

Libraries as Preservers and Disseminators of Information Related to the Colombian Conflict and the Truth Commission Report

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Abstract:

The Colombian armed conflict, which has lasted over six decades, has left a deep impact on the country and over 8 million victims. As Colombia slowly moves towards a post-conflict era, documenting and preserving the truth about the events that occurred during the conflict is crucial for the country's reconciliation and future development. The Colombian government established the Truth Commission to investigate and document human rights violations committed during the conflict. However, the dissemination of this information to the public remains a significant challenge.

This paper examines the role of libraries in preserving and disseminating information related to the conflict and, specially, the Truth Commission's report, which was published last year. The paper poses the question: how are libraries contributing to the dissemination of information related to the Colombian conflict, and what challenges do they face in doing so? To answer this question, the paper collects several strategies created by libraries and draws on interviews with librarians from institutions such as the Library of the Central Bank of Colombia and the National Center of Historical Memory.

The paper argues that libraries play a critical role in disseminating information related to the Colombian conflict. Furthermore, the paper identifies several challenges faced by libraries in the process and the solutions they have found to overcome them. These include: the importance of approaching the conflict from a human and ethical perspective, the use of technologies to reach remote communities, the need for interdisciplinary training for librarians, the importance of creating accessible narratives for the public, and collaborating with both public and private actors to enrich the work of libraries.

The findings of this study have implications for other conflict zones around the world, as they shed light on libraries' best practices and lessons learned in the pursuit of a lasting peace.

Keywords: Libraries, post conflict, dissemination of information, Colombia

Six decades, one Commission, and 10,000 pages

"How did we dare to let it happen and how do we allow it to continue?"
Father Francisco La Roux, president of the Truth Commission, quoted in *El Espectador* (2022).

The Colombian armed conflict has been called one of the longest in the western hemisphere. "In Colombia there was not a global peace agreement but an accumulation of processes. That is why it has been a complex peace process, consisting of several stages with valuable partial advances, but also with setbacks" (Arias, 2015). The last of these processes, and perhaps the most ambitious, ended with the Final Peace Agreement signed on November 24, 2016. On that sunny Thursday, former President Juan Manuel Santos shook hands with 'Timochenko', the top leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in a handshake that spread around the world and concluded more than four years of troubled and sometimes hesitant negotiations with the guerrilla.

I remember that moment vividly. I was sitting in the living room of the apartment where I grew up and, like my fellow countrymen, I could not help smiling when an unexpected loud boom interrupted the ceremony and made Timochenko flinch. He had mistaken it for a bomb. It seemed a rather surreal scene: only a month before, in that same room, we thought we had lost everything in the plebiscite that meant to ratify the accords democratically. That day I clung to the hand of my younger sister, then a child. I could not find the words to explain to her why 50.21% of the country voted not to approve the accords (BBC, 2016).

Almost seven years have passed since that plebiscite. The agreement had to be approved through legislative channels amid a convulsive political environment and a divided society. A year after its signing, the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition was born as a temporary and extrajudicial mechanism of the Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition. The Commission was created after analyzing a long legacy of more than 51 existing commissions around the world, including cases such as Argentina, Peru, Canada or Rwanda (Comisión de la Verdad, 2023).

Since its founding in April 2017 and implementation a year later, the Commission's interdisciplinary team had the arduous task of consolidating an articulate, sober and documented account of the Colombian conflict that "satisfies the right of victims and society to the truth, promotes the recognition of what happened, coexistence in the territories and contributes to lay the foundations for non-repetition" (Comisión de la Verdad, 2023b). The Commission included 290 people in Bogotá, 200 people in the rest of the country and 120 transcribers (El Espectador, 2022).

It was a Herculean task that took place largely in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic. Leonardo Sarmiento, expert advisor to the Commission, confessed to us in the panel *La Comisión de la Verdad: archivos, memoria y construcción de paz* last year that "the commission received more than 1,600 reports and cases, 19,500 interviews, 2,000,000 documents from external sources, and formed more than 450 databases from 50 public and more than 100 private organizations" (Sarmiento, 2022). Father La Roux, president of the Commission, elaborated in his speech:

For more than three years we have listened to more than 30 thousand victims in individual testimonies and in collective meetings that took place in 28 places where we

established Truth Houses, in Afro-Colombian resguardos and communities, in gypsy kumpaños and among the Raizales, as well as abroad in exile in 24 countries.

On June 28 last year, *Hay futuro, si hay verdad* (*There is a future, if there is truth*) was released. The Commission's Final Report is an extensive document divided into ten chapters that cover nearly six decades of conflict. There are two chapters *sui generis* when compared to the experience of other truth commissions in the world: the chapter on women and the LGBTQ+ population, and *Exile: Colombia outside Colombia*. The more than ten thousand pages that make up the report, along with its transmedia portal and narrative resources, give voice to the 8,775,884 victims of the war. It is a heartbreaking figure that includes numerous and varied human rights violations: homicides, forced disappearance, kidnapping, recruitment and forced displacement (Comisión de la Verdad, 2021b).

