

“For me, speaking about the past is the best in the world, for them, the worst”: Social landscapes and territories of memory from displaced Colombian children

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Abstract

The text analyses the memory of displacements of Colombian children, as a result of the armed conflict. To this end, a study was developed with 12 children, between the age of 8 and 12 years, and 5 mothers, belonging from rural areas from North Colombia, now living in Bogota periphery, who were displaced between 2008 and 2015. Visual methodologies (drawings, photographs and especially Google street view) were used to prompt children in articulating live narratives about the experience of displacement, as well as interviews with mothers. Children's memories were characterized by being spatially situated, making use of imagination and bodily experience on their narratives about the past. Differently from their mothers, children expressed the necessity to speak about the past, showing an idyllic perspective about their belonged territories and a profound sense of loss. The study reveals that children are active survivors, that constructed strategies of resistance against displacement in their daily lives, as well as agency in the production of narratives about the lived experience. Moreover, the study put focus on the importance to consider children, like adults, as *subjects of memory*, that give sense about themselves on the production of narratives.

KEYWORDS

agency, children, Colombia, displacement, memories

INTRODUCTION

The phrase that composes the title of this article was spoken by one of the subjects of our research¹: Bruno, a 12-year-old displaced Colombian child, who synthesizes our proposal. We aim to analyse the memories of Colombian children officially recognized as victims of displacement, in order to listen to their own voices and perspectives about the experience. We demonstrate that children give sense about the past in an exercise of agency, revealing a singular perception about a collective experience. At the same time, speaking about the past has a different meaning compared to when adults do the same. For children, the past is something to be remembered, while for parents, it is something to be forgotten. Finally, we try to show the embodied and situated character of children's memories.

For more than 50 years, Colombia has been involved in tragic dimensions of internal armed conflict, as a result of a tradition of agrarian struggle, and a feeling of injustice accumulated over several years of unsuccessful struggle for land (Camacho, 2022). Peasant guerrilla groups were organized, such as the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army in 1964), the ELN (National Liberation Army in 1962), the EPL (People's Liberation Army in 1967), the M-19 (the Movement of April 19, 1990), among others that unleashed a war together with the State, that responded with more violence. The situation was aggravated by the intervention of criminal organizations, the dynamics of drug trafficking, and criminal alliances, including paramilitaries, public officials, rulers, economic elites, and drug traffickers.

This conflict still presents today in Colombia did not end with the signing of the "agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace" made in 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla, and as a consequence of this, the number of forced displacements continued to increase.

The forced displacement affected especially marginalized groups, like afro-Colombian, indigenous and rural population. Many thousands of victims were forced to leave their homes under threats, kidnappings, massacres, extortion. According to UNHCR² records, Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world: 9 million of registered victims, 32% composed of children and youngsters. They, together with their families, have been forced to migrate, leaving suddenly what was once called "their home", "their territory" and "their life".

The causes of displacement are very diverse and contextual. Migration is a common experience between children from majority world in the search for better conditions of life (Punch, 2015). Among them, are the effects of war and armed conflicts, in which human rights such as life are at risk. According to the United Nations, over the last decade, more than 89.3 million people have been forcibly displaced by war, violence or political persecution.³

Displacement has impacted both children and adults, demanding processes of adaptation to a new territory, transformation of their ways of life, construction of new socio-affective references, development of resilience. In this way, being affected by displacement not only implies focusing one's gaze on the victimizing fact of forced escape, but also recognizing the dense and complex networks and paths of life before and after the event. (Boothby, 1992).

In the case of Colombia, considering the extended duration of armed conflicts, different generation of children and youngsters had been forced to migrate with their families,

or to engage as soldiers on the armed conflict (Berents, 2018). More recently, studies had been developed to understand the effects of the conflict on children and youngsters, specially focusing the experience of displacement. Some of these studies put focus on the impact of displacement on children vulnerability and mental health (Andrade et al., 2011; Flink et al., 2013). Other focuses listening about their experience of displacement (Berents, 2018; Camacho, 2022; Gonzáles, 2015; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Paramo, 2012; Riaño-Alcalá, 2010; Salazar et al., 2015). Finally, others studied the experience of children and younger soldiers (Beier, 2011; Sanford, 2006)⁴.

