

Multidimensional obstacles to the reconversion of enmity into adversariality from a peace education approach*


Obstáculos multidimensionales en la reconversión de la enemistad en adversariedad desde un enfoque de educación para la paz


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Abstract

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Since the signing of the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement, its signatories face not only the challenge of reincorporation into society, but also a process through which their image as enemies must be transformed into that of democratic adversaries. This

research addresses the following question: What multidimensional educational obstacles do the signatories of the Agreement face that hinder their reconversion from enemies into adversaries and their effective reincorporation into society? A qualitative methodology was used to analyze the interviews conducted by the Colombian Truth Commission between 2018 and 2022, considering three temporal moments: before joining the armed group, during armed life, and after the signing of the Peace Agreement. The findings identify multiple obstacles related to education across these three moments, which pose challenges to effective reincorporation, the transformation of enmity, and the strengthening of democracy from a peace education approach.

Keywords:

Colombia, radical democracy, peace education, qualitative research, peace signatories.

Resumen

Tras la firma del Acuerdo de Paz de 2016 en Colombia, sus firmantes enfrentan no solo el desafío de la reincorporación a la sociedad, sino también un proceso mediante el cual su imagen como enemigos debe transformarse en la de adversarios democráticos. Esta investigación aborda la siguiente pregunta: ¿qué obstáculos educativos multidimensionales enfrentan los firmantes del Acuerdo que dificultan su transformación de enemigos en adversarios y su reincorporación efectiva a la sociedad? Se empleó una metodología cualitativa para analizar las entrevistas realizadas por la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia entre

2018 y 2022, a partir de tres momentos temporales: antes de unirse al grupo armado, durante la vida armada y después de la firma del Acuerdo de Paz. Los hallazgos identifican múltiples obstáculos relacionados con la educación en estos tres momentos, los cuales plantean desafíos para la reincorporación efectiva, la transformación de la enemistad y el fortalecimiento de la democracia desde una perspectiva de educación para la paz.

Palabras clave:

Colombia, democracia radical, educación para la paz, investigación cualitativa, firmantes de paz.

Introduction

November 2024 marked eight years since the signing of the Final Peace Agreement in Havana, which sought to end the conflict between the former guerrilla group FARC-EP and the Colombian State. However, progress in the implementation of the Agreement remains concerning. According to the Kroc Institute, only 31 % of its provisions have been completed, 20% are at an intermediate stage of implementation, 37 % remain at a minimal level of adoption, and 13 % have not yet been initiated (Robayo Corredor et al., 2023). The degree of implementation varies across the six points of the Agreement. Specifically, points two and three, concerning “political participation” and the “end of the conflict”, show uneven levels of development. While 49 % of the provisions under the second point have been fulfilled, the implementation of the first one does not exceed 14 %, despite measures such as the election of representatives for the

Special Transitory Peace Circumscriptions and the adoption of the Public Policy for Reconciliation, Coexistence, and Non-Stigmatization (Robayo Corredor et al., 2023).

This is troubling, considering that political participation in Colombia has historically been linked to violence. The low level of implementation of point two contrasts with the murders of Agreement signatories, social leaders, and human rights defenders since the signing of the Agreement: between November 2016 and March 2022, 1327 murders have been recorded (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, 2026), and by October 2023, 401 Agreement signatories had lost their lives (Redacción Colombia+20, 2023). The violence faced by former FARC-EP members echoes previous peace processes, in which the systematic elimination of those reintegrating into society and seeking legitimate political participation was evident. According to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), between 1984 and 2018, 5733 members of the Patriotic Union (UP), a left-wing political party, were killed by various actors (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz, 2022).

Reintegration alone does not eliminate the image of threat and enemy that weighs on ex-combatants after almost six decades of conflict (Niño and Castillo 2022). Laying down arms is insufficient without socioeconomic conditions that guarantee the permanence of the demobilized population in the process, as well as a transformation in how society perceives them, how they perceive civilians, and how they understand themselves as political actors (Carranza,

2020; Nieto Bravo and Pardo Rodríguez, 2017). Among the many dimensions of reincorporation, education is crucial. It enables ex-combatants to acquire skills for the productive sector, distancing them from the conflict, while providing training in values for peace and coexistence, fostering tolerance and the recognition of the other as a legitimate political actor (Filipov, 2006; Infante Márquez, 2014).

Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following question: What multidimensional educational obstacles do the signatories of the Agreement face that hinder their reconversion from enemies into adversaries and their effective reincorporation into society? This question is based on the premise that reincorporation is a complex process involving multiple spheres of the ex-combatants' lives and entails the transformation of enmity into adversariality, as proposed by Chantal Mouffe (1999) in her concept of radical democracy (Niño and Palma, 2019). To answer this question, a qualitative methodology was used, giving signatories a central role. Their voices were drawn from interviews conducted by the Truth Commission. In analyzing educational obstacles, three moments were considered: before joining the armed group, during armed life, and after the signing of the Agreement. This article is organized into three sections. The first presents the introduction and methodology. The second develops the theoretical framework supporting the research, focused on the need for plural democratic conditions to foster peaceful encounters with difference, and on the role of peace education in transforming violent enmities into adversarial relationships.

Finally, the third section presents the findings on the multidimensional obstacles to peace education in Colombia, covering the three moments analyzed: before, during, and after armed life.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was proposed to answer the research question, since the relational perspective between knowledge and society, together with its critical viewpoint, provides the epistemological and methodological foundation for this study. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2012), critical and interpretative paradigms are central to this type of research, as they involve complex critical and ethical formulations that differ from traditional approaches in the social sciences. The multidimensional approach to the educational obstacles identified in this study is analyzed through the data collected under this methodology. Therefore, this research draws on people's own words, which, in this case, constitute the voice of the signatories, and then analyzes them from a naturalistic approach that seeks to explain everyday life from within and in a holistic manner, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (2000).

In social studies focused on the analysis of cultures, thick descriptions are taken up as material for understanding or explaining society, as proposed by Geertz (1973). Drawing on Kornblit (2007), these two forms of research imply, on the one hand, using such data to reconstruct what individuals or social groups think, feel, and believe, with the researcher interpreting the social world;

and, on the other hand, searching for social meanings through language and the study of discursive practices and their interactions, with the researcher explaining the social worlds under analysis. For the purposes of this study, these two analytical perspectives are integrated to identify the multidisciplinary obstacles in the case study.

The evidence comes from interviews conducted by the Truth Commission. Between 2018 and 2022, this Commission conducted and analyzed 14 971 individual and collective interviews for the construction of the Final Report. From this corpus, a subset of 13 interviews was selected based on the following criteria: (1) interviews explicitly identified as having been conducted with signatories of the Peace Agreement; (2) narratives containing references to educational experiences across at least one of the following stages: prior to joining the armed group, during the armed conflict, or during the reintegration process; and (3) sufficient narrative depth to allow for interpretative analysis. In addition, exclusion criteria were applied to discard interviews lacking substantive references to education or containing fragmented or insufficient information for analytical purposes. This intentional selection aimed to ensure analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness, in line with qualitative research standards.

A thematic analysis of the selected interviews was then conducted from an interpretative and critical perspective. The analysis was based on iterative and in-depth readings of the narratives, which allowed for the identification of recurrent themes,

patterns, and tensions related to educational trajectories and obstacles. The analytical process involved a comprehensive reading of each interview to understand the narrative as a whole, the identification of significant fragments related to education, and the progressive organization of these fragments into thematic axes reflecting both individual experiences and structural conditions.

Theoretical framework

This article is based on the concept of radical democracy developed by Chantal Mouffe (1999). With the supposed triumph of the liberal democracy model in the 1990s, it was assumed that consensus without exclusion could be achieved and that the antagonisms present in modern societies could be eradicated. However, it has become increasingly evident that this vision overlooks the multiplication of conflicts arising from diverse causes.

Consequently, the only way to achieve a true pluralist democracy is not to seek the eradication of conflict and antagonism, but to make room for them and strengthen democratic institutions so that differences can be addressed without violence. Thus, the goal is the reconversion of antagonism into agonism: the transformation of enmity into adversariality (Mouffe, 1999). Mouffe's distinction between enemy and adversary refers to Schmittian postulates, according to which the establishment of an "us" is always based on a distinction from an "other", who appears as a different identity and therefore gives rise to the possibility of enmity. If either side feels threatened by the presence of the other, this difference may give way to

violence as the last resort of politics (Franzé, 2004; Mouffe 1999). Thus, the central idea is, once again, the suppression of this potential violence.

However, this transformation cannot be achieved merely through the encounter of different social actors within democracy. It is therefore necessary to ask what enables this change in the way the other is perceived, and how it takes place. ⁴ In a scenario of transition from conflict to post-conflict, this transformation requires recognizing the distinction between three stages: before, during, and after the conflict itself. In the short, medium, and long term, the post-conflict period also involves changing the narrative and political image of those who have laid down their arms, so that they are no longer seen as a threat that must be eliminated, but are recognized as legitimate agents with whom disagreement is possible without implying violence against them (Niño and Palma, 2019).