During the two months after its publication, the Commission held events in 21 departments across the country to disseminate the report. It also prepared the delivery of the accompanying Human Rights Archive and Mission Information System to the General Archive of the Nation (El Espectador, 2023). But after its dismantling, once the enormous public attention was dispelled, the use of the report's portal decreased dramatically and for some, including one of the former commissioners, "no State entity assumed such socialization" (Gonzalez, 2023). Earlier this year, the former commissioner stated in his social networks:

Figure 1.

Tweet from former Commissioner Alejandro Castillero Cuéllar.



Source: Twitter, 2023.

It was in this context that the commitment of Colombian society, media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and moved and determined citizens became more acute and urgent. "Society is now in charge of sustaining the legacy of the Truth Commission," wrote the University of Antioquia (2022). A journalist from that region, known by its opposition to the accords, wrote:

Very quickly the meetings began to collectively understand what those pages contained. Reading clubs. Public readings. Podcasts. Groups to study, question and discuss; to see oneself in the mirror and ask oneself about one's own history; to heal; to protest; to remove the veil; to get out of the bubble; to activate creativity and action. Unions to not let this continue to happen or, better, to understand why it continues to happen and to be able to act with information, with knowledge (Gutiérrez Torres, 2022).

Thus, amid numerous well-intentioned but decentralized initiatives, often with limited reach, libraries across the country became key players in the dissemination of the Truth Commission Report.

Dissemination beyond the Commission: the role of Colombian libraries

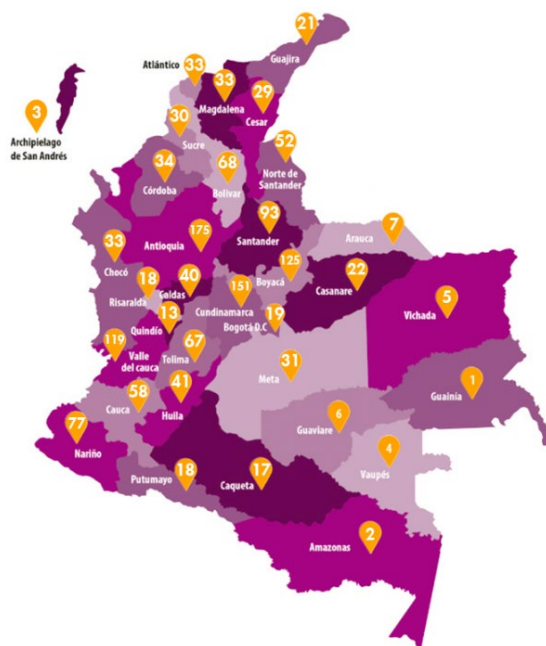
In societies increasingly dependent on information, the role of libraries as guardians of relevant and curated information is as vital as their role as safeguards and spaces for community building. We know with certainty that, more than a collection or a tangible space, libraries are scenarios in which critical thinking is developed, citizenship is built, memory is reclaimed, and collective discourses are co-created (UNESCO, 2013; Jaramillo, 2016).

In the context of conflict, this task is even more pressing. There is a broad consensus in the literature that libraries are key actors in memory building processes, especially in societies that have faced conflicts in their recent history, still fresh, such as Niger (Batubo and Digitemie-Batubo, 2010) and Pakistan (Bhatti, 2010), and even more so in those where libraries suffered serious damage in the midst of war, such as in Sri Lanka (Gamage, 2003), Sierra Leone (Gorvie, 2005) and the states of the former Yugoslavia (Riedlmayer, 2007).

The lessons learned from many of these experiences have already been systematized. They include recommendations ranging from strengthening rural libraries and ensuring the necessary funding and resources to operate, to the use of ICTs as tools to promote peace and communication between communities, the capitalization of multi-ethnic experiences and alliances with external actors (Obasola, 2012). The goal, according to Lor and Pabón-Cadavid (2018), is for the work of libraries to contribute to a construction that goes beyond mere absence of conflict, a 'negative' peace, and is oriented towards 'positive' peace: a peace that cultivates and nurtures the conditions necessary for lasting peace.

In the case of Colombia, the outlook, with its downsides, is promising. Today there are dozens of children's and university libraries, plus 1,561 public libraries located in 1,023 municipalities in all departments of the country (National Library of Colombia, 2023). There are also six institutions of higher education that train librarians through their professional programs, some founded more than half a century ago. However, despite initiatives such as the National Itinerant Libraries Program, Colombian libraries follow an unequal socio-demographic pattern that is evident in the National Network of Public Libraries: only 12% of libraries are in rural areas, and five departments in the heart of Colombia concentrate 44% of libraries.

