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Languages of Silence as Peaceful Coexistence in Victims Survivors of Armed Violence in Chalán, Sucre (Colombia) *

[English version]

Lenguajes del silencio como coexistencia pacífica en víctimas sobrevivientes de la violencia armada en Chalán, Sucre (Colombia)

Linguagens do silêncio como coexistência pacífica entre sobreviventes da violência armada em Chalán, Sucre (Colômbia)

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this article is to understand, through the narratives of victim-survivors of armed violence in Chalán, Sucre (Colombia, 1992-2007), the meaning they attribute to silence as a form of peaceful coexistence. **Methodology:** From the perspective of social constructionism, silence was analyzed as a form of language that articulates memory and forgetting. Researchers interpreted how silence becomes part of people's daily lives to such an extent that they generationally resignify this concept as a life option. Under the strategies of research-action-participation, dialogues were created in collective workshops and during visits to 30 families of victim-survivors. The information was processed with the support of Atlas.ti 7 software. **Results:** Silence is an action of peaceful coexistence, protection, and a survival strategy. **Conclusions:** Narratives about silence redefine the concept and open new alternatives for survival and new encounters through non-violent relationships. There is evidence of a shift in the meaning of the concept of silence. Traditionally associated with mechanisms of repression, evasion, and negative resistance, silence is now recognized as a means of protecting life as a precious commodity.

Keywords: silence; memory; forgetting; armed conflict; peaceful coexistence.

Resumen

Objetivo: en este artículo se tiene como objetivo comprender, desde las narrativas de víctimas-sobrevivientes de la violencia armada en Chalán, Sucre (Colombia, 1992-2007), el significado que ellas y ellos le otorgan al silencio como una forma de coexistencia pacífica. **Metodología:** desde la perspectiva del construccionismo social se hace una lectura del silencio como una forma de lenguaje que se articula a la memoria y el olvido, a la vez que permite interpretar cómo el silencio llega a ser parte de la vida cotidiana de las personas a tal punto que ellas resignifican generativamente este concepto como una opción de vida. Bajo estrategias articuladas a la investigación-acción-participación se crearon diálogos en los talleres colectivos y en las visitas a 30 familias víctimas-sobrevivientes. La información fue procesada con el apoyo del software Atlas ti 7. **Resultados:** se dio cuenta del silencio como acción de coexistencia pacífica, estrategia de protección y sobrevivencia. **Conclusiones:** las narrativas sobre el silencio redefinen el concepto y abren nuevas alternativas de sobrevivencia y nuevos encuentros a través de relaciones por vías no violentas. Se evidencia un giro del significado del concepto 'silencio', el cual tradicionalmente ha estado más asociado a mecanismos de represión, evasión y resistencias negativas; un silencio que protege la vida como un bien preciado.

Palabras clave: silencio; memoria; olvido; conflicto armado; coexistencia pacífica.

Resumo

Objetivo: o objetivo deste artigo é compreender, a partir das narrativas das vítimas-sobreviventes da violência armada em Chalán, Sucre (Colômbia, 1992-2007), o significado que elas dão ao silêncio como forma de convivência pacífica. **Metodologia:** a partir da perspectiva do construcionismo social, faz-se uma leitura do silêncio como uma forma de linguagem que se articula com a memória e o esquecimento, ao mesmo tempo em que permite interpretar como o silêncio passa a fazer parte da vida cotidiana das pessoas a ponto de elas ressignificarem geracionalmente esse conceito como uma opção de vida. Sob estratégias articuladas com a pesquisa-ação-participação, foram criados diálogos nas oficinas coletivas e nas visitas a 30 famílias de vítimas e sobreviventes. As informações foram processadas com o apoio do software Atlas ti 7. **Resultados:** o silêncio como ação de convivência pacífica, estratégia de proteção e sobrevivência. **Conclusões:** as narrativas sobre o silêncio redefinem o conceito e abrem novas alternativas de sobrevivência e novos encontros por meio de relações não violentas. Há evidências de uma mudança no significado do conceito de "silêncio", que tradicionalmente tem sido mais associado a mecanismos de repressão, evasão e resistência negativa; um silêncio que protege a vida como um bem precioso.

Palavras-chave: silêncio; memória; esquecimento; conflito armado; coexistência pacífica.