In order to cast a light on the children's perspective, we will discuss the concept of memory and singularity of children's memories, establishing a relationship between memory, agency and generation order in the study of children's narratives about displacement. Secondly, we present methodological strategies, discussing the use of visual technologies as a powerful tool for the process of the construction of narratives, regarding the children's experiences. Furthermore, we discuss the ethical dimensions on listening to child victims of armed conflicts, focusing on the its challenges and limits. Finally, we analyse the material of their memories, embodied and situated in time and space: the territories of memories.

Memories, narrative and children agency

Children have their own constructions and understandings of their life experiences and their memories reflect these peculiarities. Their memories have their own sensitivities, feelings, values, characters, places and events (Aleksiévich, 2018). Although these memories are linked to a past, they are permeated by a present.

Memory is not a record of the past, but a reconstruction that connects past and present, in which the person gives meaning to an experience of the past, from the present moment. While it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than merely a personal act. As Halbwachs (1990) showed, a seemingly individual capacity to remember is really a collective phenomenon. According to him, it is a collective construction that embodies individual perception about the past, where a social framework informs the process of remembering, sustained on interpersonal relationships. This process involves selectivity which maintains, consolidates or even silences memories (Misztal, 2003). As Pollak (2006) points out, forgiveness and remembering are both materials of memory.

Pollak goes further on the inter-subjectivist approach of memory, considering that, despite being constructed from cultural forms and constrained by a social context, it is an individual mental act that involves agency. There is active work in the process of remembering, that defines what is registered and what is forgotten.

At the same time, the individual reconstruction of the past is based on social belonging in which social markers such as gender, class, nationality, race/ethnicity, generation and also age condition memories. With regard to children's memories, there is a double dimension. On the one hand, they are based on collective memories shared with adults, in which their everyday experiences are connected to wider social arrangements. On the other hand, they possess singularities related to generational belonging.

It is important to consider that, as suggested by Moss (2010), in the study on children's memories, the experiences and the events that influence their lives might be beyond their own understanding. Combinations of social memories are transmitted through family, community and nation. These create complex landscapes of social memory that children need to navigate.

Centrally, in everyday family life, children construct a sense of self, as they listen to stories about themselves, within a collective framework.

The act of remembering demands a construction in order to give sense to the past and at the same time, to make it comprehensible. It involves the construction of a narrative, using human languages, which connects different images of the past. As Wibben (2011, apud Berents, 2018) points out, narratives are experience-centered and meaning-making. Experience does not exist, unless it is expressed in a discourse.

Narrative makes possible, through language, turning an absent past into a relevant present. Bruner (1987), in the study on the emergence of the self, considered the central dimension of narrative. From his perspective, listening and telling stories permits an internal comprehension about reality and the emergence of subjectivity in the first years of life.

Children narratives are imbedded by the relation with adults, who have a broader view about the shared experience, while also trying to control what must be said or silenced. Thus, we understand that the act of remembering involves an exercise of agency.

Agency here is considered according to a relational perspective, in which the focus is on “when, where and how children’s agency happens. (Oswell, 2013)”, remembering that it is both made possible and limited by generational ordering (Spyrous, 2018), as we will analyse in our study about displaced children memories.

In this sense, generational order defines the possibilities and constraints of child agency “in which conflict, cooperation and change are played out and negotiated (Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015)”. When focusing on the micro relation between children and adults, we must consider the social structure that informs such relations, situating agency in a specific social and cultural context (Punch, 2015, 2020).

Nevertheless, even in dramatic situations, agency takes place. Within a collective experience, children participate and interfere on family daily lives, contributing to the struggle to survive (Freitas et al., 2023) At the same time, they construct a singular narrative, where the boundaries between individual and collective memories, reality and imagination are blurred. In this sense, constructing a narrative about their experience, also express children’s agency.

In the case of displaced Colombian children, who at their young age have been pierced by the armed conflict, the condition of victims does not mean that they are passive, but rather that they are active survivors (Boyden, 1994), who have a political status and potential site of agency (Krystalli & Krystalli, 2021). The recovery of their memories implies a struggle of resistance at the individual and collective level against their invisibility and silencing.