Figure 2.
National Network of Public Libraries (2023)



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia. (2023).

Notes: This distribution is due to the global trends of urban migration and the high degree of centralism of the country, which concentrates most of its population and therefore its state and private institutions in a dozen urban centers headed by Bogotá. To these variables are added more than 752,964 victims of forced displacement (Truth Commission, 2023b) who migrated to the large capitals in the context of the conflict.

Fortunately, overcoming their geographical restrictions, during the long years of conflict and to this day libraries "in many cases become neutral zones" (Jaramillo, 2016). In its speech as winner of the National Public Library Award, the Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento Municipal Public Library stated that, "although the guerrilla prohibited any type of state institution from entering these regions, the library was never vetoed, since it had a cultural connotation and of bringing knowledge to very remote populations" (Ministry of Culture, 2014). This library is located in Valle del Guamuez, a small municipality in the department of Putumayo, in the middle of the violence.

Nartyjulieth Vásquez, a librarian at the National Historical Memory Center (CNMH) with whom I spoke for this article, said:

Libraries are the only infrastructure that is nationwide. It is the presence of the State. The dynamics of conflict within the city are vastly different. In the territory, libraries end up being the center of everything: not only a guardian of information or the preserver of the memory, but also a place of protection to a great extent. They turn out to be the ones that supply many academic initiatives and actions to safeguard community meetings. The library becomes the heart of the whole territory.

This and other testimonies collected by Restrepo-Fernández (2022), IFLA (2017) and CNMH (2022b) show that Colombian libraries have had a long history as agents of peace and memory building long before the historic signing of the agreements. "The Commission's report is one part, but libraries and communities have been building memory for a long time," says Nartyjulieth. However, today, seven years after the signing of the peace agreement and one

year after the publication of the report, the dissemination of its 10,000 pages, hundreds of multimedia resources, and its lessons faces great challenges in libraries across the country.

Peace-building libraries

“Whose dead are they? They are the lives of our brothers/ They are memory claimed with bullets/ Orphans and widows are left/ in a war of no one/ with no more amends than flowers and graves/ while the bread and the land are distributed”.
Tavera quoted in CNMH (2022)

This fragment is part of a poem written by the librarian of a municipality in Boyacá during one of the pedagogical workshops organized by the CNMH and the National Library of Colombia. Although the beauty of the poetry is certainly unique, it is but one of the hundreds of ways that librarians in Colombia have found to bring the population closer to the report of the Truth Commission in innovative, critical and thoughtful ways. Only one year after the dissolution of the Commission, the initiatives organized by libraries are diverse and involve private and public actors, often cooperating in an articulated manner. This diversity of efforts, as well as their novel and changing character, makes it difficult to compile them exhaustively. This section is, therefore, only a snapshot that highlights some of them.

I would like to begin with an initiative that was conceived during the Commission's activities. The Open Library of the Colombian Peace Process (Bapp) is a digital platform that "seeks to be the most complete interactive knowledge center on the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP" (BAPP, 2023). In that sense, it is worth clarifying that its scope is greater than the work done by the Commission. The library was born through the Compaz Foundation and the financial support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy, and today it is allied with organizations that include the Universidad de los Andes, the Banco de la República, the United Nations and the Ford Foundation. With more than 4,500 documents, many of them originals, it is one of the main sources of information for the international public, but it also aims to welcome a diversity of Colombians, to whom it offers a synthesis of the agreement in 44 indigenous languages of the national territory. It also contains a section of games to be used as pedagogical material.

Other libraries throughout the country have incorporated strategies that facilitate the dissemination of the report. In the case of Bogotá, these include the Bogotá Digital Library, which in addition to offering access to more than 33 books, has held workshops such as "Colombian Law in the Bogotá Digital Library" with an emphasis on the Commission's legislation. The recently inaugurated Library of the Gilberto Alzate Avendaño Foundation inaugurated last September a cycle of four meetings of public readings and reflections on the document accompanied by concerts. Also, community libraries such as the Altamar Community Library created the workshop "Community libraries, scenarios of memory and peace". Finally, the District Secretary of Education has taken the report to public schools and launched the seventeenth edition of the Reading and Writing 2022-2023 Contest 'Come along, there is hope'. The contest was part of the District Reading, Writing and Orality Plan and received the writings of 225 students and teachers on peace and post-conflict issues.

Other cities and stakeholders have joined in. In Medellín, the second largest city in the country, the Public Library System has held "Citizen Dialogues" and events in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, such as the Night of Truth, "cultural and artistic presentations, a recital

for peace, book donations, the screening of a documentary and a Tent for Truth" (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2022). Just a few weeks ago, the Library of the University of Antioquia received the physical volumes of the Commission's report.