Introduction

The municipality of Chalán belongs to the Montes de María sub-region, located between the departments of Sucre and Bolívar. This municipality was hard hit by the armed conflict in Colombia. As of 2022, 4,732 people (more than 90% of the population) are considered victims according to the Registro Único de Víctimas. The geographical configuration of Chalán promoted the population settlement around the San Jacinto mountain range, as well as cultural/ethnic factors present throughout its history (Daniels et al., 2017, p. 14). In this sense, one of its inhabitants, identified as *the historian*, states that cultural and ethnic expressions in Chalán are linked to the inhabitants' descent from the indigenous Zenúes. The Zenúes inhabited the valleys of the Sinú and San Jorge rivers, as well as those of the Caribbean coast in the Gulf of Morrosquillo. Their economy was centered on agriculture and livestock. Chalán is a non-violent population dedicated to the domestication of dogs, chickens, pigs, cattle, horses, and donkeys, as well as the cultivation of cassava, yams, corn, plantain, rice, and tobacco (Yépez, 2017). The following image shows the location of Chalán in the Colombian territory (see Figure 1).

Figura 1. Location of Chalán, Sucre.



Source: <http://www.ovejas-sucre.gov.co/tema/mapas-313397>

In this context, the project “Hilando Capacidades Políticas Para Las Transiciones En Los Territorios” considers the Chalán municipality as the object of study, attention, and action toward the reconstruction of the social fabric and the mobilization of spaces for peace-building. The research “Mediaciones Simbólicas Y Psicosociales Co-construidas Por Las Familias De Chalán, Sucre: Caminos Para La Transformación De Conflictos,” which this article is derived from, is the result of this macro-project. This research highlights the voices of Chalán's inhabitants who express that their experiences are forgotten, and they do not have the opportunity to be heard, much less to heal their wounds.

Through research-action-participation and a social constructionist perspective, the recognition of personal and collective voices became a dialogic resource that activated the memory between researchers and informants in meetings and conversations.¹ Their narratives include the desire to talk about issues that have not been heard, to activate memory in terms of their conflicts and the pacifist strategies created, which have allowed them to be victim-survivors and peace mediators today.

Within the framework of the research objective, “Comprender El Silencio Como Coexistencia Pacífica En Víctimas-Sobrevivientes De La Violencia Armada En Chalán, Sucre,” the article highlights the stories of the Chalán community. In their narratives, people express stories that have been relegated to oblivion, voices silenced amidst living memory, threats, and fears that are still present in their territory. Today, these are exacerbated by new events that are emerging in Colombia.

The analysis and interpretation of the information recorded from the voices of the community and the active participation of its members are based on a framework of social constructionism. This epistemological approach considers silence as a form of language that is constructed within the narratives of the people who participate in a reflective and inclusive process. It is an approach that recognizes the experiences, the daily language, and dialogic interactions with their social and familial environment, as well as the capacities that the population faces in crisis situations while living amidst the traces of silence, memory, and oblivion.

¹ The number of informants corresponds to a total of 30 people (one for each family), as explained in the methodology.

Conceptual Referent

Language and Memory: A Socioconstructionist View

“Through language we cannot say what the logic of reality is, we can simply show what one thinks of it” (Sánchez, 2018, p. 51). This phrase opens the concepts of “language” and “memory,” from socioconstructionistic and hermeneutic perspectives. In these, narrative constructions are included as part of a reflexive and inclusive process with a sociolinguistic logic that recognizes the language of everyday life. According to Arregui and Betancur (2003), “Ordinary language is the common, public, social language of a community of speakers, used in everyday speech” (p. 30).

Through language as a form of life, each person expresses themselves uniquely and elaborates on their memories and place in history. People focus and punctuate their memories. They express them as an important part of their experience. The individuals create their own style of narrative, while simultaneously searching for an interlocutor who can comprehend and acknowledge their story. Sharing with others is part of human existence, it is “a political gamble, while narratives become important as a vehicle of memory” (Herrera & Pertuz, 2015, p. 151).