CHALLENGES ON LISTENING TO DISPLACED CHILDREN’S MEMORIES

The process of listening to children’s memories was developed through individual and group meetings with 12 children between the age of 8 and 12 years, 4 boys and 8 girls, legally registered in Colombia as victims of displacement, as well as the memories of their 5 mothers. Fictitious names were used. They were displaced from their territory between 2008 and 2015, mainly from areas located in North of Colombia, now living in the periphery of Bogota, attending to the same public school where the research was developed.

Children’s narratives were listened along with the memories of 5 mothers. The children were selected considering that they are legally included together with their family group in the unique registry of victims (RUV⁵) and their current place of residence is Bogotá. The participants

are children belonging to peasant families, who came specifically from rural areas from North Colombia, and now live in peripheral areas of Bogotá, in conditions of poverty and marginality, studying in free public schools.

Access to and approval for the participation of children in research was one of the greatest challenges. On one hand, undouble, there is a concrete risk for children, their families, (and even the researcher) on speaking about the armed conflict, as it is still taking place on Colombia. Uta (2004) analyses the relationship between the researcher and his subjects (Liberian displaced youngsters), considering the delicate ethical aspects and risks involved on highly sensitive information that could affect personal safety and the safety of their subjects. In our research, we tried to avoid any concrete and personal information from the subjects about their families, focusing on their feelings and expectations. Even then, a permanent feeling of fear and insecurity took place during the field work.

Taking Paul Ricouer as reference (Ricouer, 2011), listening to victims is a moral imperative. Children must be listened to when explaining their experiences, considering memory as a right that affirms them as subjects of memory. It is necessary to understand that behind each child victim of displacement there are different ways in which violence has impacted them; some were in their mother's womb, others in their arms, some were toddlers, others young children. The reasons for which they fled range from threats, harassment, clashes between armed opposition groups or their presence in the territories, dispossession of property and/or land, drug trafficking, ideological position, murder of one of their parents, to the involvement of relatives as combatants in the ranks of the guerrilla forces or the army.

The invasive nature of violence and the consequent stains and ceases to be an exclusive event of the past; it is above all a reality anchored in the present. This is a present in which the children face not only the constant demands of the new environments they inhabit, but also with the weight of being uprooted and stigmatized, as Berents (2018) showed in her study about Colombia displaced youngsters. On the other hand, to children mothers listened on this research, reality imposes emotion, pain, impotence and frustration, which are the consequences of a trauma. For this reason, for many parents, allowing the emergence of memories from their children about the experience of displacement is a way to “relive” or “awaken” the suffering; a pain that must be forgotten, a revival of a subject that should not be touched by children. In this sense, Gonzáles, (2015) refers to Colombian displaced children as silent witnesses, voices that have no space in which to be heard.

The work towards accessing memory from the voice of the children necessarily is met by resistance at the family, social (with the discrimination and preconceived ideas about the displaced) and even at the individual level of the children themselves (trying to reconcile the adults' perspectives with their own) in the face of invisibility and silencing.

In this investigation, it is important to show that the researcher had, herself, the experience of being displaced, as a child. So, listening to displaced children and adults brought back painful memories. At the same time, this also afforded a profound identification with, and comprehension of, their history, their fragility, fear and, on the other hand, the power of their resilience. That made possible the emergence in the in-between spaces of memories (Millei et al., 2022), where the boundaries between the researcher and the subjects' objective and subjective knowledge were buried.

In this sense, telling and listening to narratives about a traumatic experience lived by both, carried a deeply emotional weight. In our case, the process of listening assumed a meaning of affective caring, a responsibility about children's emotional conditions, as well a feeling of impotence.

Regarding field work: Methodological path

The field work was carried out within a school setting, even though the purposes of the research were not linked to any educational aspect. In order to track down and find the participants, confidential access was obtained to both the school database and also the student registration forms. Thus, all participation was completely voluntary, taking place with free and informed consent, with protocols in place for both parents and children. In the case of the children, the consent document was designed in card format and presented according to their particularities, with an accessible language facilitating the understanding of the information and accompanied by graphic, typography and layout resources that made the reading experience enjoyable.