In Cali the outlook is similar: the Mayor's Office, the Ministries of Culture and Education, the Public Library Network, Comfandi and the Bibliotec Foundation have joined forces, for example, to jointly organize the VII International Meeting of Public and School Libraries "Reading and Libraries: Agents of Social and Educational Transformation". Pasto, Sabaneta and Manizales, as well as dozens of other cities, have also made their libraries zones of peace. Non-governmental organizations such as the Prodepaz Foundation and La Paz Querida have the results of the Truth Commission's Final Report on their portals and even companies such as Comfenalco have carried out dissemination processes.

Amid this avalanche of talks, workshops and academic events, it is worth highlighting other initiatives that have managed to combine the Commission's report with literature, art and culture. Past editions of the Bogota Book Fair, one of the oldest in Latin America, were the scene of academic and literary events. Last year, "Voices for the legacy of the Truth Commission" reached diverse audiences through activities such as "New perspectives on the conflict in literature", "Comics and conflict" and "Poetry slam: poetry as a stage for action in the midst of the conflict". Likewise, the National University of Colombia and the University of Bristol (England) worked together on an interactive documentary entitled "Memory from the margins", which gathers the voices of victims of the conflict through photographs, songs and podcasts. These are important efforts to disseminate the report in its multiplicity, capitalizing on Colombia's multiculturalism and bringing it closer to all types of audiences.

There are two experiences that I believe can contribute to the understanding of the magnitude and difficulty involved in making libraries territories of peace in a country like Colombia. One of them is completely virtual; the other has travelled throughout the country, village by village. One of them was born only months after the dissolution of the Commission; the other has been accompanying libraries and collectives in their reconciliation processes for years. Despite their differences, both share the fact that they are backed by public entities and headed by teams that believe in peace and have left their skin and heart in what they do. They are the library of the CNMH and *Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia*, a collection of the virtual library of the Banco de la República.

The CNMH and the National Library of Colombia: a match made in heaven

As head of the National Network of Public Libraries, the National Library has played a leading role during the conflict. However, one of its greatest contributions in the last year has taken place hand in hand with the CNMH thanks to the strategy that resulted in the poem that opens this section.

In March 2022, the CNMH and the National Library of Colombia signed agreement 4470-2021 to "define a route for social appropriation of historical memory in libraries and promote the participation of victims of the armed conflict, as a way to contribute to truth, historical memory and symbolic reparation" (CNMH, 2022b). The Center aims to uncover the armed conflict, understood as a historical process that includes the peace agreement signed in 2016 but transcends it. Unlike the Commission, this is a permanent institution affiliated to the national government that enforces Law 1448 of 2011, the so-called Victims Law. To this end,

it has cooperated since its creation with other institutions such as the Center for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation and the Casa de la Memoria Museum.

The agreement seeks to take the accounts of what happened in the conflict to the libraries within the Network of Public Libraries of Colombia, understood as a network of networks. It has two main objectives: to develop their collections and to carry out pedagogical actions to enliven these collections as per the local features of each territory. It is an enormous challenge for a small team like the Center's Library, which also offers consultation services for researchers and training for librarians at the CNMH headquarters. To discuss this topic, I interviewed Nartyjulieth Vásquez, a librarian who has dedicated her life to libraries and is part of the Center.

The work began several years ago to capitalize on the diversity of materials that the CNMH has produced, so rigorous that many served as a documental and methodological source for the Commission's work. However, since the signing of the agreement, they set out to reach at least 50% of all public libraries in the country. In 2022 alone, "4,649 materials produced by the CNMH, both physical and digital, were sent to the 32 departments of the country to be at the service of the community, classified, catalogued and processed in 332 public libraries in 303 municipalities" (CNMH, 2022). Among these materials are those associated with the Truth Commission, which have been a great complement, very mediatic in its beginnings, for the construction of the conflict narrative.

In addition to this distribution, training for librarians in charge of local libraries is also provided. The pedagogical activities that they plan seek to raise awareness among Colombian citizens about what happened during the conflict. This is not a linear or standardized account, because "to be able to talk about historical memory you have to talk about collective memory, and to be able to talk about collective memory you have to start from the memory of individuals," says Nartyjulieth. Nartyjulieth found that there rarely is a line that divides librarians from victims.

I met a librarian who said that, thank God, she was not a victim and that she thought it was too painful, that she did not believe she could work on actions to talk about the armed conflict. When I asked why, she said: "because in this town there have been many guerrilla takeovers". I asked her how many, and she told me three. And I asked her: "you are not a victim of the conflict, but you survived three guerrilla takeovers? She answered: "yes, the bomb fell on the house next door and killed *them*. It didn't do anything to us... But to be honest the last takeover was horrific because I was pregnant." So, the woman had survived two guerrilla takeovers and in the third one, in the middle of the bullets, a teen member of the guerrilla noticed that she was pregnant, stopped his rifle and took her to her house so that she could start labor. But she does not consider herself a victim of the armed conflict.