Sharing acknowledges the existence of something that cannot and should not be forgotten, as forgetting is a way of erasing a part of life, identity, and language, which often happens in social contexts of violence. “Narrating oneself is then configured as a form of struggle against dis-memory, which is also a form of violence” (Herrera & Pertuz, 2015, p. 157). Shared memory configures an alliance capable of confronting silence and oblivion. It is a conversation “*between us*,” while at the same time “It is a social mode of functioning of the capacities and techniques of remembering, commemorating, and transmitting experience” (Haye et al., 2018, p. 23).

These actions generated within relationships open a communicative act that is common in daily lives and is articulated with cultural processes (Gergen, 2006). Likewise, memories and memory arise from social exchange and are mediated by language. The use of language allows for the emergence of accounts of the past that include present and future narratives, often with a new perspective or interpretation.

This becomes consolidated as a generative agenda according to Fried Schnitman (2010), aimed at reconstructing what has been lived and guiding new social ecologies, perspectives, and actions. This is done by providing resources, possibilities, opportunities, new paths, and new versions of oneself and one's circumstances. People engage in dialogic coordination to re-signify memories,

transform certain memory contents, elaborate on feelings and actions, find new interpretations, and promote new strategies for survival. The way in which living spaces of memory and personal and community encounters strengthen the social and community fabric is highlighted by Parra (2014). These spaces also have the potential to transform lives by providing more dignified, loving, hopeful, happy, and humanizing experiences.

Wittgenstein considers that in the act of remembering, there is an intersection of feelings, sensations, affections, and intellectual actions, which give people their identity in the everyday moments of life.

Memory is alive in recollection and in the act of remembering four factors are combined: 1) Remembering has empirical support; in fact, it commonly arises from an experience connected with the sensory realm. 2) Memory is open to different re-elaborations, characteristically embodied in dreaming, where the intellectual component usually makes its presence felt. 3) There is a genuinely reflective and cognitive type of memory that is usually updated in line with thinking. 4) Memories are often born bathed in affectivity and can motivate actions or paralyze them. It is the clearest expression of memory. (Gil de Pareja, 1992, p. 244).

Alternatively, Paul Ricoeur (2008) states that memories are the object of remembrance. Therefore, forgetting is a form of death of memory and a way of eliminating all forms of recognition, because *remembering is a form of recognizing*. It is a moment in which the solitude of life is, for a moment and in any form, illuminated by the common light of the discursive encounter (Ricoeur, 1995). The expressions “saying something about something” and “saying something about someone” are living manifestations of memory and encounters with others, which serve as points of humanization and recognition. In this sense, these expressions are voices that narrate to show how much it means and makes sense to talk about the memory of an experience. They are a way to prevent it from becoming silent in the context of oblivion, loneliness, and death.

Silence and Forgetting

The silence of voices is the reaction of people when they have been faced with armed violence and forced into their own dehumanization. Violence steals and murders their freedom to create multiple forms of expression through words, feelings, emotions, proxemics, gestures, art, culture, rituals, spirituality, and beliefs,

which are an important part of personal, social and cultural identity. For this reason, the silence of voices is the theft of the most sacred, intimate and social aspects that human beings can maintain while they are alive.

People in contexts of violence, notwithstanding the conflict, reduce their lives to silence that triggers fears that seem unresolved (Ángel, 2007). With the silence of voices, ruptures are generated in the daily lives of people. Ruptures are generated in their languages, which do not escape the consequences of traumatic events that are traditionally associated with mental and psychiatric problems. Rather than causing this, and seen in the context of armed violence, these are human reactions to the unexpected. "One of the results of the traumatic experience is that they lose the connection of the very familiar sense of identity that someone had" (White, 2016, p. 28).

When these events "break the daily life of the victim, it turns their world into a hostile place extraneous to them and produces a loss of control over their lives and disrupts their dignity" (Rodríguez, 2015, p. 83). Events that diminish his freedom of expression, his word, identity and social world, which remain fractured, are stolen from him and, in this context, silence emerges. It is a concealment mechanism and, at the same time, unveiling in the reconstruction of the identity of the person in a story of violence. (Montes & de León, 2021, p. 323). There is deprivation of expression and language as a condition of their identity without which human beings fail and become confused in their relationship with themselves and with the world.

In this sense, the silence of voices is faithful to uniformity, to homogenization, together with the numbness of the human beings subjected to the decision-making power of other humans who represent themselves or as part of a threatening group or society. They are others whose image is death in any of their expressions: fear, horror, panic, anxiety, pain, suffering, and paranoia, among others. It is, in this sense, a form of contradictory game of those who are in antagonistic and bilateral positions of persecuted and persecutors, good and bad, masters and slaves, dictators and subjugated, avengers and executed, armed and unarmed, supported, and helpless.