Of a total of 4075 students enrolled in the school in 2019, 267 children and adolescents were identified as victims of displacement. Among these, 71 were between the age of 8 and 12; however, only 16 children received approval from their parents to participate in the study. Regarding the instruments to be used to access the children's memories, the use of photographs and objects of sentimental value, that evoke life experiences, were initially contemplated. It was decided that these types of elements would be kept in "the memory box"—a box that was built with the children themselves and in which their memories were symbolically preserved. In the process, it was possible to show that many of the children had not been allowed to take these resources with them to their new homes. This was either because at the time of displacement they had had to leave everything behind, or because even when the photographs and objects still existed, they were hidden from the children's eyes due to the negative emotional effect that they generated, and/or fear of the consequences of being identified as displaced in the educational community.

Thus, even when displacement is the common denominator in the lives of children and their family group, the experiences and meanings given are multi-faceted. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a methodology that would attend to diversity and respond to the particular needs of each child. Furthermore, consideration was given to the operational aspects related to time and number of meetings; planning groups or individual meetings; familiarity with video and recording cameras and also which spaces in the school provided security and protection to talk in confidence.

As an initial and transversal element in meetings with children, it was essential to establish relationships of trust and knowledge, with the participating children. This enabled the flow of memories and, consequently, the revelation of sensitive fragments of life, demanding ethical care both for the protection of the researcher and in the relationship with children (Uta, 2004). Although the value of trust was essential in the relationship with the children, the same was true of the researcher's empathy, that, as said earlier, had experienced this phenomenon of violence firsthand. This condition had been essential in gaining the trust of mothers and children, and, at the same time, in constructing a space of confidence, sharing and mutual understanding.

Being affected by the experience of displacement is intimately associated with the meaning and belonging that a place signifies. Places are not only geographical points of reference, but, function as spaces of production of senses, becoming fields of production of meanings about what has been lived (Denov et al., 2022).

For this reason, in order to stimulate the emergence of children's memories, visual methodologies were used to evoke the aforementioned spatiality. Same strategy where used in other studies with displaced children in Colombia, as Salazar et al. (2015), that recurred to drawing as Gonz ales (2015), and Guerrero and Tinkler (2010) to photography. For this, the Google Street View tool was utilized, accompanied, in some cases, by images that were on the internet and the personal photographs that were supplied in some exceptional cases.

This web tool allowed the exploration of various places, virtually walking through its streets and appreciating the different spaces that characterized it. Google Street View, in addition to being a powerful instrument to ignite memories, turned out to be an attractive online resource for children due to their developed affinity with technology, which generated impressions that they themselves were the architects and active protagonists in the meetings.

Exploring the territories of memory

The use of visual methodology made possible the emergence of narratives that surpassed the comments about the place's children saw on the computer. The narratives that were externalized, were the vehicle of innumerable stories in which memories were woven that fluctuated and interconnected between the past, the present and the future. In contrast to Archambault (2022, p. 235) who affirms that: "Through narratives, an informant can create order, select the significant experiences, and present them accordingly", in our perspective, narratives are not supposed to be coherent or rationally constructed, especially when talking about children's narratives of displacement. They were invoked with imagination, profoundly emotional, expressed sometimes with sadness, other times with humour and joy.

Those memories were spatially and temporally situated where the substance of the memories were the places they lived in. At the same time, the narrative of the past was evoked using a sensitive perception, referring to sounds, colours, smells and tastes. As affirmed by Misztal (2003, p. 293): "The fact that memories are often organized around places and objects, suggests that remembering is something that occurs in the world of things and involves our senses".

As Denov et al. (2022) points out, home, place and belonging are connected in children's memories, establishing emotional links between people and the spaces they inhabit, imbued with meaning, and giving sense about the self. In the case of migrant children, as Popyk (2022) affirms, the sense of belonging is central in the construction of self-identity, where the relationship between past and present is defined by ambiguity and instability.

As Gonzáles (2015) points out, displacement involves both deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which implying loss of a relationship with the place of origin and the reconstruction of a new sense of belonging, and new ways of inhabiting the world. This process takes place in the body, considering that, as Lefebvre asserts, each living body is a space and has, at the same time its own space; the body is produced and in turn produces a space (Lefebvre, 1991: 199).