Anecdotes like this explain why the work with the 214 librarians she accompanied last year was personalized and careful. The sessions took more than two hours and allowed for a careful exploration that included choosing the theme of the activities, reviewing the associated material, and defining the methodology (which included film forums, gatherings, kites, planting trees in honor of missing persons, and traditional dances dedicated to the victims). All

this under precepts unique to each community, for example, that "for many indigenous communities the conflict is not the conflict we speak of: the conflict began in the conquest. For many Palenquero communities the conflict is not only the conflict we talk about, the conflict comes from slavery."

In 2022 alone, Routes of Memory included "143 socialization and circulation activities [and] covered 144 libraries in 127 municipalities in the departments of Bolívar, Boyacá, Caldas, César, Cundinamarca, Huila, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Risaralda, Santander, Sucre, Tolima and Valle del Cauca" (CNMH, 2022). Nartyjulieth and her team reached prisons, indigenous cabildos, schools and libraries. This outreach is especially impressive considering that the agreement between the National Library and the CNMH covers the possibility of pooling human resources for joint actions, but no budget. This year, while the new agreement is being signed, Nartyjulieth and her team continue to accompany libraries and institutions of higher education in Bogotá in their memory-building processes. "This is about heart and guts, as they say. This is not just about collections and cataloging," she says with conviction.

The Commission's legacy... in a virtual collection

"This country definitely needs to know what happened in the conflict. I feel that because the violence has gone on for so long, we are anesthetized against the pain, we are anesthetized against the violence. I think the report does a great job in trying to summarize, trying to compile, trying to understand the magnitude of everything that happened to us," says Andres Ramirez. Andres is a historian who until recently was part of the team behind the virtual collection *Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia* in the virtual library of the Banco de la República. Before that, as part of the cataloguing team of the Commission's Mission Information System, Andrés helped the teams that made up the Commission to determine which documents they wanted to leave in the official archive. This hard work gave him a holistic understanding of the diversity of topics investigated by the Commission. Therefore, it seems a natural progression that after its dissolution he was one of the six people chosen by the Bank to create, from scratch, a virtual collection.

The task began in September 2022. The Bank, beyond its role as the country's central bank, has established itself as one of the most respected guardians of the country's cultural heritage thanks to the Banco de la República Cultural Network, which brings together 29 cultural centers throughout the country, a network of libraries (including the oldest virtual library in Latin America), and several museums. The Bank showed great support for the work of the Commission and even expressed interest in being responsible for its legacy. Although that did not happen, it currently has three teams committed to perpetuating its work: the project team of the Luis Ángel Arango Library, *La paz se toma la palabra*, and the virtual collection team of Andrés and his colleagues, in its beginnings under the leadership of director Juan Pablo Angarita.


Figure 4.
Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia

Banco de la República
Biblioteca Virtual

Explorar Acerca de Nuestras colecciones Proyectos web Recursos electrónicos Items guardados

Búsqueda Avanzada

Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia



Acerca de esta colección

Esta colección digital pone a disposición de la ciudadanía una selección curada y organizada del Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad con el propósito de contribuir a su divulgación y propiciar espacios de lectura y diálogo en torno a los hechos, contextos y factores de persistencia de la violencia en Colombia. La curaduría se realizó teniendo en cuenta la posición plural de la Comisión de la Verdad, poniendo en el centro a las víctimas y reconociendo las responsabilidades compartidas de todos los que participaron, directa o indirectamente, en el conflicto armado colombiano. Su objetivo es animar a quienes la visiten a pensar y actuar en torno a la no repetición, dando a conocer los documentos que resultaron del trabajo de la Comisión. Estos documentos incluyen los tomos completos de Informe Final, al igual que documentos de trabajo y archivos sonoros, gráficos y audiovisuales producidos entre 2018 y 2022.

Esta colección digital está organizada de la siguiente manera:

Capítulos del Informe Final: Esta sección incluye los tomos del Informe Final *Hay futuro si hay Verdad*, además de anexos que muestran los resultados del proceso de investigación, análisis y contrastación de información realizado por la Comisión desde el 2018 hasta el 2022 (37 contenidos: PDF, MP3, MP4).

Impactos y afectaciones del conflicto armado: Esta sección reúne contenidos digitales que ayudan a entender lo ocurrido en el conflicto armado colombiano, al igual que sus impactos y afectaciones en diferentes poblaciones y territorios del país (150 contenidos: DNE y MP3).

