a more nuanced and adaptable exploration of the multifaceted nature of violence in educational settings. By recognizing violence's complex and multilayered nature,

researchers and stakeholders can move beyond simplistic definitions (Blair, 2009) and develop more effective strategies for addressing and mitigating its impact. Beyond the overt acts of harassment and abuse, teachers often experience subtler forms of violence that can significantly influence their professional lives. These expressions of violence have varying degrees and ultimately impact teaching practices, intentions, and personal well-being.

Second, stakeholders must recall that systemic and symbolic violence is complex to examine, analyze, and resolve. This complexity is evident in the case of racial profiling in the USA, which has been fought against since the 1990s and keeps happening. It is also evident in the use of hateful language by certain newspapers or platforms towards a particular group of people, which has historically affected minorities and yet persists. Racial profiling and hateful language do not begin there, nor are they self-sustaining—they need other systemic or symbolic violence forms to stay alive. In other words, it is critical to focus on *conditions for violence*. The research collaborators illustrated some important systemic and symbolic conditions, such as political hate against teachers, media campaigns to condemn the teaching profession, a low appreciation for the teacher's role in the community, a lack of psychological support, etc. These conditions are not typified as violence in Colombia, and yet they do stimulate synergy among other forms of violence which directly affect teachers. They help in the process of promoting or nourishing that form of violence that becomes instrumental violence against teachers. To develop a comprehensive understanding of violence in education and create an actionable framework, education stakeholders must consider the interconnectedness of these multiple *conditions for violence* and their effect on the forms of violence and their implications for teachers' experiences.

My work aligns with the literature in that, like Becerra, Infante, and Cortes (2012), I assert that oral storytelling can be a valuable way to honor and learn from the experiences of teachers. By directly listening to the stories of teachers, in as unfiltered a way as possible, we can gain insight into what it's like to teach and live in the face of various forms of violence. Retelling these stories serves as a powerful tool, offering practical insights for dealing with violence. This manuscript presents conversations with seven teachers, allowing them to share their experiences and empowering other teachers to speak out about the different types of violence they have encountered. It delves deep into the various forms of violence experienced by teachers in five regions of Colombia. It explores how they have overcome and transformed the effects of the violence they have faced.

Conversations were a key component to achieve that. As previously explained, conversations in this research were defined from the concept of pláticas (Flores et al., 2018; Fierros & Dolores, 2016). I decided to implement this method because I needed a method that allowed a horizontal dialogue with the research collaborators about those possibly disregarded experiences or knowledge they had on violence. I needed a method that allowed me to understand and co-construct the meanings of teacher and violence and, quite significantly, a method that invited the research collaborators to reflect. The conversations allowed all this to happen. In the conversations, the research collaborators expressed that they could reflect on their lives as teachers and had moments of realization (e.g., Clío comments that it was in our conversation that she realized that the school's control mechanism had affected her). The conversations permitted to investigate with those "under investigation" and displayed the teachers' individual characteristics, conditions, and contexts.

Yet perhaps another contribution of this research concerns a surprising finding about the limits of this method. Unfortunately, having reflective and evocative conversations led us to emotional exhaustion. At the end of the conversations, I reached a moment when it became challenging for me to react to what I was listening to, to sustain the dialogue, and to participate actively. I remember telling some of the research collaborators that I was quiet or seemed lost because I was still processing what they had just shared with me—some of the life experiences they shared with me were intimate and distressing.

Still, there is an element of this limitation that is intellectually interesting and perhaps useful from a methodological standpoint. I understood that this factor could advise researchers when to stop the conversations, and I related it to the concept of data saturation. As discussed in the methodological chapter, I did not consider data saturation as a standard to stop data collection in this research. However, I did not expect there would be another indicator that could signal when to stop collecting information. After ninety minutes into the conversations, I reached an inflection point when I experienced an emotional overload. It became more challenging to manage a sensitive and respectful reaction to what the collaborators shared and simultaneously pursue the research's purpose. I reached a moment of what we might call *emotional saturation*. In further work like this, it may be valuable to consider achieving emotional saturation as a methodological device. This can help the researcher conclude that they have gone as far with the participant as possible.

I want to bring Pedro Pablo's words to conclude this section. He was clear on what he wanted from participating in this project. He mentioned during our conversation that we—teachers in Colombia and Colombians in general—know too much about conflict. As Pedro Pablo said, numerous research initiatives, educational projects, and academic programs have

been designed to study violence and armed conflict. However, he invited me to reflect on what teachers have done to resist or transcend forms of violence. And there are some of these resisting practices in the conversations. The readers will find in the conversations how the research collaborators build networks to encourage professional development, organize group sessions to vent about their challenges in the week, engage in alternative practices to heal or stay healthy, and more.

Practical implications

The following section is framed as a series of recommendations for teachers and education stakeholders on what to do when faced with forms of violence. These recommendations are drawn from practices adopted and exercised by the research collaborators. I recognize the value of the research collaborators' initiatives to structure ways to cope with the forms of violence affecting them or the conditions for violence found in their contexts. I also ask the readers to consider adapting and modifying such recommendations. A more technical guide will be designed and presented in a later project.

Informal support meetings: Celeste highlighted the importance of social support among teachers, especially in challenging work environments. Despite facing stress and adversity, she described creating a sense of community and camaraderie through informal gatherings and shared experiences. They encouraged each other to persevere, offered advice and support, and celebrated personal milestones together. This collective effort helped them cope with their challenges and maintain a positive outlook. To foster a supportive and resilient teaching community:

Prioritize social connection: Encourage regular informal gatherings, such as after-school coffee breaks or social events, to strengthen teacher bonds.

Offer emotional support: Create a safe space for teachers to share their experiences, express concerns, and receive encouragement from their colleagues.

