

Pedagogy for peace as a strategy for the transformation of social imaginaries of violence in children in the Catatumbo region

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Abstract

This article carries out a documentary study using the hermeneutical method¹, with the purpose of analyzing the social reality in which children live in the midst of the armed conflict in the Catatumbo region, emphasizing the serious effects that this situation generates in the integral development of childhood and also how violence takes over this reality and influences the ways of perceiving the social world through imaginaries in favor of violence which affects their social construction process and has an impact on the adult of tomorrow. Therefore, from the theory of social constructionism², the text describes the self-creative and transformative capacity of the human being, which promotes change

processes, in the face of a reality disturbed by the violence that affects the construction of subjectivities and identities of children, based on methodologies and strategies proposed from the pedagogy for peace, being their design and implementation a priority that should be included within the regional agenda in Catatumbo, aimed to work against the effects of the armed conflict on children and move from a violent culture to a culture of peace.

Keywords: Children, social imaginaries, social construction of reality, pedagogy for peace, violence, armed conflict, Catatumbo.

Introduction

One of the particularities of the Colombian armed conflict is its multiplicity of causes, actors, consequences and its accentuated location in the regions and zones of the Colombian periphery, characterized mainly by their rurality and historically marginalized by the political system (National Center of Historical Memory -CNMH-, 2013). One of these zones is the region of Catatumbo, in the department of Norte de Santander, where various guerrilla groups

- 1 Hermeneutics is the act of interpretation. The hermeneutical analysis is framed in the qualitative paradigm that allows the understanding of texts through an intentional and contextual interpretive exercise, that is, it seeks to deepen the thought structures built by the author, capturing their meaning in the particular context of interpretation of reality. Among the main authors are Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, among others (Cár-camo, 2005).
- 2 Social constructionism is framed in contemporary sociology and among its main exponents are Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who point out that "our daily reality is socially constructed through the objectification of social patterns that are constructed and negotiated within our daily social practices. The main means of objectifying these patterns will be the daily linguistic operations that occur in each social community. Therefore, reality is constructed as a historical process within the social interactions allowed by language" (cited by Lopez-Silva, 2013)

have settled, maintaining control over the territory, and where the paramilitary groups have also made incursions and the population has a high level of unsatisfied basic needs, due to the limited presence of the State (CNMH, 2018). According to reports presented by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Norte de Santander (2019), it is evident that the internal armed conflict has intensified and that there is concern about the increase in recent years of violations of human rights (HRD) and international humanitarian law (IHL) in Catatumbo.

In view of this situation, the present article aims at directing the attention towards the effects and the deep marks that the armed conflict generates in boys and girls and the way in which this influences the social construction in the first years of life where the bases for the integral development of the human being are forged and that, in view of the daily life of war, the patterns and symbols that are formed in the middle of it are creating social imaginaries of violence. In this regard, Grajales in his article entitled "The hidden pain of childhood", points out the following:

The most devastating effect of the armed conflict on the child population living in the areas of high confrontation is the formation of scenarios favorable to violence. Children easily learn that weapons give "power", that force turned into violence offers spaces for recognition and that, in acts of atrocity in which the bodies of the enemies are mutilated, violence is exercised without limits or control (1999, pág. 23).

This is how children create their subjectivities and identities influenced by their experiences, customs, cultures, values, by what they see, hear and feel from their environment and by the way adults show them the world, all this in their condition of direct or indirect victims or simply as spectators of a series of acts of physical, psychological and symbolic violence that occur in the midst of war and between conditions of inequality and poverty.

In addition, it is evident how youngsters are used by the armed actors as informants, collaborators, combatants and as labor in the cultivation of illicit crops, which is why recruitment occurs as a form of direct linkage, either voluntarily³ promoted by the desire to obtain recognition, power, revenge, or by the lack of opportunities, in search of protection and ideological sympathy or abuse at home. It also occurs in a forced manner when they are forced and pressured to belong to an armed group or the birth bonding that occurs when children are the children of combatants and grow up being considered the property of the illegal organization (Romero & Chávez, 2008).