Source: Banco de la República. (2023). Legado de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia. <https://babel.banrepcultural.org/digital/collection/comision-col>

The idea of creating a collection that would complement and enhance the Commission's collection was born because the Commission left such a "tremendously broad, extensive, and in some ways very difficult to approach legacy," says Andrés. "We have so many resources on so many places and you can access them in so many ways that sometimes people are afraid of that: they take a little step back and say 'I don't understand where to start'." So they set out to make a careful selection of resources accompanied by a comprehensive yet simple cataloging based on the Commission's thesaurus. One that would allow the public to filter conflict information by topic, Commission recommendation (which consist of over 70 proposals it made to Colombian society to preserve peace), and geographic location in a much more efficient way. The collection has two components: one on the conflict, entitled *Impacts and Affectations of the Armed Conflict*, and another on the present and future called *Dialogue, Coexistence and Peacebuilding*. By the time it was launched at the April Book Fair this year, it already had 330 resources, including interviews, radio programs, podcasts, reports and books.

The collection seeks to reach three audiences. The first is the network of mediators that extends the services of the Banco de la República to almost 30 places in Colombia and works hand in hand with La paz se toma la palabra to disseminate the virtual collection. This public acts as a bridge between the team of which Andrés was a member and the communities that attend the cultural centers, acting as dynamizers. Secondly, there is the audience of researchers inside and outside the country for whom this can be a very useful tool. And, finally, the school population of children and adolescents in grades 9, 10 and 11, for whom special summary materials have been designed in simple language. This, says Andrés, is one of the most demanding tasks. To facilitate access for the three audiences, it is possible to retrieve resources in the collections using filters for basic and secondary education, non-formal and community education, and for higher education and researchers.

Due to the novelty of the collection, the team does not yet have much data on its reception by the public. But they hope that the collection will continue to grow and carry the legacy of the Commission to all parts of the country and beyond. Like the Comision itself, says Andrés, this collection is betting on "leaving the victims at the center, beyond political polemics, beyond ideologies, beyond anything."

Challenges and lessons learned: a road ahead

The aforementioned experiences have faced and overcome difficulties of all kinds thanks to a powerful combination of will, resilience and collaboration. The following are some of the challenges they converge on.

First, such a diverse and painful conflict can be examined from infinite perspectives. Considering the moral responsibility of memory building, as well as the demographic particularities of the users and their experiences and beliefs associated with the conflict, the question of what to disseminate and to whom is traversed by enormous human sensitivity, on the one hand, and technical concepts and tools, on the other.

With respect to the latter, there are multiple methodologies and approaches that can contribute to the collection development process. In the case of the joint work between the National Library and the CNMH, a committee evaluated the nature and characteristics of the users' regions and established complementary guidelines for the cataloguing, classification and physical preparation of the materials. Banco de la República combined the expert opinion of the team members with the use of the Commission's knowledge classification systems, for example, through its thesaurus and geographic categorization. Other experiences such as that of Restrepo-Fernandez (2022) are valuable in this regard.

With regard to human sensitivity, Nartyjulieth stresses the importance of considering the interests and experiences of the library community, which includes both the librarians in charge of activities and collections and their users. It is imperative that the choice of topics to be covered, as well as the materials that support them, results of a careful balance between the themes that may generate greater interest and sensibility (due to geographic, historical or gender variables, for example) and the duty to avoid victims revictimization. "Provision of information should be inclusive, that is, it should cater for the needs of all citizens" (Itsekor et al, 2007). This implies that planning of all activities should actively involve community representatives and consider, if possible, expert psychosocial accompaniment.

In this context, the work of librarians goes far beyond their purely disciplinary scope. During the interviews with Andrés and Nartyjulieth I was struck by the fact that, despite their differences of the work they do, they both have the same thoughtful, stubborn gleam in their eyes when they talk about the transcendence of their work and how it marked a turning point in their lives. For Andrés, his work in the Commission and in the Bank generated a deep sensitivity for the conflict and its victims and the certainty that "this country is much broader than what we have thought, much more diverse than we imagine it to be". For Nartyjulieth, it has allowed her to travel village by village through 25 of Colombia's 32 departments and has made her more aware of her own condition as a victim of the conflict. For her,

These are materials that transit our own historicity, that transit our heart, that confront us with the vulnerability that we have when we become aware of our lack of clarity about our space, our roles and ourselves in the midst of the conflict.