Celebrate achievements: Recognize and celebrate personal and professional accomplishments to boost morale and foster a positive work environment.

Promote self-care: Encourage teachers to prioritize self-care activities, such as exercise, relaxation techniques, and hobbies, to help them cope with stress and maintain well-being.

Advocate for change: Support initiatives to improve working conditions, address systemic issues and create a more supportive environment for teachers.

Pre-service teacher networks: Clío highlights the disconnect between the theoretical knowledge gained in a Bachelor of Education program and the practical realities of teaching. While the university provides valuable knowledge, it often fails to adequately prepare students for the day-to-day challenges of classroom management, including dealing with schedules, routines, and psychological exhaustion.

She emphasized the importance of practical experience and mentorship in supplementing academic learning. Clío advocates for more substantial support networks among teachers and more immersive teaching practicums that simulate real-world classroom experiences. To enhance the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, consider the following guidelines:

Integrate Practical Experience: Incorporate more hands-on learning opportunities, such as extended teaching practicums, simulations, and case studies, to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Foster Mentorship: Encourage, assess and redesign mentorship programs, if needed, that pair experienced teachers with student teachers to provide guidance and support. More than

observation and assessment, pre-service teachers need to learn about the realities of the teaching contexts and what works best when facing certain situations.

Focus on Teacher Well-being Management: Develop programs, courses, or seminars that inform the teachers how to deal with everyday challenges found in the classroom and school. Teachers must be equipped with knowledge and skills to help them navigate challenging and, perhaps, violent situations.

Emphasize Social and Cultural Competencies: Equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to navigate diverse social and cultural conditions that permeate the classrooms so they can effectively engage with students from different backgrounds.

Preventing and Addressing Workplace Violence in Education: Yara narrated the severe impact of workplace violence on a teacher's physical and mental health. She described experiencing a wave of pressure and rudeness from students, leading to a physical breakdown and a diagnosis of a brain fluid leak. This incident caused significant health complications, including mobility issues and emotional distress. Yara reflected on the toxic work environment, emphasizing the importance of clear communication and avoiding emotional overreactions. She also discussed the psychological toll of workplace violence, highlighting the invisible wounds that can linger long after the initial incident. She suggests avoiding strong emotional bonds with students and focusing on self-care to cope.

Foster a Supportive and Respectful Work Environment: Establish clear policies and procedures for addressing workplace violence, promote a culture of respect and civility among all staff members and students, and provide training on conflict resolution, stress management, and mental health awareness.

Encourage Open Communication: Create opportunities for teachers to express concerns without fear of retaliation, implement anonymous reporting mechanisms for incidents of violence, and encourage open dialogue and active listening among colleagues and students. Students must recognize the impact of their actions on the teachers' lives.

Prioritize Self-Care: Encourage teachers to care for their physical and mental health, provide access to counselling and support services—do not simply indicate on paper where these resources are; bring them to the teachers, make them accessible—and promote work-life balance and stress management techniques.

Set Boundaries and Expectations: Establish clear boundaries and expectations for professional behaviour, model respectful communication and behaviour, and discourage emotional overreactions and excessive bonding with students—as Yara recommends.

Address Workplace Violence Promptly: Investigate and address incidents of forms of violence promptly and thoroughly, take appropriate disciplinary action when necessary, and provide support and resources to the teachers affected by these forms of violence.

Recommendations for future research

Understanding the multifaceted nature of violence against teachers requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. This study highlights the need for further research to explore regional variations in the interconnectedness of different forms of violence and their associated conditions. Additionally, incorporating diverse perspectives from teachers across national backgrounds is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and develop effective solutions. By fostering collaborative analysis and developing practical tools for teachers, future research can contribute significantly to mitigating the impact of violence on the teaching profession and creating safer and more supportive learning environments. In this

section, I present some brief recommendations for research on violence and teachers. These are brief and limited but are a roadmap of further directions I might want to investigate as a researcher.

First, it is necessary to explore if the regions where teachers are most affected by violence vary in terms of the links between different forms of violence and the available conditions for violence. For example, I presented political hate speech in the pilot study as a condition for violence that targets teachers and creates a hostile environment for teachers to work and live. In Colombia, dominant political groups use hateful language to control and intimidate educators. This rhetoric, often employed in major cities, is now disseminated widely through social media and impacts teachers in regions where the speech did not occur initially. Yet, it is still inconclusive if the degree to which a condition for violence is present in the context affects the linking and execution of certain forms of violence.

Second, future research should welcome more teachers from different national backgrounds. There may be important differences between the Colombian context and other contexts, and having more conversations with teachers will help education stakeholders further explore the complexities of this phenomenon, and the variations that occur depending on the contextual conditions for violence. More importantly, welcoming more teachers will help make connections between the lived experiences of teachers in varied contexts and build the necessary networks to advance applicable solutions to teachers affected by these forms of violence.

Third, teachers and researchers should also develop a way to conduct a collaborative analysis of the collected information. For this research, the research collaborators and I reflected retrospectively on, talked about, retold, and questioned the living meanings of violence they experienced. This was critical in refining and reflecting back their understandings. But ethical

restrictions on the research prevented me from doing this in a group. Inviting teachers to analyze their stories and openly discuss their different points of view in a more public venue is a further step which could deepen our exploration and enrich the *conversación* around this issue.

Finally, I understand that eradicating the forms of violence would be preferable. However, realistically speaking the most that education stakeholders can do is create tools (e.g., protocols, guides, programs, etc.) given the conditions of the current scenario and make them accessible to the teachers. Forms of violence might be prevented or resisted if there are tools available for the teachers. Thus, future researchers should direct their efforts to describe and understand what it is to teach and live amid forms of violence and facilitate the making and dissemination of practical guidelines to support pre- and in-service teachers better.

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