Therefore, at the present time of implementation of the peace agreement, it is imperative to make far-reaching changes in the environment of children. For this, the present investigation proposes, from a theoretical look and from significant experiences implemented in similar contexts, the pedagogy for peace as a strategy for the transformation of social scenarios of violence in boys and girls in the middle of the armed conflict in the region of Catatumbo, after an analysis of the specific social context and the understanding and interpretation of secondary sources that demonstrate the impacts and effects generated by the armed conflict on children, as well as the theoretical postulates that support the creation of social imaginaries that somehow influence the construction of subjectivities and identities in children. This is done with the purpose of evidencing a problem that must reach a higher priority in solutions by the government and society, besides facilitating inputs that can be put into practice and allow social reconstruction processes.

3 "According to the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation and the ICBF, the concept of «voluntariness» in recruitment must always and in all cases be understood as the combination of external factors that force children and adolescents to make decisions that are flawed by principle" (cited by Romero & Chávez, 2008, p. 200)

Children in the midst of the armed conflict in Catatumbo

The Catatumbo sub-region is located in the department of Norte de Santander, in northeastern Colombia, and is currently made up of eleven municipalities: Teorama, Convención, Hacarí, El Carmen, El Tarra, San Calixto, Tibú, La Playa, Ocaña, Abrego and Sardinata, which represent about 50% of the department's territory and concentrate about 11% of its population. It is a border sub-region, mostly rural and with a high population dispersion, with ethnic and natural diversity, rich in mineral-energy resources and has been historically a marginalized zone with high vulnerabilities due to weak institutional presence (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2013)⁴. With the exception of Ocaña, its municipalities are identified as sixth category and according to the most recent government statistics, more than 45% of the population has unmet basic needs - UBN - and more than 15% lives in conditions of extreme poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2019, p. 12).

In addition, since the 1970s and 1980s, the region has been influenced by guerrilla organizations such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), the People's Liberation Army (EPL) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC EP) (currently by the dissident members of the latter two organizations, taking into account the agreements between these groups and the national government), which have maintained a political, military and economic dispute over this territory. Towards the 1990s, paramilitarism made incursions

under the structures of the Northern Bloc and the Catatumbo Bloc, mainly with the interest of ending the guerrillas, controlling the strategic corridor for the connection with various regions of the country and the border with Venezuela, taking over the income from the coca economy, allowing the exploitation of natural resources and annihilating the processes of social and community organization, imposing social and territorial control until the year 2006 when the last blocks demobilized. This period was also marked by the perpetration of extrajudicial executions by the public forces, with the most victimizing acts being committed between 2006 and 2008 (CNMH, 2018).

Thus, decades of violence are evident as a result of the presence of different armed actors in a region that is still identified as one of the most complex in terms of public order in the country and where the civilian population is constantly exposed to serious human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law. According to the National Information Network -RNI- of the Unit for Victims, the Victimization Risk Index -VRI⁵- in most of the municipalities in the region of Catatumbo is high, with the exception of Ocaña and Abrego which are at medium risk and La Playa which is medium high. This same source reports 137,881⁶ victims of the armed conflict in the 11 municipalities that make up the region, of which 26,237 are children between the ages of 0-11 years, and of these, 20,806 are in need of care⁷.

4 Law 1551 of 2012, which modernizes the organization and operation of municipalities, in its 7th article establishes the categorization of districts and municipalities according to their population, current incomes of free destination, economic importance and geographical location. In this way, they are classified in: first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth category and a special one. Municipalities in the sixth category are those that have free destination current income -ICDL-annually not exceeding 15,000 legal monthly minimum wages, their economic importance is grade seven and their population is equal to or less than 10,000 inhabitants or having a greater number of population does not reach the established IC DL

5 See <https://vgv.unidadvictimas.gov.co/>. Consultation date 03/14/2020.

6 The figures presented were taken according to victims by location, that is, persons recognized within the framework of Law 1448 of 2011, who, taking into account the last known location, live in the territory. Taken from <https://cifras.unidadvictimas.gov.co/Cifras/#!/enfectoDiferencial>. Consultation date 03/14/2020