Likewise, Carranza (2020) argues that ex-combatants face a "security dilemma": their image is stereotyped at several levels. At the micro level, it is assumed that the absence of opportunities, lack of training, and possession of military skills make them more likely to take up arms again than to reintegrate into society. At the macro level, they are collectively perceived as a threat to peace and to a supposedly harmonious order that preceded the conflict, that they are seen as having destabilized (Carranza 2020). Conversely, on the path toward reincorporation into civilian life, the post-conflict period also involves the need to create basic conditions for subsistence

and development. These conditions must guarantee reincorporated persons the realization of individual and community life projects that, from a human security perspective, reduce direct and indirect violence, as well as deprivations and needs to which individuals may be exposed in their daily lives (Rojas and Álvarez Marín, 2012). In this sense, achieving negative peace⁵ is not enough; rather it is necessary to advocate for the establishment of positive peace (Carranza, 2020).

This is linked to the multidimensional obstacles faced by ex-combatants in their transition to civilian and community life, and the transformation of their image into that of adversaries. These obstacles may be social, economic, political, cultural, community-based, or related to stigmatization, among others. In fact, they are reflected in the seven dimensions of long-term reincorporation established by the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN), namely education, economic sustainability, habitability and housing, comprehensive psychosocial well-being, health, community, and family (Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización, 2020). The fact that education is the first of the seven dimensions is not accidental. This dimension encompasses the two processes involved in the post-conflict period: the reconversion of enmity into adversariality for the strengthening of democracy, and the creation of conditions to guarantee reincorporation with opportunities. Education, or its absence, constitutes a variable that can condition an individual's life before, during, and after the armed conflict.

For Infante Márquez (2014) and Filipov (2006), the non-recurrence of violent conflict depends on the (re)establishment of an educational system that fulfills several functions, including the training and professionalization of reincorporated individuals for their reintegration into productive economic activities, as well as education in new values for peacebuilding. This makes it possible to transform enmities and promote coexistence, tolerance, and democracy. Therefore, in addition to including the training and professionalization of ex-combatants, educational programs must incorporate a peace-oriented approach. Peace education—hereinafter PE—seeks to prevent the intensification of beliefs, discrimination and, consequently, enmity toward others. If this approach is not included within the transition from conflict to peace, education itself may become a source of negative peace or new forms of violence, thereby maintaining situations associated with armed conflict.

PE took shape and acquired global reach with the creation of the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), both of which emerged in response to the Second World War. UNESCO's postulates on PE follow the tendency to prevent war by incorporating education in human rights and education for disarmament³. With full awareness of the difficulty of transitioning from war to peace, what is known as peace research has taken shape (Jares, 1995), giving PE a new scope: education for development. With this new scientific support, we arrive at the most contemporary definition:

Peace Education is a continuous

and permanent process, based on a positive conception of peace and a creative perspective on conflict, that aims to develop a new type of culture of peace. This culture helps people critically unveil an unequal, violent, complex, and conflictive reality, so that they may situate themselves before it and act accordingly. (Jares, 1995, p. 6)

Results

Findings on the multidimensional obstacles to peace education in Colombia

Returning to the concept of radical democracy, this research presents the findings according to three moments of the life trajectory of each signatory: a) before entering armed life, b) during the experience of belonging to an illegal armed group, and c) after the signing of the Peace Agreement and the reincorporation process.

a) Education before entering armed life: the family environment and the context of war

This section presents the voices of those signatories who had a direct educational experience before joining the guerrilla. In this first category, associated with the family environment, two findings were identified. The first concerns internal factors, such as hostile family environments (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). This is illustrated in the following testimony:

My father was killed when he was being robbed. After that, my

mother went with us to PLACE3. I studied until eighth grade in PLACE3—I did not finish eighth grade there—and from then on, I started to make bad friends. I began having problems with my brothers at home because I was very diligent at school, and my mother used to hold me up as an example to them—a mistake mothers often make. Once, when I was fighting with one of my brothers, an 8-year-old boy took out a knife and almost stabbed me because I wouldn't let him go out into the street. (Personal communication, 2020, 163-AA-00004)

The hostile family environment may thus become a motivating factor for joining armed groups, as observed in another testimony:

I had already put up with a lot at home, because I was always afraid of seeing the situation there and of getting involved with someone like that. But I don't know, I fell in love with the boy, and I went with him. (Personal communication, 2019, 087-AA-00001)