Fear is the weapon of those who seek to numb the being, whose objective is to exercise control over their lives. People do go on with their lives as they usually do due to fear of death. Their routines, customs, and traditions change; they turn toward new actions of life. Actions such as hiding, fleeing, keeping quiet, entering permanent vigils that disrupt sleep routines emerge as a way of survival. "Amnesia is both survival and uprooting. In it there is no past and there is no future" (Ángel, 2007, p. 178). People seek ways of forgetting that allow them not to suffer memories related to violence in their territories, families, with friends, neighbors and communities. As Montes and de León (2021) say,

“Sometimes, what we experienced in the past has been traumatic, painful, shameful, or immoral and we feel the need to forget it, to hide it from others by hiding it from ourselves” (p. 322).

In this context, people lose clarity regarding who is the friend or the enemy. That is, “It is necessary to know at all times who the real and concrete friend is, to determine with whom an identification relationship is built” (Hurtado, 2013, p. 137). The sense of community that revolves around help, protection and solidarity among those who are named as acquaintances is transformed. Toro & Henao (2022), like López et al. (2016) agree that silence is a defense mechanism that allows one to live and protect loved ones.

In the context of armed violence, silence is a kind of labyrinth with no way out. People cannot speak to the State fearing that they will be revictimized. For this reason, a paradoxical relationship is created, since people expect security, protection, and well-being from the State. For this reason, many times in the absence of the State, people remain silent, just as they do with armed groups. A threatened and abandoned population in its territory flees or sees entering any group outside the law as a way out, as refuge. Whoever they turn to, the situation, leads to losses and uncertainties.

In war contexts, voices that have not been heard or have been silenced through threats, persecution, finger pointing, and psychological and physical torture leave traces of helplessness and impotence. To emerge from this situation, individuals seek the intervention of others or of a character who listens in silence (Montes & de León, 2021). “The voice is a kind of certificate of existence of the condition of victimization, as if it were in the word, paradoxically, where the traumatic experiences are certified” (Castillejo, 2017, p. 145). Voice is a social memory that fights against forgetfulness and silence (Andriotti, 2021).

Methodology

This article is framed in a study based on the research-action-participation methodological process, as well as on the epistemological perspective of social constructionism. The use of participatory strategies allowed the articulation of assumptions that unite these two research components (Sánchez et al., 2022):

- a. Knowledge is social action and the world is constructed and transformed from a variety of dialogic forms and contextualized languages in everyday life.

- b. Each construction is articulated with processes created by people, their capacities to act, and practice together and value new personal, family, social and community life experiences.
- c. The production of knowledge must be contextualized around the expertise, values, truths, conventions, and narratives of the communities.
- d. The dialogical approach between subjects and collectives is fundamental toward the generation of knowledge.
- e. History as a foothold for personal and collective memory is a resource for the redefinition of the past and new present and future projects.

Under these assumptions, the subjects disclosed their experiences, highlighting what was significant about their realities. Likewise, and within the framework of social constructionism, there were important reflective processes, multiple voices, dynamics, performances, and drawings created in the workshops reflecting different styles of narration and the generation of liberating expressions (Gergen, 2006). Therefore, the central theme of this article arose in the first workshop held with members of 30 victim-survivor families. They voluntarily participated and expressed, with informed consent,² “The need for their experiences and what they had in their memories, during and after the armed violence in Chalán, to be recognized and disclosed. Something silenced and impossible to forget” (collective workshop, May 29, 2019). Based on this calling, and with the support of the field researcher (a resident of Chalán), the researchers had a first approach to the families.

Population

Chalán is one of the municipalities affected by violent acts, since it has great fertile potential on its land, which is very attractive to armed groups (Rivera, 2018), and one of the poorest in the region and the country. In 1992, massacres occurred in the Vereda el Cielo and in the corregimiento of La Ceiba. In 1996, the FARC-EP exploded 60 kilos of dynamite placed as a load on a donkey taken to the police post where the death of 11 members of the public force occurred and civilians were injured (El Tiempo, newspaper July 22 of 1999). From the end of the 90s decade of the 20th century until 2007, the fear continues due to the

2 The research project complied with the agreement of informed consent and identity protection of the people interviewed., issued by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Legal and Social Sciences of the University of Caldas, formalized by official letter dated 27 June 2017.

possibility of the existence of mine fields and the abandonment by the State,³ together with the accusation of being a “guerrilla population.”