7 Victims in need of care refers to the persons recognized in the framework of Law 1448 of 2011, who can effectively access care and / or reparation measures. They do not present news of death due or not to the victimizing event, identified with a number of valid documents and have requested humanitarian aid directly or through a relative, according to the last known location. Taken from <https://cifras.unidadvictimas.gov.co/Cifras/#!/enfectoDiferencial>. Consultation date 03/14/2020



Despite the signing of the Peace Agreement between the national government and the FARC-EP, conditions in the Catatumbo region remain unfavorable. According to the "Insecurity in Catatumbo: The Weak Point of Territorial Transformation" analysis, carried out by the Ideas for Peace Foundation (2020), the humanitarian crisis in this region is becoming increasingly acute, due, among other things, to the lack of strategies to guarantee security conditions, since, although there is a greater presence of public forces, their interventions are more reactive and less preventive and do not guarantee the protection of the communities. This situation has led to serious effects on the civilian population due to restrictions on mobility as a result of armed strikes in the midst of the confrontation between the ELN and the EPL over territorial control and the business of illegal economies, the influence of FARC-EP dissidents, and the humanitarian crisis caused by the migration of the Venezuelan population, who have also showed a high level of vulnerability within the armed conflict.

According to Human Rights Watch (2019, p. 22), more than 40.000 people in Catatumbo were displaced between 2017 and 2019, mainly due to confrontation between the ELN and the EPL and between the illegal armed groups and the public forces; the homicide rate more than doubled from 112 in 2015 to 231 in 2018, and events such as the murders of human rights defenders and social leaders, kidnappings, disappearances, crimes against sexual integrity, the use of antipersonnel mines, the recruitment of children and adolescents, and terrorist attacks are constant and increasing in this region.

On the other hand, drug trafficking and illicit crops are another great difficulty in Catatumbo, which has also allowed armed groups to remain in the territory. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), by 2018, about 33.598 hectares were being used in Norte de Santander for cocaine cultivation and 88% of

these are concentrated in Catatumbo, mainly in Tibú, Sardinata, El Tarra and Teorama, a situation that has been increasing significantly in recent years, with Catatumbo contributing 18% of the total potential production of fresh coca leaf and 16% of the total potential production of cocaine base in the country (2019).

Well, in the midst of all this context, children are silent spectators, direct and indirect victims and their integral development is highly affected. In a research carried out on the effects of the Colombian armed conflict on children and adolescents (León Giraldo, 2017), the effects suffered by this population are exposed, either in a direct way on their physical, psychic and moral integrity or in an indirect way when the integrity of their parents and/or relatives is hampered and the main characteristics and dynamics of the violence exerted on them are highlighted, as shown below

- *Utilization of children and adolescents in the armed conflict:* for the International Labor Organization (ILO), (cited by León Giraldo, 2017, p. 19) The use of boys and girls in the armed conflict is one of the worst forms of child labor, since by means of threats against them or their families or promises of money and protection, they are coerced to join the ranks of illegal armed groups, being exposed to different violations of their rights, such as the limitation of access to education, use as labor in illicit crops and coca production, as informants and combatants, and subjection to sexual abuse, especially of girls. According to a Human Rights Watch report, between 2017 and 2018, 14 minors were recruited by armed groups in Catatumbo; however, this same organization states that the statistics and the cases reported do not reflect the number and seriousness of all the abuses, since many facts are not reported for fear of reprisals by the armed groups (2019, pág. 22 y 36).