Using a decolonial perspective as reference, some Latin American authors use the concept of body-territory to understand how, historically, subjects and social groups experienced the colonialist process (Haesbaert, 2020). According to this, social markers such as gender, race, class and generation are embodied, defining a relationship between body and territory.

In this sense, we understand that children's experiences of displacement are defined by a relationship between the child's body and territory, what was detached in their narratives about displacement.

Regarding the spatial dimension of memories, the findings were grouped into categories called: territories of war and fear, territories of war and resistance, territories of home, territories of play, territories of walking and territories of exile (Camacho, 2022). Territories of home, play and walking referred to the spaces that the children identified in the images on Google Maps, related to their daily life before the displacement.

The places were remembered with nostalgia and loss, as times and spaces of joy and happiness. In those territories, children recalls of majestic landscapes, where the idea of family

exceeded the people of the family group to integrate friends, community, nature and animals, giving a sense of belonging. That nostalgic vision of the past is characteristic in the construction of memories. Same perception about territories of memory where identified in the studies of Salazar et al. (2015); Andrade et al. (2011); Berents (2018) about Colombian displaced children, and Denov et al. (2022) about Uganda ones.

In contrast, territories of exile that were evoked referred to the present, and were understood as spaces of loss of all that defined their fortunate past. Territories of war, fear and resistance referred to the narrative of displacement, the breaking moment between past and present, which happened in a special place, recalled via the use of Google Street View. In this paper, we will focus on these, considering their centrality in the construction of a memory of displacement.

On children's narratives, displacement assumes a meaning of displace less, a profound sense of loss of identity. In this sense, one can see the difference between children's narratives about displacement and adults. In the interview with mothers (Camacho, 2022), displacement was understood as a construction of a safe life, in a safe place. Territories of memories were not evoked with nostalgia, but related to a past that must be forgotten. These differences demonstrate that even sharing the same experience, children and adults have singularities in the construction of memories, showing the importance of relating memory and generational order (Punch, 2020).

Children perception about the past, with the use of Google Maps, linked their body and territory, recalling their movements between places, inhabited by people, animals, plants and things, which are the material of their memory. On seeing the images of their belonged places, the children constructed a geography centered on spaces where everyday life took place. On the one hand, the space of home, described not as a building, but an affective place where family, nature and pets were connected with strong ties. On the other hand, public spaces, related to childhood sociability, centered in the activity of play, like squares, stadiums, open territories and shops. These spaces were described following a walk through the city (actually, walking virtually, via-google maps). As Aitken (2001) points out, children develop a knowledge about the cities, in the movement of walking. It is interesting to observe that, even though all the subjects were attending school, no one referred to it in their constructions of their geography of the city.

MEMORIES OF WAR AND FEAR

Phillo (2005) created the expression “geography of wounds” to refer to places where the population are submitted to vulnerable conditions, “causing wounds and provoking scars”. The use of body metaphors by the author is a way to put in words the experience of horror, even affirming the limits of representation of radical experiences of pain and loss. In this sense, the children constructed a geography of wounds, exploring the places where they experienced extreme violence. What was told and what continues to be untold is the material of that geography of wounds.

As Boyden and De Berry (2004) point out, it is difficult to understand the psychological consequences for children of armed conflicts if one uses adult categories, considering that they tend to be more diverse, complex, and subtle. In our study, fear was omnipresent in the narratives, as a central feeling in the perception of terrible events. Fear is described as a feeling shared between children and adults, in the context of displaced families.

In the extensive history of violence that the Colombian people have lived through, and continue to experience (despite the peace agreements between the Colombian government and FARC-EP in 2016), a powerful device of control has persisted: fear. It was imprinted on subjectivities, embodying the individuals and becoming omnipresent.

The children's memories reflect how fear has been produced to achieve a variety of disturbing objectives, among them, the dispossession of real estate such as houses. In this way, we will see in Bruno's (one of our subjects) narrative how remembering his house is also to remember the fear of that day in which "his house" was already "the house" of others; who had taken over his family's space. This was a space that, beyond the mere material that it had meant, was his home and shelter where deeply affective ties had been woven. Accordingly, to Blunt and Dowling (2006 apud Archambault, 2022) home refers both to the place and also the idea and the imaginary of feeling at home. Both dimensions were lost in Bruno narrative:

"We arrived at the house, but we found guerrillas there. They told us not to come back there anymore, that this house is no longer ours. They were saying: - get out! or else they would kill all of us (dad, mom, brother, sister and him). And we went from there." (Bruno, 12-years-old).