In the investigation, carried out between 2019 and 2020, members of 30 families residing in the municipality of Chalán since before 1990 participated—one person per family group. They are registered as victims and survivors of the armed conflict. With this population it was possible to meet the criteria of validity and saturation of information. From this number, and from the total information recorded, sections were taken of those fragments that explicitly contain the theme of silence and the expanded descriptions of this concept.

Therefore, this article presents the narrations that describe the meaning of silence in greater detail: seven women between the ages of 31 and 58, and three men between the ages of 36 and 41.⁴ These ages make it possible to identify that in the year of the attack on Chalán with the “donkey bomb” in 1996, the ages of the informants ranged from eight to 35 years of age.

Procedures, Techniques and Registration of Information

Between June 2019 and March 2020, nine workshops were held in the municipality of Chalán, one per month. The initial objective of these workshops was to identify the types of experienced conflicts and the coping mechanisms enacted by the families during and after the armed conflict in the municipality of Chalán. During the meetings, the participants proposed working on a proposal on “Community psychosocial mediators of Chalán” (Sánchez & Rincón, 2021). Over the course of these workshops and interviews with members of the families, the word “silence” emerged in some narrations, accompanied by expressions of fear and pain for speaking about what forced them to remain silent. The presence of the researchers in the territory and the conversations with people strengthened the confidence to build knowledge in dialogical interaction and enrich the information around the guiding questions.

The interview was adjusted based on an exercise carried out with the field researcher, a resident of Chalán and victim-survivor of the armed conflict. From

3 In order to respond to a situation of abandonment of the municipality, the 2020-2023 development plan “Building a new Chalán” (Municipal Office of Chalán, 2020) states that: “It must be taken into account that at the date of measurement of UBN 2005, the municipality lived conditions of ungovernability and abandonment, loss of road infrastructure, services, schools and others due to the effects of violence and terror...” (p 42).

4 It is reiterated that talking about what happened in times of armed violence and issues that the population saw as latent was considered a risk for the person reporting and for their family. For this reason, followed by each fragment, no initials of the names are noted, but only the gender and age.

the narratives told by the people there is an issue of analysis and interpretation that has to do with the concept of “silence.” It emerged among narratives in response to the research concerns regarding the following questions: a) how were family and community relations affected? and b) what actions did they take in their family to face the conflict situation? The initial questions were not focused on *silence*. The concept emerged from constant repetition in the narratives. A question occurred: *what is the meaning of silence in these families as victims-survivors of the armed conflict?*

The word “silence” was identified by Atlas.ti 7 with a self-coding tool. The context of analysis and interpretation was determined from two lines before the word and two lines after it. The meaning of this word within the contexts of armed violence and traumatic experience contains expressions of pain, prudence, panic, distrust, anxiety, suffering and peaceful resistance. It also shows the conditions of helplessness, insecurity, and horror that remain for them. The answers show the resignification of the concept of “silence” as a way of peaceful coexistence that allowed them to protect both their own and their relatives' lives. In this way, strategies of protection and survival converge, as every reader can notice in the narratives. The interpretation articulates the exchange of voices between researchers and members participant families.

Results

Silence as Peaceful Coexistence: Strategy for Protection and Survival

According to the *Plan de Desarrollo Municipal 2020-2023* (Municipal Government of Chalán, 2020), Chalan is a territory in which the presence of the State has been zero or scarce. It is a spiraling circle because the silence of the voices is no longer limited to victims-survivors during and after an attack or massacre, but extends beyond the territory, with no ears, words, or acts to stop the historical damage to a social and cultural identity. In this municipality, one of the ways to shut down the voices with regard to violent events that affected the lives of people, families, and communities is to force and submit every witness to be part of the rule of silence.