- *Forced displacement*: one of the causes of displacement is the threat of forced recruitment of children, in addition to the dispossession of land, confrontations, disappearances and other victimizing events to which families in areas of armed conflict are exposed, situations that generate a fracture of the social fabric and support networks, uprooting, separation from the family nucleus, interruption of the educational process, greater vulnerability to physical and emotional mistreatment, sexual abuse, domestic violence, conditions of marginalization and in some cases extreme poverty or begging.
- *Sexual violence*: this type of violence has been used by armed groups as a weapon of war to break in and to deal with community resistance. Although the greatest risk for the female child population is in cases of recruitment, the exposure of children in conflict zones to the risk of sexual violence is permanent.
- *Abandonment or orphanage*: many children are exposed to transitory or permanent abandonment after being victims of the homicide or disappearance of their parents or caretakers or when they are children of combatant parents and are given to support families. Their rights to protection, care, education, health and integral development of their early childhood are violated, affecting their life project.
- *Anti-personnel mines*: these explosive devices are an imminent risk for children who, in the midst of their games, curiosity and desire to explore, have become victims. The region of Catatumbo has different risk alerts issued by the Ombudsman's Office due to the high presence of antipersonnel mines and unexploded ordnance and a constant concern is the minefields near

schools⁸, which causes the suspension of classes in the affected educational centers and with this, the rights of children to education, life, physical and emotional integrity, health and recreation are violated.

- *Kidnapping*: this method can be used either for recruitment or for sexual exploitation and abuse, forced labor, extortion, hostage taking, collection and indoctrination.
- *Homicides and massacres of children*: the combats and terrorist attacks between the military forces and the armed groups outside the law cause the direct victimization of children.

In addition to this, there are many other situations within the framework of the armed conflict that have a similar impact on children, such as the confinement of the civilian population by illegal armed groups, terrorist attacks, confrontations and fighting, fumigation of illicit crops and work in these areas, the latter being a cause of school dropouts, attacks and occupation of schools by armed actors, in addition to the limitations established for the development of daily life such as not being able to travel on certain roads or access certain water sources, not being able to play in some spaces and the fear, uncertainty and hopelessness that are appropriated in this daily life (Save the Children Canada -SCC-; Organization of Ibero-American States -OIS-, 2009).

As can be seen, children living in areas of armed conflict are deeply affected in their physical, social, affective, cognitive and emotional development, more so when early childhood is one of the transcendental stages of human beings for the configuration of their social and cultural structure and for the increase of their positive awareness of diversities, the

8 See <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/campos-minas-impiden-la-jornada-escolar-en-el-catatumbo-245450>. Consultation date 03/14/2020

creation of content, meanings and assertive images. Thus, the constant transformation of daily life due to the armed conflict permeates and disturbs the construction of identities, since it weakens the bases of upbringing and development due to traumas, situations of fear, rage, rejection and abuse, as well as affective circles, indispensable for the construction of bonds of trust and the containment of difficult situations, finding themselves in scenarios of socialization influenced by the culture of illegality and values, practices and images that induce the naturalization of violence, as pointed out by the National Plan of Attention and Reparation to Victims through Decree 1725 of 2012:

The armed conflict destroys the vital spaces of children and adolescents, their networks of relationships and their worlds of meaning. The alterations in their integral development are disproportionate in every perspective. The impacts on their family and community environments are profound, without even counting the implications for the country's general development. It is not in vain that the relevance of making visible this population, victim of the conflict, and including in the broad sense of the word the differential variable is a step towards guaranteeing the right to truth, justice and integral reparation of the children victims of the conflict and to tend towards the non-repetition of the facts.

The social construction of reality and the creation of social imaginaries of violence in children

From a phenomenological thought, Edmund Husserl stated that there is a correlation between man and the world, which means that in order to understand man, his relationship with the world must be understood, and vice versa. From this idea, Husserl sought to explain the meaning that individuals give to their experiences and tried to describe the significant subjective structures, those phenomena given to consciousness. In other words, he sought to

understand how the worlds are constructed within the subjects. Thus, this author created as part of his phenomenological theory the concept of *Lebenswelt*, which means the world of life (quoted by Herrera Restrepo, 2010).

Later, this concept is taken up again by Alfred Schutz (1974, pp. 38-39), who goes into it in depth from the social world, that intersubjective world, common to all men, who relate to and understand each other and from this, meanings and behaviors are established, which will be interpreted and from there assume their own self-interpretation. This is how common knowledge is built, which is the result of the accumulation of knowledge and interpretations of people over time and is reflected in the social agreement on patterns of behavior, naming of objects and in general, the typification of situations that make up the language, which will be transmitted to subsequent generations.