Another objective that fear pursues is to cause large exoduses of populations in order to exercise dominance in large areas of a territory, targeting an entire town., in the case of Luna, 9 years old.

"By then my mom was pregnant with me...

My mother said that there was a truck in the town that was carrying some shotguns, those who were inside threatened them (the townspeople), telling them that they had to leave the town, or else, at dawn they were going to kill them. So, they left at night, they hid, but those from the truck found them and threatened them again; that's when they left for good."

Luna narrative exemplifies the heritage of memories of war, passed from one generation referring to the odyssey lived by the family. Even not being born, she took place on the event, and suffered its consequences. This was an enforced exile, in which fear planted instability and modified the course of Luna's future, and a forging of an identity. In the same way that the right to live in a territory was usurped from Luna, Abril's memoirs narrate how the right to have a father was taken from her:

"My mom told me that my dad was a... a demobilized person. That he was in the guerrilla forces. I was six months old...Then my mom told me that... My mom had me in her arms and my dad was next to me. We were in the bakery, we sat down. Then my dad picked me up, hugged me and as we, my mom and I were going to go home, my dad said goodbye to me, then some... some men arrived. They got out of a van and shot him." (Abril, 11-years-old).

In Abril's memory, another disturbing objective of fear is made explicit: revenge, in this case because her father abandoned the armed group to which he belonged, the guerrillas. Revenge is fierce with the one who was a guerrilla paying with his life for "disloyalty". Or, in other cases, paying with members of family life's, as Carla's memories show.

"...so, they wanted to kill my dad {shaky voice, stutters}, because my dad used to be in the guerrillas. Later, he got involved with those men who start killing people; that's why they're looking for him - to kill him.

So, my dad came to Bogotá... we stayed there. I stayed with my mother because she was the youngest and my brothers with my aunt. He came here (Bogotá) with my brother so they wouldn't do anything to him, but the one they started looking for was my mother...

...they told my mom that if she didn't leave there, in 24 hours, they would come and kill us both.

When they started pointing a gun at my mom - that was what marked me.

I went back inside and started crying and screaming. My mom was trembling... (hoping) that they wouldn't do anything to me.” (Carla, 12-years-old).

Among the many disturbing objectives of fear is also the recruitment of people. Such recruitment, with preference for children and young people, is focused upon, in order to improve the strength and size of the armed squads. As Boyden & De Berry (2004, p. 12) shows, especially in internal armed conflicts, the frontiers between the victims and perpetrators are buried, with the crescent process of forced recruitment of youngsters and children, considered “more agile, impressionable and expendable” by the armed groups. In Greeicy's memoirs, the memory of how fear-makers operate shows their destructive ability to cause damage, trying to involve youngsters and children in the armed conflict.

“They began looking for recruits. They damaged the door of my house, thirty broke windows several times and they damaged a sofa. We left there because of that. They damaged everything, they persecuted us all.” (Greeicy, 8 years old).

As we see in children's memories, fear is produced for different purposes, among them, the dispossession of property, the domination of large territories, the search for revenge and recruitment. Despite their escape, their lives have already been infected with the stain of fear - that sensation that meshes memory and body as a reference of feeling: “there my heart was scared... It was beating strong, very strong” (Bruno), “I was trembling, sweating, my shirt was soaking with sweat...”. Thus, the memory manifests fear in the body and in parallel the body manifests the fear of the memory: the hands sweat, the eyes water, the voice breaks and the gaze is restless. Memories of/about fear are therefore memories of bodies in danger.

The children's narratives involve both a collective memory, of what was not personally experienced, but told by family members, as well as individual records, in which the fear is reported from their body. In all reports, the fear of death is related to the fear of losing territory, from the body-territory, to the territory of the house and of the community.

MEMORIES OF WAR AND RESISTANCE

As Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) affirms about the civil experience of armed conflict, referring to the experience of Colombia displaces youngsters, everyday life must be considered as a space of political and personal resistance, especially considering marginalized social groups, as women and youngsters. Acting in local levels, on private and public spaces, youngsters are peace makers, that creates formal and unformal strategies to resist, using bodies and experiences as expressions (Berents, 2018).