Another factor identified is the lack of economic resources to support the family (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022), which is illustrated in the following testimony:

At the age of 18, I joined the FARC because of the lack of resources to continue studying and to continue helping my mother, because I saw her suffering, since there were so many of us. We were seven women and three men. So, there were very

few resources, and my mother had to work to support us, even though she had a partner. She told us that the best path for us to take was to study. But that was very difficult and hard, because there was no stable job. So, from there I started to look... growing up in the middle of all this conflict, because every day I saw the guerrillas, the army, the paramilitaries. (Personal communication, 2019, 215-AA-00001)

Similarly, another interview shows how the lack of resources can be one of the reasons for joining armed groups:

I was about 16. At that age—from about 15 to 17 or 18—was the time we were in that territory. My childhood was, as I said, in ———, that's where we grew up. Without studies, because we could not study due to lack of money. (Personal communication, 2019, 075-AA-00002)

In this perspective, Filipov (2006) proposes the reestablishment of a strong educational system for several reasons, including: a) the need for skilled labor; b) the reincorporation of ex-combatants into the economy through education and training; and c) the importance of offering socioeconomic opportunities to the poorest sectors of society through access to the educational system, since these population groups are among the most vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups or involvement in illicit activities as a means of escaping poverty (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2011).

A second set of findings concerns structural factors, such as the presence and influence of armed groups in rural areas, especially in schools, as well as the geographical distance between children's homes and educational facilities (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). Regarding the presence of armed groups in rural areas, one testimony states:

I was about 18 and in the 4th grade of high school when I learned about the M at school. I studied at EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION1———, and then I reaffirmed it when they arrived here during an activism event involving culture, music, and dance, and all those things, as well as the formation of groups. Then they arrived here and... they started with that type of activity. (Personal communication, 2019, 075-AA-00003)

Other interviewees refer to the same issue:

At the age of 17, when I was older, I had already taken two middle school courses, introductory courses given by the party, in a regional school at ———. So, I was becoming more political. I knew things, I shouted and spoke, I formed party cells, and that made the enemy, in quotation marks, begin to brand me and point fingers at me. (Personal communication, 2019, 228-AA-00001).

When I was finishing elementary school, I saw many injustices that made me think that there had

to be some situation that would change this, that the country would change and that our people could have a better life. I lived in Urabá (...). And then I began to relate to the Communist Youth group; we were a group of students who began to exchange ideas and to look at the very difficult situation that Colombia was going through. (Personal communication, 2019, 088-AA-00001)

Geographical distance also appears as a structural obstacle to access to education, as the following interviewees explain:

First, my parents did not live in a place where I could have the opportunity to go to school. Secondly, it was also very far from the town to where my parents lived. And there was no school in the rural area where I lived, there was nothing at that time. (Personal communication, 2019, 237-AA-00002) We studied, I studied, I was in elementary school. We had to study far away, yes. They sent us off with breakfast and lunch to school, because it was a full day and the little school was too far away for us to come home for lunch. That's how I got to know the guerrillas. Later on, they started to come often, and by the end they let themselves be seen. (Personal communication, 2019, 089-AA-00003)

From another perspective of bonding and proximity, a voice of a girl describes how being part of an armed group could appear as an

alternative way of life:

You grow up there and you don't see them as an enemy, but rather as a great bond of brotherhood, I would say, because you say they are armed, but we didn't feel any fear. Because people, their actions are what define them. In that case, their actions at that time, when I was a child, were very... how could I say it? I was tired of working. My parents didn't want to give me education; they were closed, closed to the fact that they were not going to send me to study. I had no other choice. I didn't want to get a husband because I was only 13 years old, I was still a girl. So, I had no other choice. I was going to experience life, whichever one I could get. So, I knocked on the door of the two organizations. (Personal communication, 2019, 089-AA-00002)

In maintaining the methodological decision to present the voices of those who had direct educational experiences, this first category reveals relevant information about internal and hostile factors. Therefore, as Infante Márquez (2014) states, short- and long-term measures are required to ensure the construction of resilient societies. Among these measures is the establishment of a quality education system for the entire population, since several processes associated with successful post-conflict transitions depend on it, including training in new values that strengthen peace, coexistence, and democracy; the professionalization of the population, so that poverty and lack of

opportunities do not become determinants of new conflicts; and the formation of human capital, so that the State does not depend solely on the exploitation of raw materials; among many others. In short, education is closely linked to the human development of a post-conflict society.

b) Education during the armed conflict: literacy, political training, and war skills