Actors with the *power of weapons*, acquired legally or illegally, need to perpetuate violence by means of the golden rule: silence and forgetting, as a woman states: “It is not forgotten, but it is not spoken” (woman, 36 years old,

personal communication, November 13, 2019). Therefore, it is a very difficult intention when memory remains alive, but silent both for those who were directly affected and for a community that neither speaks nor forgets. “At the core, we are aware that what has already been experienced cannot be completely discarded voluntarily” (Montes & de León, 2021, p. 322).

In Chalan, people and their families chose to silence their voices as one of the ways to protect and prolong their lives. Not to speak, although they do not forget, is to blind themselves to other coming problems associated with armed conflict: displacement, murder, threat, torture, or capture of one of the members of the family to be part of any illegal group. Silence is used to avoid putting families at risk. The relatives also close their relationships with their neighbors while their voices mute out of fear of any real or symbolic act associated with death and resistance to defend themselves from further damage.

At some point, I trust in silence as part of my life. There were times when I felt anxiety attacks. I was walking the street smiling, but when I arrived at the hospital I shout a cry, I felt a persecution, although I had never been threatened. It seemed like they were going to kill me as I saw several people killed. (Woman, 45 years old, personal communication, September 28, 2019).

It was new for me. Silence for me is like the way of a silent cry, within the conflict what hurts and is affected cannot be said, forgotten. (Woman, 38 years old, personal communication, August 17, 2019).

To be able to live, one had to know in advance whom to talk to, what to say and painfully, and what not to do, to see things and to keep silent, to do that or die. I had to be very cautious and keep silent to survive and resist those very difficult years. (Woman, 41 years old, personal communication, August 14, 2019).

Crying becomes an expression of silence and repressed words. This is linked to individual and family loneliness and helplessness. This is due to fear and horror of violent activities that surround houses and their territory, as well as the lack of support of local, regional, and national authorities in the protection of life. “The people were alone and without any law” (woman, 42 years old, personal communication, October 15, 2019).

In Chalan, the inability to express pain, to be forced to keep silent, not crying, nor making mourning for passed away loved ones made silence a way to resist and protect their own and their relatives' lives. However, to be silent is a silence imposed and compelled by voices from several places, as it has happened in different sides of “illegal groups” and “legal groups.”

The subject ends up in a paradox, voices that force people to be silent about these groups, and at the same time, under submission to speak about the enemy groups. Therefore, within the contradiction of these groups there are threats that, at the same time, cannot be expressed. In addition, despite attempts to flee armed organizations in Chalan, people ironically looked for refuge in an armed group to get out of a dilemma. However, they moved into another issue without option to go out. It becomes a way with no exit as these narratives state:

I was displaced by the conflict, I was living in Sincelejo, where I lived in relatives' houses, but I had no job opportunities because I did not know how to read or write. I didn't have the opportunity to work and I decided to go back to town. And as I had a brother who was a community leader, I was rejected here in Chalan by the military because they said I was a FARC collaborator. I was subjected to military surveillance and break-ins. I was prosecuted and I had nothing to do with this. Then I realized that I couldn't trust anyone, because I had already been displaced by violence and then by those who offer security and belonged to the State. At that time, I began to look and think about dangerous ways of taking refuge. It was terrible and painful, even more so because I had to leave my children and family. (Woman, 58 years old, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

The most common thing was not talking about neither friend nor neighbor, all that could be risky, we talked about ourselves, what we wanted to be, how far we want to get. For example, many young people wanted to join the military and they could not express it because they were being killed. (Man, 36 years old, personal communication, November 17, 2019).

In the next narratives, the woman tells of a time when parents teach their children to protect themselves from death:

They [the children] sometimes noticed that uniformed people were passing by, they saw when one was running out and closed the door. They heard shots. One began to warn them and tell them that if they heard such a thing, they had to go under the bed and stay quiet. They asked, why? Then, one already explained that it was to survive, that they could kill them and end up in a coffin. (Woman, 38 years old, personal communication, October 11, 2019).

As can be read, families, organization and associations were silent. Meetings could only be held around a collective cooking, that time was used to talk about

what happened, what is happening or was about to happen. Silence and prudence meant not speaking of the other events with friends or family.