In our research, the subjects were too young to engage on expressive acts of resistance. Even so, they developed daily manifestations on public and private spaces, especially on the defence of their territory.

As Boyden and De Berry (2004, p. 32) comment, in armed conflicts, age is not necessarily the critical determinants of vulnerability, considering that youngsters demonstrate remarkable resilience. Their responses tend to be nuanced and multifaceted, where fear and courage coexist together. In this sense, roles and responsibilities of adults and younger people tend to change, and provoke consequences for survival, self-perception, identity and adaptation during and after armed conflicts.

When fear clandestinely stalks the places of childhood life, it is nuanced with tension, instability, emotionality and vulnerability. However, it is precisely in and with fear that courage is revived, prudence is manifested, strength emerges and the senses are sharpened in achieving the purpose of protecting life at any cost.

In this empowerment to protect life against threats, Paquita's memories of resistance highlight how the element of force operates with all its power when fear attacks the house and the door is not robust enough to withstand so much violence.

“They didn't take my mom. No, because my dad was holding that door with all his strength.” (Paquita, 12-years-old).

Force is the human resource of dispute and resistance. The force of Paquista father is described as he was a superhero, revealing the presence of imagination on her narrative.

Salazar et al. (2015) highlights how the family has a central role in the construction of a possible emotional stability among these dislocated children. Family gives a sense of protection, which was emphasized by Paquita in her narrative. However, within the memories of resistance, it is notable how feeling fear awakens the child's expertise and agency, and as a result, they choose to go to a place of hiding, as described by Mathias:

“They carried shotguns. They broke the windows, kicked the door, I hid out of fear...”

As I was 8 years old, I was small. I hid in the bathroom, under the beds...sometimes under the sofas...When I was on the street, I would also hide behind someone or sometimes in the workshop.” (Mathias, 10-years-old).

Here, hide-and-seek is not child's game. To win, you need to be aware of yourself, of the advantages of being an 8-year-old boy like Mathias; In addition to his motor skills, his infant anatomy allowed him to shelter between cracks, spaces and even people.

In the memories of resistance, hiding is not only a children's strategy, adults also use it. Carla's memories show her participation in her father's hiding place:

“And that night they were looking for my dad, because they had said that he was there. They were looking for him at night - all of them were looking for him to kill him. And then we, we hid and we closed the door well.” (Carla, 12-years-old).

The memories of resistance also consider the children's ability to read their own social reality, an expression of their agency. Such comprehension involves certain details; the singularity, the objects and the signs that allow them to deduce the danger, make decisions and act safely. It is a reading

that draws on their repertoire of individual and collective experiences. Therefore, as can be seen in Paquita's memoirs:

"This is where we find it! {points to a private street with little traffic on the computer} ... on a red motorbike. He was always on that one.

He was looking, observing {she refers to one of the men belonging to the armed gang} ... Surely, he saw my mother and she was there.

That's where my mom and I would sit to hide {points to a bush}." (Paquita, 12-years-old).

The utilization of Google Maps makes it possible for children to return to the territories where they had lived experiences of fear and resistance. As highlighted, most of the children are prevented from returning to the territories, which reinforces the feelings of exile and deterritorialization.

When fear lurks, childish daring stands firm. The courage in Bruno's memories reflects a certain dispossession of unfounded fear. He demonstrates his courage by returning to that place from which he was dispossessed, revealing the most pressing need of his spirit: his missed home.

"My parents told me not to go near that house; that if the guerrillas were there, they could catch me.

One day I went and saw a motorcycle outside.

I saw that the little plants that were there, noon...they were already with dry leaves."

(Bruno, 12-years-old)

Bruno perfectly understands what fear, danger or losing one's life means. Despite this, fear is transformed in courage and strength in order to have a consolation—to quench even a little the absence of what was stolen: "the little plants... were with the dry leaves". In the reference of dead plants, it is possible to see the singularity of children's perception, by highlighting what, for an adult, could be an unimportant detail.

Fear settles in different places in a territory, including those that have been prepared for games, sports and fun -the places where children like to be:

"See the sports center here!