In this way, it is understood that the world of life is everything that one begins to discover as soon as one is born and even if one wants to, from the moment one is in the womb, it is everything that comes before. Through observation, understanding, interaction, knowledge and experience, each subject creates his or her *own self*, defining his or her desires, projects, concepts and ideals and behavior, with language being the means to access the other person and the way to build knowledge and the social world.

Thus, following this constructivist perspective of Schutz, the sociologists Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger, who state that "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man⁹ is a social product" (1968, pág. 82). Through their work *The social construction of reality*, which has become a classic in contemporary sociology, they carry

⁹ For the purposes of this writing, the reference to the word man is understood from its broadest notion, that is, as a human being that includes all gender identities

out an analysis of the knowledge that guides behavior in everyday life and they state that "The social reality of everyday life is therefore apprehended in a continuum of typifications that become progressively anonymous as they move away from the 'here and now' of the 'face-to-face' situation" (1968, p. 51).

In this sense, Berger and Luckman (1968, pp. 118-121) focus on the subject as a creator of everything social, which occurs from its continuous externalization, which also leads to the formation of institutions, these being the result of a whole historical process, of habits that have been mutually accepted by the social group and whose specific function is to control human behavior under guidelines that have been defined collectively and, therefore, can hardly be changed. However, within this process of institutionalization of societies and their need for legitimization, it may happen that knowledge becomes fragmented and specialized, making it indispensable to integrate the meanings that give global and historical meaning to the fragmented social experience. It is precisely this second level of knowledge and meaning that we call the *symbolic universe*, understood as a structure or matrix of meanings that seeks to legitimize and explain socially constructed reality.

It is necessary to stop a bit at what the authors have pointed out in the face of the simultaneous process that society brings about of *externalization*, *objectification* and *internalization*, a sequence that is also developed by the individual member of society by externalizing his/her own being and the social world and internalizing it as objective reality. However, taking into account that the individual is not born a member of society, the sequence he/she follows to become part of it begins with internalization, also called the *process of socialization*, which allows him to understand his/her fellow human beings and to apprehend the pre-existing social world (1968, pp. 162-163).

Well, within this process there is a primary socialization that takes place in childhood and leads the individual to become a member of society and a secondary socialization that takes the already socialized individual to new sectors of the target world. It is extremely significant for this paper to analyze in detail the stage of primary socialization, which is assumed to be the most important for the individual, since it is where the other signifiers present the objective reality to the individual. In this regard, Luckman and Berger assert about the individual that

(...) he is born not only into an objective social structure, but also into an objective social world. The other signifiers, who mediatize the world for him, modify it in the course of that mediatization. They select aspects of the world according to the situation they occupy within the social structure and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world appears "filtered" to the individual through this double selection. Thus, does the lower class child not only absorb the social world in a lower class perspective, but absorbs it with the idiosyncratic coloring given to him by his parents (or any other individual in charge of his primary socialization). The same lower-class perspective can produce a satisfied, resigned, bitterly resentful, or ardently rebellious mood (1968, pp. 164-165).

Another transcendental contribution of primary socialization is in the definition of the subject's identity, which is constituted as a key element of the subjective reality. This identity is precisely composed from the perspective given by others and from one's own self-identification. Therefore, it is a social process that leads the individual to accept roles and attitudes and once the identity is established, it is maintained, modified or reformed by social relations, which are determined by the social structure (Berger & Luckmann, 1968, p. 214).

Therefore, returning to the concept of the symbolic universe as a social structure of objectivized and subjectively real meanings allows the subjective apprehension of the

biographical experience, giving meaning to the individual biography and the institutional order. Thus, another function of the symbolic universe is the definition of identities, since it is within this that the entire historical society and the biography of an individual occur (Berger & Luckmann, 1968, pp. 123-125). Moreover, it is within this universe that social imaginaries are created that fulfill specific functions such as the structuring of the representations of the world, the designation of the purposes of action, and the establishment of types of affects characteristic of a society (Agudelo, 2011, p. 12).