To be very cautious. That was one of the strategies of the municipality to survive. Prudence, to recognize who to speak to, with the pain, what should be done, to see things and to keep silent, to do that or die. Keep silent was one weapon and mechanism to survive and resist all those very difficult years. The pain kept hurts a lot, not being able to cry for the dead because we could not mourn, the pain of losing a loved person. They could not express that pain as they ought to or as they wanted to and they had to be silent. (Woman, 41 years old, personal communication, October 12, 2019).

There are many brave men in the cemetery. So, to be peaceful and let things pass avoids more problems, it avoids so many unnecessary things not only personally but also related to the family. At that time conflict didn't touch you directly, but what hurts you the most. (Woman, 38 years old, personal communication, February 23, 2020).

In other words, silence is seen by the people of Chalan as a way to peacefully resist, as a defense mechanism. Then suspicion and distrust arise. The only option was not to talk to neighbors or people of the community.

However, spontaneous groups arose from the need to release repressed feelings and actions. These family groups were born out of everyday life and met inside their houses. It is where women can share their fears and pains, express their feelings about the war, while they do everyday tasks such as cooking and cultivating the garden, as has happened since 1996. These precautionary actions become part of their relationship and interactive contexts. There is no certainty about who he or she is and how the ones around the houses act.

Silence reflects fear and fear of dying. According to another golden rule, conversations among individuals are conducted in the kitchen: *keep quiet outside with neighbors, members of the community and even with one's own family*. The following voices reflect this:

Out of anonymity, out of silence, we formed small groups. No, we were not having a gathering, instead we were meeting with the group of friends, with the home garden, with the vegetable garden, with the corn crop, men and women would gather under any excuse to socialize. Telling things was not a sudden situation, it was a gradual process. Both, men and women realized that the space provided a sense of trust where they could share what they had long kept silent. We would gather to prepare a communal meal: let's

make a *Sancocho* (stew), as the women were peeling the yucca, the yams, the plantains, the vegetables, and the meat; women would spontaneously share stories, they would cry and support each other. (Woman, 41 years old, personal communication, August 23, 2019).

In these pieces of information, the voices reflect how the communal meal was the only space in which women felt confident and could abandon the silence they had long kept. Despite these liberating actions, after 30 years without constant psychosocial accompaniment, the voices of the Chalano community cry out to not be repeated. One of its inhabitants' states:

In Chalán, although life is the most valuable good and we all want to live in peace, people are still afraid that history would repeat itself. They want to oppose more agony and death; they want to mourn, but the ghosts of those who walk the nights today keep them awake and silent once again. (Man, 41 years old, personal communication, February 23, 2020).

The actions of being silent, not grieving, or mourning the death of friends, colleagues, and relatives create ways of living in which silence prevails. These permanent ways of acting to save their lives are a form of agency and an immediate solution within the context of violence and death.

Despite these protective strategies, the feeling of distrust and the feeling toward what is already considered *unknown* take over Chalaneros' actions, leading to distancing themselves from each other due to a potential threat to their lives and those close to them. There is a need to return to personal shelter and to take care of their closest group, as in the case of the family. As a survival strategy, the walls of families and neighbors with whom it is still possible to preserve trust, help, and self-help are disrupted as a symbol of communication, information, and protection, while the main doors of the houses are closed and voices are silenced:

I remember that, at that time of the war conflict in Chalán, in 1999, when the fear and anxiety of the armed conflict started, the families would tear down the walls to be able to move from one side to the other and get away from danger. We did the same with our next-door neighbors. The union was a sign of solidarity among all. Also, we would lock the houses and put padlocks on the outside of the front door to make people think that no one was living there, especially to distract armed groups. We switched off the lights, spoke very softly, and walked barefoot in our houses to avoid being heard walking and being summoned to meetings where the entire family had to go because if there were too many of us,

we risked being recruited or killed. (Man, 38 years old, personal communication, August 16, 2019).

Chalaneros are involved in a labyrinth with no way out because of this war and recruitment; it becomes an inherited war. The following reflects this inherited form of warfare: *Violence is coming back to Chalán*.

On March 11th, 1996, a donkey loaded with 70 kilos of dynamite exploded in the main square of Chalán (Sucre). The 35th Front of the FARC entered the town, killed the police officers, and burned the police station, the health center and several houses. The police did not return to town; however, the Marine Corps mobile brigades successfully repelled the subversion. This situation fostered a strong bond between the community and the marines leading to a close friendship between the girls in the town and the marines. Two young, charming girls paid for this relationship with their lives. Early last week, they were shot to death in their own homes. (Digital archive, El Tiempo newspaper, July 22, 1999, para(s). 1-5).