That's where my brother and I used to play soccer... that's where the marihuaneros (armed men) also stayed. When they were there, we didn't go in." (Mathias, 10-years-old)

The force of resistance in Mathias's memoirs made possible to signify the spaces. The sports center was the place of the convergence of actors and the divergence of objectives. Therefore, resisting also implies tolerating the intolerable. In this way, the children's memories of resistance narrate the power of their agency, the acts of survival that are carried out in the hiding place, or acts of

staying/visiting their territories (home, street, sport center) the impulse of daring and of the ability to bear the danger. However, when the various forms of resistance are insufficient, memories of re[existence] flourish. These are forged with a sad goodbye, with the separation from their territory, and from their own.

“My mom started packing my clothes and those of my brothers and we came here, to Bogotá. My mom left behind my bike, my toys, she left everything for me there... she just packed my clothes.

We packed at 4:00am to arrive at 5:00am, and I remember that we left in my uncle's taxi.” (Carla, 12-years-old)

A whole life has to be left behind to start another in the city. Re[existence] occurs with forced displacement, with the final departure from that idealized paradise; to re[exist] you have to rewrite life in another place, change the course of your aspirations and transform yourself. Displacement has also been experienced as a process of rupture of a cultural universe, in which children are dislocated from rural to urban spaces. As Berents (2018) assert these children fear that they will be dislodged to peripheral urban spaces, associated with poverty and marginality, which are at the same time culturally strange, in which reteriorization implies a cultural shock and the need to construct new references to inhabit the world.

CONCLUSIONS

The narratives of children's displacement described here demonstrate how they are constituted. On the one hand, they come from a collective memory, transmitted by adults, imprinting stains on them in the processes of subjectivation. On the other hand, they also constitute individual memories, in which children report, from a child's perspective, the drama of their experience. In this process, they use elements of children's culture, mediated by imagination, to fill in gaps between fragments (Miształ, 2003).

It is not possible, nor does it make sense to try to apprehend and distinguish what in the children's reports refers to fantasy and what to reality, which is also an issue present in the memories of adults, insofar as memory is always reconstruction. However, it is worth highlighting the uniqueness of the elements present in children's memories, as they bring forth elements that are not always present in the memories of adults.

The use of Google Maps made it possible for the virtual tour through the spaces of the children's cities and towns to become a visit to territories of memory, in which their bodies also moved virtually through places where experiences of displacement took place.

When listening to displaced children, it is important to pay attention to the limits of representation of the lived trauma, considering that some experience are unspoken, as Shubin and Lemke (2020) observes. Even so, these narratives reveal a changing and embodied subjectivity constructed between boundaries of time and space. For the children, being listened to made it possible to give sense about themselves, their belonging and present.

On their daily lives, children tried to resist, developing embodied practices (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015) of occupation of territories, into an intergenerational conflict. Moreover, we understand that the act of constructing a narrative about their experience was an expression of resistance and agency, making themselves subjects of their own history.

This research, by listening to children's narratives, demonstrates the need to consider children as subjects of memory. That is, subjects capable of giving meaning to what they have experienced, from a singular point of view, who demand to be heard, as subjects who have the right to memory.

In the case of Colombia, projects are being developed to recover the memory of those excluded from history: peasants, women, blacks, and indigenous people. However, little attention has been given to children. It is urgent to understand them as subjects of memory, who are entitled to the construction of a symbolic process of listening.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors decided that the data that support the findings of the research will not be shared due to the special characteristics of the participants and the ethical restrictions for protecting the identities of the children and their families.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Any information that could reveal the personal data or location (such as the school where the fieldwork was carried out) of the participants was removed and/or changed to fictitious names.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Camacho (2022) "Recordar... para mi es lo mejor del mundo, para ellos es lo peor." Memorias de niños y niñas víctimas del desplazamiento en Colombia y sujetos con derecho a la memoria. Belo Horizonte: PHD Latin America Education Program. Institute of Education. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais/ Brazil (UFMG)
- ² Colombia agency of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/colombia.html>
- ³ <https://www.unhcr.org/media/40152>
- ⁴ To an extended bibliographic production, see Berents (2018)
- ⁵ Registro Único de Víctimas. <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>

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