In this respect, it is convenient to delve into the concept of social imaginaries, which was specified in 1964 by the Greek-French philosopher, sociologist, economist and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis, who approached this term from the socio-historical point of view, being that capacity of creation through which individuals invent their own worlds and produce collective meanings. This social content of the concept is due to the fact that the imaginative capacity is a faculty developed in the historical life of societies and everything historical; it is derived because it is built in time and is part of their history (quoted by Agudelo, 2011). Thus, this concept can be understood as all those mental images that, from relatively conscious inheritances, creations and transfers have been collectively generated in a society and configure its symbolic context of interpretation (Martínez & Muñoz, 2009, pp. 210-211).

For his part, the philosopher and sociologist Juan Luis Pintos, as part of his research on the construction of reality, has proposed a new concept that establishes that "social imaginaries are being socially constructed schemes, which allow us to perceive, explain and intervene in what, in each differentiated system, is considered *reality*" (2005, p. 42). In this way, it is understood that the reference to *social imaginaries in the plural* is due to the fact that we live in poly-contextual societies,

that is, there is no single imaginary or truth or morality that is universally valid, so this concept is proposed with an evolutionary character that transforms, adapts and renews itself over time. Likewise, it is assumed that they are schemes, ideas that are held about something and condition behavior, which have been built within the structures and systems in which the subjects develop and which, beyond being an ideological imposition, direct perception and allow their intervention within their reality (Pintos, 2015, pp. 156-158).

In this way, social imaginaries have been defined as abstract schemes of representation that operate as a *meta-code*, since they are developed within intersystemic communication, within a specific "medium" (money, power, information, belief, etc.) proper to each differentiated social system, through the *relevance/opacity* code, which, taking into account the degree of dominance, allows us to generate forms and modes that will function as realities (Pintos, 2005, pp. 44-45).

Therefore, a basic mechanism for the construction of realities are the social imaginaries, which contain the historical, economic and social context, beliefs, cultures, social representations, paradigms and are established between the observer and reality, operating like a lens or glasses that help improve or deform the observation, but they are imperceptible, because they are naturalized elements, that is, they help perceive the world, but without observing the own imaginary (Randazzo Eisemann, 2012, p. 6). Furthermore, they are articulated with the *relevance/opacity* code, which works like the focus of a camera, making a difference between the visible, which is what appears within the *field*, and the invisible, which would be what remains *outside the field*; this is how it cannot be argued that there is only one reality, since it is constructed depending on the angle of perspective, taking into account the relevancies and opacities that are produced (Pintos, 2005, p. 20).



From the above, it is possible to determine how social imaginaries of violence are created in children. For this, it is necessary to understand the concept of violence, which has been studied by Johan Galtung (quoted by Percy, 2009, pp. 74-75) in his research on peace and social conflict and of which he has said that it has a triple dimension: direct, structural and cultural. The first one refers to that violence that manifests itself either physically, verbally or psychologically. The second is that violence that is immersed in the social, political, and economic systems that govern societies, states, and the world. Cultural violence is conceived as all that symbolic sphere that exists and is materialized in religion and ideology, in language and art, in empirical science and formal science, from which, direct and structural violence can be legitimized, since cultural violence makes these two to be perceived as reasonable or justified. Johan Galtung asserts that "culture preaches,

teaches, warns, incites, and even dulls our minds to make us see exploitation and/or repression as something normal and natural, or makes alienation possible in order to live with the appearance of not feeling its consequences" (2016, p. 155).

In this way, it is found that in complex social contexts such as the Catatumbo region, children are either victims or spectators of an armed conflict that causes permanent direct violence (forced displacement, kidnapping, terrorist attacks, homicides, threats, anti-personnel mines, recruitment, etc.) and exposed to structural violence generated by high levels of inequality and deficient access to fundamental rights such as education, health, housing, food, recreation, among others, due to decades of state abandonment and social exclusion and to a social world permeated by a cultural and/or symbolic violence with psychic power over the subjects.