Another example of this inherited legacy is found in the following piece of information in which, a victim who survived narrates the effects of the armed violence on a family. Although it is a story about one family, this narration has an imprint that extends to other families.

Due to the killing of the two girls, their two other sisters moved to Sincelejo, the family disintegrated. Shortly thereafter, their elderly father died. One of them moved to Medellín and the other one to Cartagena, while their mother stayed in Sincelejo with some of her relatives. The one who moved to Medellín has not had any children yet because she was affected by the massacre. They were very close sisters, and her sister killing is still painful; she feels sad, cries, and feels afraid. She will not come back to Chalán. And this happened with other inhabitants and families. Because it was a painful situation, one tries not to recall or talk about it. It is not forgotten, but it is unsaid. (Woman, 35 years old, personal communication, October 15, 2019).

In Chalán, although life is the most valuable good and we all want to live in peace, people are still afraid that history would repeat itself. They want to oppose more agony and death; they want to mourn, but the ghosts of those who walk the nights today keep them awake and silent once again. (Man, 41 years old, personal communication, November 18, 2019).

Finally, these Chalano community narratives illustrate how individuals shift between silence, memory and forgetfulness. In the midst of pain, affliction and survival strategies, the Chalaneros rely on silence as an action of peaceful coexistence; remembering and talking with the closest and smallest group become liberating actions. All these voices and narratives break the silence that, despite being a survival strategy, has also inflicted considerable pain.

Conclusions

A pivotal aspect of reflection in this article was to provide a fresh perspective on the traditional meaning of silence. This concept has often been associated with mechanisms of repression, avoidance, and negative resistance that an individual has toward another one, or a particular form of relationship or an event. Additionally, the role assigned to silence is closer to the marking of the subject as an individual who “says nothing.” From this perspective, silence can be considered synonymous with “non-expression.” In this regard, the meaning assigned to this word does not encompass the voices and dialogic processes that people have built in relation to one another, wherein silence is perceived as a means to preserve and safeguard life as a valuable good.

On the contrary, within the context of the armed conflict, the silence of the chalaneras’ voices means a potential strategy for self-protection and well-being of others. It is thus presented as a form that gives rise to new alternatives and possibilities for the individuals’ transformation, offering possibilities of survival and fostering new relational encounters through non-violent means. Silence retains its own memory and manages to be expressed through collaborative approaches, serving as a resource to openly express the pain, suffering, affliction, anguish, and fear caused by the actions of armed actors in their territories. Therefore, through open interaction with relatives and close individuals, the Chalano community discovers a potential to construct meanings and actions that contribute to strengthening the social fabric and fostering new relationships.

So, the voices of silence and memory become the basis of remembrance. In other words, a way of life in which forgetfulness cannot become “the golden rule.” This is another expression of peaceful coexistence that resists authoritarian, threatening, and intimidating actions in times of war. As long as the actions of war perpetuate the silence surrounding stories of violence in the territories, attacks on the integrity of every human being will persist. The feeling of mistrust will continue to guide people's actions and will lead Chalaneros to distancing

themselves from those who may pose a further threat to their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. The need then arises to go back to their own shelter and to take care of their closest group of people, such as their families and closest friends.

However, when people from Chalán, in the midst of their stories, let their voices and ways of life flow in the relationship between silence, memory, and forgetfulness, they disrupt their narrative which, encourages them to keep their story concealed in anonymity. The voices of people from the Chalano community who decided to share part of their story revealed narratives that ameliorate the violence and pave the way for new connections with others to preserve their existence. Language itself has its own agency. An illustrative example is the recurring narrative of the meaning of silence given by individuals as an act of survival and peaceful coexistence. As a result, individuals can use language to create new contexts and new ways of life.

Finally, this article presents silence as a form of language related to memory and forgetfulness, to peaceful coexistence, to coping in contexts of violence and as a strategy for protection and survival. As Ricoeur (2008) points out, it is an act of remembrance through the voices that individuals construct to narrate their experiences of war, death, and pain. It is a search for memory as an object of memory that allows for struggling against forgetfulness, the rapaciousness of time, and the burial of memory.

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