For this reason, reading, analyzing and sharing memories of the Colombian conflict is not purely intellectual work. "The conflict is not something objective: it is lived by the people. That is why it is subjective and tremendously emotional. We cannot study it with distance, with the pretension of 19th century scientific objectivity," says Andrés. Librarians are not exempt

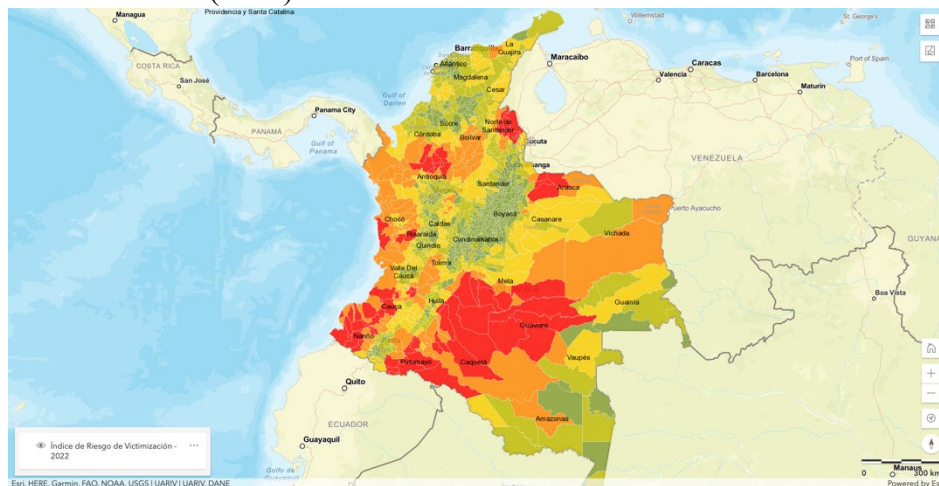
from this: Nartyjulieth found that more than 90% of librarians in her territory are direct victims of the conflict, although many are not aware of it. The challenges of librarian training for post-conflict, therefore, go far beyond traditional curricula and require us to bet on interdisciplinarity. Librarians need to master topics as diverse as self-knowledge, national legislation, human rights and emotional containment protocols.

Jaramillo (2016) had already announced it:

It is necessary that the bet is oriented towards the training of librarians and promoters of high-level reading, writing and orality to face the complexity of peace and social conflict. Librarians should reinvent themselves every day, join efforts, take risks, undertake initiatives and dream. This approach requires mediation, coordination and organization of a public library skills, to reaffirm its vocation as a seedbed of dialogue, coexistence, cohesion and memory, where peace can germinate.

To the challenge of what and how to disseminate is added the geographical variable discussed above. Areas most affected by the conflict are precisely those with fewer libraries, and libraries with fewer resources, as can be seen by comparing the distribution of the National Network of Libraries with the Victimization Risk Index for each department. In fact, the Truth Commission was the first government institution to reach several of the country's villages hit by the war. There are even areas where it would be impossible for libraries to carry out dissemination actions at this time. In this scenario, ICTs have become important allies that both the CNMH and the Banco de la República have capitalized on. During the quarantines imposed by Covid 19, all their work, like that of the Commission, was virtual.

Figure 5.
Victimization Risk Index (2022)



Source: Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas. (2023). *Índice de Riesgo de Victimización 2022*. <https://vgv.unidadvictimas.gov.co/irv/>

Notes: This is a composite indicator formulated by the Unit for the Integral Attention and Reparation of Victims to compare the risk a citizen has of being a victim in various municipalities of the country.

In the case of the Banco de la República, the commitment to the digital continues because the flexibility and practicality of these platforms make it possible to multiply its audience. For

example, to reach the thousands of Colombians who have been exiled during the war, to whom the report dedicates one of its chapters. It is also important to keep in mind that despite the tireless work of the CNMH team and the Library Network, the magnitude of the national territory and the human and financial costs associated with the deliveries are huge. Only now, a year after the report was published, are the physical volumes arriving in libraries in many parts of the country. Nartyjulieth states categorically:

The Commission cannot reach every place, no matter how many people it has. It would need at least one person in each of the towns of Colombia, in the more than one thousand towns of Colombia, to do it in person and every one of them would have to go to nearing rural areas, corregimientos, resguardos, palenques.... That is impossible, we do not have the human infrastructure to do it.

Virtuality has made it possible to anticipate the arrival of materials, at least when the territories have the necessary resources to access them (such as electricity and internet). When these conditions do not exist, strategies such as podcasts on cell phones and the use of community radio are an excellent alternative. Nartyjulieth corroborated that "the implications of new technology for public awareness, promoting quality are seen as positive in the changing patterns of librarianship" (Bhatti, 2010).

For Andrés these advantages are undeniable, given that from its very conception the Commission report was thought from a transmedia approach that cannot exist without the help of ICTs. However, he also knows "that there is nothing that reaches people more than the physical. When one person meets another and starts talking, when you pick up a book and start reading it.... It seems to me that this has an important force," he confessed towards the end of the interview. In this sense, the compilation and curatorial work of an initiative such as the virtual collection is an initial, vital step that is magnified and dignified when teams such as the CNMH use it to reach, face to face, the territories affected by the conflict. On-site and virtual strategies can converge to make libraries more open, modern actors that extend their message of peace to frontiers that were once impossible thanks to technology.