In the interviews, the demobilized individuals stated that they had received training in the midst of war. In other words, “people who have belonged to an illegal armed group have developed skills that function effectively within these groups, even if they later become an obstacle when they return to civilian life”. (Colombian Agency for Reintegration in Nieto Bravo and Pardo Rodríguez, 2017, p. 102). In their educational experience during the armed conflict, the interrelation between at least three levels can be highlighted. The first is the acquisition of skills for everyday life, such as learning to read, write, add, or subtract, which they had not been able to access in civilian life and which they referred to as literacy. The second is the apprehension of an ideologized understanding of their own experience as political actors and of the deprivations suffered by the communities to which they belonged, which gave meaning to guerrilla life and to the armed struggle. The third is political training based on values for collective life, both within the guerrilla camp and in relation to the civilian population, intrinsically linked to instruction in war skills, such as the handling of weapons, discipline, and organization within the life of

a guerrilla camp.

Regarding the first level, the subjects of interviews 163-AA-00004 (2020), 414-AA-00001 (2019), and 228-AA-00001 (2019) stated that they studied and learned skills for daily life, even although this education did not take place within a formal system that could certify their learning, and always unfolded against the backdrop of war:

There they studied a lot, they taught people to read and write (...). It was not like primary or high school, because at the end of the day nobody was going to certify them. At least you say, ‘you don’t know how to read or write, so you go there for literacy training’—that is what it was called. (Personal communication, 2020, 163-AA-00004)

With the guerrillas you studied a lot, the Secretary of Education had to be aware of education, it was read a lot. If you did not know how to read, they would give you homework, they would give homework to the squadron (...). Personal communication (2019, 414-AA-00001)

Daily, in peace and in war, that was the way of it. Because there were times when you could be at war and you had to study. Personal communication (2019, 228-AA-00001)

Interviews 266-AA-00003 (2019) and 089-AA-00002 (2019) are important because they establish a link between literacy and the second level: the apprehension of a political

vision of the interviewees' own experience and the deprivations suffered by the communities, which, from an ideologized worldview, gave meaning to their belonging to the guerrillas. The following fragments also reaffirm the idea proposed by Nieto Bravo and Pardo Rodríguez (2017), according to which the capacities developed by combatants function effectively within the armed group, but may become an obstacle to their return to civilian life, given that they involve an intrinsic justification for the seizure of power through armed struggle:

Well, to learn to read and write well, we started to learn to read and write. And then they began to tell us about the history of Colombia (...).

Of course, it was interesting, because it was our history: the violations by the State, the humiliations committed by the Army, what capitalism was, what the bourgeoisie was. They explained where all this comes from, what our struggle was, why we were going to do that, because the reason was not only to carry a weapon. You did not come just to carry a weapon; first you had to know why you are going to carry it. 'We are going to fight the Army', and he told me, 'No, first you have to train your mind, and then you can carry a weapon'. (Personal communication, 2019, 266-AA-00003)

One kept up to date. That's why I tell you, whoever did not bring a capacity from there to here was wasting his time.

And it was necessary to have it because we were an organization that foresaw a struggle for the seizure of power. They would leave us for life. So, we had to know the country well, strategically, economically, everything. (Personal communication, 2019, 089-AA-00002)

Something similar occurs with the third level, that is, political training linked to the instruction in war skills. Training for everyday life, understood in terms of belonging to the guerrilla and justifying the armed struggle, was complemented by the idea that the values acquired within the group were not only different from those that could be learned in society, but were essential in the relationship with the civilian population and in the clandestine work of the collective organization. The excerpts from interviews 175-AA-00003 (2020), 237-AA-00002 (2019), and 088-AA-00001 (2019) also show the extent to which this political training was closely linked to the use of weapons and could not be easily dissociated from it:

The organization has a very broad policy, and it is primarily one's preparation regarding the population. That is, the ideology of the FARC has always been, since I joined it, how should I put it... to always set an example for the civilian population and to fulfill all those requirements, yes? To prepare yourself a lot, prepare yourself a lot to be a mass organizer, to create clandestine organizations; to prepare yourself to be a governor,

a leader. (Personal communication, 2020, 175-AA-00003)

They always instilled in us values, human rights, that we had to respect. We had to be people with dignity, we had to be professional people. It was a revolutionary organization. Marxism and Leninism were always there. There were always lessons where, during cultural hours, there were news, news summaries. Whatever you saw, you had to be an upright person (...). In other words, it was a teaching more rigorous than what you can learn in normal life, such as at home. (Personal communication, 2019, 237-AA-00002)