Another challenge that unites the experience of Colombian libraries stems from the fact that the work of the Commission, due to its nature, left an almost unmanageable amount of resources. Many of them of academic nature and therefore inaccessible to a large part of the Colombian population, including the youngest. In this scenario, the creation of summarized narratives in simplified languages, respectful of the conflict and its victims, is a challenge. The purpose is to build on the collections of the Commission and the CNMH; not to replace them. For Nartyjulieth, "it is necessary to generate spaces for the word to emerge, and the word can be painted, it can be sung, it can be woven". Some elements of the Banco de la República collection and several of the strategies compiled point in this direction (for example, the documentary of the Universidad Nacional and the pedagogical section of the Open Library of the Colombian Peace Process). But there is no doubt that this task requires great care and demands human and financial resources that not all libraries possess.

A next point to explore is the need to turn libraries into leading actors in the memory building process without isolating them. On the contrary: peacebuilding calls for libraries to collaborate, hand in hand, with private and public actors that can enhance their work. In the two case studies we looked at in detail, the alliance with entities with a territorial presence allows the strategies of the CNMH and the virtual collection of the Banco de la República to

be expanded and enriched throughout Colombia. In many of the other examples, engaging educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and multilateral agencies may enhance the visibility of the strategies and increase their credibility, as well as expand their funding opportunities (as suggested by Gorvie, 2005 for Sierra Leone). These collaborative approaches should also include the libraries themselves. Together they could make the legacy of the Commission more powerful.

Finally, it is undeniable that this task is undertaken amid a polarized Colombia. While libraries enjoy a legitimacy that make them ideal spaces for dissemination and discussion of the report, the Truth Commission and the peace process itself continue to be the subject of controversy in the midst of a political environment that confronts the government of the country's first elected leftist president (BBC, 2022) with Colombia's traditional power structures. According to Nartyjulieth, "there are political confrontations, and we cannot deny that there are actions that have moved in a very particular way at certain times, but when one sits down to work with libraries that does not matter: libraries do not work based on political intentions, but rather for community work."

Towards the present and the future

“Libraries and librarians will not, of themselves, achieve greater equality, reduce poverty, protect the environment, promote human rights, engender mutual respect between people of different views and backgrounds.

But we can make our contribution – and it can be, I believe, a significant contribution”
McKee (2002), in his address to the United Nations.

During decades of conflict, Colombian libraries have taken on the enormous challenge of contributing, just as McKee suggested, to the construction of peace in the country through all kinds of initiatives: virtual and on-site, academic and recreational, governmental and private. Seven years after the signing of the peace accords and one year after the publication of the Truth Commission's report, this commitment is as strong as ever and is manifested in diverse strategies throughout the country that carry the story of the conflict to millions of Colombians. This study addresses the history and particularities of two of them: the Legacy of the Truth Commission collection of the Virtual Library of the Banco de la República, and the work of the CNMH library in association with the National Network of Public Libraries.

Although different in scope and methodology, both strategies share a deep respect for the victims and for the legacy of the Commission. The experience of both, as well as that of other libraries, shows that there are important challenges inherent in peace-building itself, especially because in the case of Colombia "we are doing it while the conflict is happening, not when the conflict has passed," as Nartyjulieth stated. Therefore, the key challenge for the country, as well as for other regions of the world, "is that all voices must be heard, all of them: those we do not want to hear, those we agree with, those that hurt us, and those that we cannot imagine".

To achieve an effective and ethical dissemination, it is imperative to approach this topic with compassion, recognizing the diversity of perspectives and experiences associated with the conflict. As such, interdisciplinary training for librarians is a must. We need to understand and address the complex post-conflict era not only from our technical knowledge but also from our own human condition. Perhaps even from our own condition as victims. Furthermore, in all the experiences analyzed, implementation of technologies has proven to be a valuable tool to reach

remote communities and expand the scope of memory building. In Colombia, as in other areas of the world, "high tech is seen as positive for widespread awareness and better-quality information in the evolving framework of librarianship" (Itsekor et al, 2017).

The experiences also highlight that it is crucial that the narratives created are accessible, dynamic and understandable to the public, promoting a deep and reflective understanding of the Colombian conflict that can draw on its own cultural and artistic expressions. Finally, collaboration with public and private actors emerges as a key strategy to enrich and strengthen the role of libraries in the construction of memory, especially in a polarized context. In summary, in the words of Andrés: "those who are facing post-conflict in other parts of the world have to know that this requires money, it requires financial muscle, it requires patience, it requires effort, it requires time." But also, I would dare to say, they must know that this is one of the most important tasks for societies that, like Colombia, are going through the intricate and yearned post-conflict journey.

Acknowledgments

I thank Nartyjulieth Vásquez, Andrés Ramírez and Leonardo Sarmiento for their sincerity, trust and invaluable support throughout this project.

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