One enters and undergoes (...) a training course on how to behave with the population, political work, and how to defend oneself against the adversary. And then comes the handling of weapons and all those kinds of things, well, military practices (...). And fundamentally the political issue: how to reach the population, how to behave with the population. (Personal communication, 2019, 088-AA-00001)

Consequently, it can be argued that the effective reincorporation of demobilized individuals, understood as a process that should enable the emergence of an agonistic citizen logic, requires the reconfiguration of the capacities acquired for war so that they may function in civilian life (Nieto Bravo and Pardo Rodríguez, 2017). Nieto Bravo and

Pardo Rodríguez (2017) consider it essential for DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) processes to be approached from a capabilities perspective, proposed by Sen, Max-Neef and Nussbaum. This perspective makes it possible to avoid overlooking the importance not only of providing sufficient socioeconomic conditions for the satisfaction of needs, but also of cultivating the internal capabilities of ex-combatants for their full development as citizens. Without this transformation, the return to civilian life becomes difficult, since the worldview embedded in former combatants and by war may persist. None of this can occur outside education, understood as the means through which reincorporated individuals can find a renewed social role and the receiving community can recognize their potential as actors at the service of collective interests.

c) Transition: homologation of studies, peace education, and guarantees

The transition from war to peace is a process that requires multiple stages and specific measures to prevent rearmament, the emergence of new armed actors, or the continuation of cycles of violence. For this reason, educational opportunities following demobilization or the signing of a peace agreement are as important as transitional justice mechanisms and security guarantees for those returning to civilian life (Cárdenas, 2020). The following are the multidimensional obstacles experienced by signatories within the educational system after the signing and implementation of the Colombian Peace Agreement. These obstacles are identified from a peace education perspective, which is

essential for preventing repetition of violent events and the resurgence of divisions among Colombians that could lead to a returned to armed conflict. Conversely, PE seeks to strengthen education as an effective tool for facilitating the transition from enmity to adversariality. Thus, three multidimensional obstacles can be identified that limit the development of PE in Colombia during the post-agreement period:

- Homologation of acquired knowledge and learned trades.
- Training in values and community life (peace education).
- Lack of guarantees for access to quality education.

First, it is important to recognize that many signatories possess knowledge, skills, and trades acquired during their time in the guerrilla organization. In numerous cases, these experiences constitute the primary source of education and training they have received throughout their lives. Such knowledge and practical competencies can become valuable sources for obtaining employment and pursuing further studies within the Colombian educational system. Consequently, it is imperative to establish mechanisms that allow these competencies to be formally recognized and certified. Without such recognition, former combatants are placed at disadvantage compared to other citizens whose educational trajectories have developed within formal institutional frameworks.

This is important for achieving the objectives and guarantees of positive peace⁴, as shown by the following experiences of different signatories in their reintegration into

civilian life. In their experience, education is the only way to survive in Colombian society; therefore, the recognition of what they learned is essential for them. The protagonist of interview 163-AA-0004 (2020) highlights as very positive the fact that both she and her husband were able to finish high school after demobilization, as well as the impact this has on her daughter's life:

Now, as an adult, one sees that the need is so great. One is required to have at least a high school degree to get a job. Now, thanks to God, I am doing my technical training in _____, and, thanks to another program through the firefighters, I am going to get in April my medical knowledge approved in PLACE3 to receive the certificate as _____. All this is very positive for me, because it is a dream that I could not fulfill there, (...) so now I am achieving it here as a civilian. (...) I am doing the — with the business, and that also helps me to work in a hospital. The more certificates and experience you have, the more chances you have to get a job. (Personal communication, 2020,163-AA-0004)

Several testimonies indicate that high school is one of the first steps toward access to employment, higher education, and a better life quality. For example, the signatory in interview 266-AA-00002 (2019) states that they are about to take the Saber 11^o exam and complete the requirements to graduate from high school and continue with technological studies. There are also

testimonies from people who, within the framework of the post-agreement period, have entered university to pursue undergraduate degrees, as explained in interview 414-AA-00001:

For me, the guerrilla was a great school and a university (...). And maybe without it I wouldn't have the aspirations I have today, because today I am at university, I am in my third semester, I start tomorrow. I study public administration, and my projection is to continue advancing, to finish this degree and continue learning every day. (Personal communication, 2019, 414-AA-00001)

These testimonies from signatories who have followed the path of education within the framework of the post-agreement period highlight the importance of access to quality education for the free development of the personality. At the same time, they show how the lack of access to adequate education can become a factor of conflict. The testimonies also reveal other limitations within the educational process, making the experience different from what they expected and distancing their future expectations from what they had imagined at the time of signing the Peace Agreement. This is largely because they were unable to complete the homologation of acquired knowledge, as reported in interview 175-AA-00003:

Nurses here just pass gauze, give injections, pills, yes, but not there. A nurse must be trained to do operations, extract.... well, many things. At least she knows how

to operate. A nurse around here doesn't do it; it has to be a doctor, you see? I say that one of the best things the government can do is to give the opportunity to those people who know, that is to say, the degree, which is what is needed here today. (Personal communication, 2020, 175-AA-00003)

Likewise, one interviewee expressed the frustration they feel and argued that this feeling is shared by most signatories:

The other thing we want is education, because most of us who were in arms, don't have education. There are few who have at least a high school diploma; we don't. Eight people graduated out of 11, and those of us who have not finished want to do it. And those who want to study, only start elementary school, they are stuck. (Personal communication, 2019, 215-AA-00001)

This testimony is linked to the dreams expressed by the signatory in the following interview, who states that there were many dreams, but the reality is far from allowing those dreams to come true, because the homologation of knowledge is not a simple path:

When the dialogues began in Havana and all that, we had a beautiful mentality regarding the future, with that negotiation. And I heard men saying, 'I am going to study languages, I am going to study engineering, I am going to study medicine'. Everyone

wanted to study, everyone wanted to become professionals (...). I saw men and women who operated. For example, I saw the operation of a man who had all the heart tissue removed, everything, and they threw it in a bucket, they washed it... Those people know a lot, but they don't have a professional card. So, when this process was done, everybody wanted to validate their knowledge; they had their dreams of studying, of working, of saving new lives. That was everybody's dream. Unfortunately, all those dreams have been frustrated. (Personal communication, 2019, 228-AA-00001)

From the perspective of PE, education is essential for influencing citizen participation and even the leadership that signatories can exercise in peace contexts. Thus, education fosters active participation in the civic and political life of their communities and countries, turns them into agents of positive change, and contributes to preventing new conflicts, the taking up of arms once more, and the transformation into armed actors. This means that having limits on access to education also can restrict the creation of economic opportunities, which may lead signatories to engage in criminal activities. For this reason, training in values and community life is identified as another multidimensional obstacle in the post-agreement period.

Training in values is essential from the perspective of PE. In Colombia, however, this training must also be accompanied by

a collective perspective, since the signatories used to live in community and, if cultural peace is to be achieved, this community framework is needed to contribute to the non-repetition of violent events. This is reflected in interview 237-AA-00001 (2019), in which the signatory is not only taking advantage of the post-agreement period to homologate her high school studies, but has also become an education leader in the territory where she lives, managing to become a member of the municipal council and thereby impacting not only her own life, but also that of the entire community:

I would like to be doing a degree in five years, to have finished it, to have our own productive project, to lead it ourselves, as we are now, and to live as a community, to help people, and to move forward. (Personal communication, 2019, 237-AA-00001)

However, this community life is also an object of longing for the signatories and, in some ways, they express sadness because the society into which they were reintegrated is not the one they knew:

Once, we handed out a loaf of bread to 60 people; there was solidarity, there was that nice atmosphere there. And when we came out here to a beautiful, wonderful civil society, it turns out that we crashed with reality. Because here there is envy, there is no solidarity, there is the gene of individualism... everyone goes for themselves. And what we did was to get infected by the environment here and become the

same as the civilians. In other words, become people of the masses. But the dreams of studying, of preparation, of productive projects did not happen, they did not happen. (Personal communication, 2019, 228-AA-00001)

Finally, the experience of the signatories speaks of the impact that training in values can have on achieving cultural peace in Colombia after so many years of conflict, as well as of the challenges ahead:

I would say that, as in the spiritual realm, before disarming the body we must disarm the soul, that is part of education. And in that sense, the educational system has changed a lot. I remember when I was in elementary school, we were taught values, respect for adults, respect for elders, respect for nature (...). I think that an educated society is a society for the future, and I do not lose faith. Children are the future; of course, we old and young people are as well, but I say that if we educate a society, a good education based on values, based on all that, then we can (...). My goal was to build peace, I said. But peace without social equality, without development, it is no peace, because while you are hungry you are not going to be calm. (Personal communication, 2019, 308-AA-00002)

The above leads to the identification of the third multidimensional obstacle, caused by the lack of guarantees for continuous and quality education, where learning is constant

and meaningful. This can be seen in different testimonies:

I really learned that I could have a family and fight for it, and that you can fight for ideals, no longer by imposing them, but by making yourself felt with words and with a pen in your hand. (Personal communication, 2019, 215-AA-00001)

At the same time, some signatories that have not been able to finish homologating their high school diploma because the teachers did not return to the territory. This happened to the signatory in interview 237-AA-00002 (2019), who, aware of the need for a high school diploma to get a job, feels discouraged because the teachers have not returned to administer the tests required for graduation and for continuing professional studies in law. The signatory warns, however, “if they let me”, because they consider that there are no guarantees of support to continue studying, despite having demobilized through peace negotiations and accepted all their conditions.

In short, identifying these multidimensional obstacles to PE reveals the particular experiences of the signatories: while some have improved their quality of life, others have been unable to access education, which reveals a risk for the achievement of peace in Colombia.

Conclusion

There is still a long way to go in the effective reincorporation of the signatories of the 2016 Agreement, both in terms of democratic guarantees for participation

and the implementation of the agreed provisions, and in terms of their image before society in general, the image they have of themselves as democratic actors, and the image they have of the society that welcomes them back. Therefore, although we agree with Mouffe regarding the importance of constructive inclusion of conflict to strengthen democracy, the democratic system cannot be considered plural merely because multiple political options exist. On the contrary, the transformation of enmity into adversariality is a long-term, complex, and uncertain process, especially in a post-conflict scenario, whose purpose is the reconfiguration of the very functioning of politics

Conflict may persist after demobilization due to remarginalization, the continuation of violence against ex-combatants, and the reactivation of the economy that fueled the war, among other factors. Therefore, laying down arms is not enough if it is not accompanied by real socioeconomic possibilities, a change of image, and the building of citizenship. Education, as a variable that is present before, during, and after the armed conflict, becomes fundamental for providing opportunities for insertion in the labor market and for learning new values based on a culture of peace that can cement new political relations.

The analysis of the first moment, before entering the illegal armed group, allowed to observe the different multidimensional obstacles linked to education that led the interviewees enter the armed conflict. From the perspective of human security, these obstacles reveal different direct and indirect forms of violence that led them to take arms.

In short, this first moment offered a glimpse of the causes that gave rise to enmity. The next moment, during armed life, showed that the signatories had access to informal education according to an ideologized worldview that justified the seizure of power through arms. Therefore, this training which combined literacy with the acquisition of skills for war, can become an obstacle when returning to civilian life, so the objective in the post-conflict is to transform these skills to make them compatible with democracy.

The final moment, corresponding to the post-conflict period, must respond to this need from a peace education approach. Three types of obstacles were identified: a) the homologation of acquired knowledge and learned trades; b) training in values and community life, understood as Peace Education; and c) lack of guarantees for education. Specifically, it is important to recognize in a differential manner the training acquired during war, since it does not conform to the Colombian formal education system; the need to provide reincorporated individuals with training in values based on collective thinking, which transforms the negative image of selfishness and individuality that they have of the society that receives them; and the importance of providing guarantees of continuity in the provision of education and homologation services.

The identification of these three types of obstacles has broader implications for both policy design and theoretical understandings of post-conflict reintegration. First, the challenges related to the homologation of knowledge suggest the need to rethink rigid formal education systems by incorporating

flexible accreditation mechanisms that recognize experiential and non-formal learning acquired in conflict settings. Second, the obstacles linked to values and community formation highlight that reintegration is not only a socioeconomic process, but also a deeply relational and symbolic one, requiring sustained investments in peace education as a means to transform identities, rebuild trust, and foster democratic coexistence. Finally, the lack of educational guarantees reveals structural limitations in state capacity, indicating that without continuity, accessibility, and territorial coverage, reintegration efforts risk reproducing the very conditions that contributed to the emergence of conflict.

Taken together, these findings suggest that effective reincorporation policies must move beyond short-term, assistance-based approaches and instead adopt a multidimensional and long-term perspective that integrates education as a central pillar for transforming enmity into adversarial democratic engagement.

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Notes

1. It is here that a limitation of Chantal Mouffe's argument can be observed. Although she gives preponderance to this reconversion, she does not refer to the process that must be carried out for it to become possible, specially when there has been a violent conflict between former enemies who now seek to rebuild their relationship through peaceful and tolerant coexistence, as in the Colombian case.
2. Absence of violence.
3. Its didactic assumptions includes respect for other people's lives, the common heritage of humanity, solidarity, international cooperation, democracy, freedom and equality, human rights education, and disarmament.
4. In Galtungian terms, peace is achieved only when there is social justice and basic needs are met.

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