Thus, violence disrupts the process of social construction and affects both the integral development and the socialization environments of boys and girls, as well as the construction of identity and citizenship, their family, social and community ties, their emotional world and cultural values, in such a way that the symbols and expressions of the violence generated in these territories are reflected in the language, the games, the forms of interaction and of perceiving the social world, in addition that, within their process of internalization, they are found with emptiness that transgress their moral development when there is a flexibility on the good and the evil, the allowed and the prohibited (SCC & OEI, 2009).

In this regard, studies carried out by the Ombudsman's Office (cited by Fajardo, Ramírez, Valencia, & Ospina, 2018, p. 8), show the internalization of values related, for example, to the image of the brave soldier within the interaction of children with the armed forces, creating images of power, freedom and autonomy that allow it to be conceived as an option within the life project or the symbolic character represented by the use of weapons and uniforms when generating attributes such as respect, recognition and status.

Similarly, the book *"Colombia: traces of conflict in early childhood"* of the Early Childhood Institute of the Organization of Ibero-American States -OIS- and the Save the Children International Alliance (2009) starts from the hypothesis that the traces of hate, retaliation and the involvement of children in the conflict can be gestated in the first years of life, when war marks directly and indirectly the daily life of boys and girls and becomes a permanent scenario, to such an extent that in these contexts of armed conflict the actors of the conflict end up not being perceived as dark forces or as a threat to order and coexistence, but as members of society, family circles and daily life. The authors of the book point out that for children this scenario generates great confusion

about the notion of authority, which ends up not being based on values and principles, but on domination, patriarchalism, authoritarian and violent control, exclusion, imposition and alignment that are the logic of war.

In addition to this, the social imagery of violence in children has also marked their forms of play, with a common practice of "playing war" or "the gunmen" using sticks and toy guns and identifying themselves as part of one of the armed groups, thus assuming roles, values, beliefs and conceptions that are part of the same conflictive social dynamics (SCC & OEI, 2009, pp. 121-122). Similarly, economic development based on illegal businesses such as the cultivation, processing and commercialization of coca, forges in children learning from this illegality. Due to the precarious economic conditions of many families, minors are forced to work in the fields from a very young age, which are sometimes illegal activities and a cause of school dropouts (Alvarado et al, 2012, pag. 204).

Consequently, there are many practices, representations, ideologies and symbols that reinforce or transform social and cultural reality. In highly conflictive territories such as Catatumbo, the culture of illegality and violence ends up permeating the consciences of individuals and creating worlds of meaning around the conflict. Children, in their continuous interaction with adults, with their environment and in the development of their understanding of being and doing within culture and society, are influenced by the social imaginaries that shape their perception and behavior in the social world.

It is as a result of this that the transcendence of the study and understanding of social imaginaries arises in order to produce significant changes in the construction of subjectivities and in the behavior of individuals. Castoriadis points out that there are two kinds of social imaginaries, the instituted one, which is that

set of meanings already established in society such as tradition, customs, and memory, and the instituting one, which is the possibility of the emergence of the new and social transformation from the constitution of new universes of meaning, but, in order to achieve radical changes, he states that it is essential to understand what one wishes to transform (quoted by Agudelo, 2011, p. 10).

In this way, within a process of conflict transformation, peace building and recovery of the social fabric, the study of social imaginaries becomes a high priority, generating greater empathy and assertiveness in the process of rebuilding ways of life, daily life and worlds of life, with children playing an important role in forging the foundations of their physical, emotional, affective and cognitive development.

The pedagogy for peace as a contribution to the construction of new social imaginaries

The line of thought proposed in this paper suggests the human being as a creative being and capable of recognizing his/her reality and transforming it, that is, with a self-creating capacity of society as Castoriadis said and as "a being with a capacity for peace" (quoted by Percy, 2009, p. 64), as Galtung states. This allows us to think about the possibility of carrying out real transformations in socially segregated territories overwhelmed by violence, through processes of peace building aimed not only at ending the war, but also at achieving greater conditions of equity and respect for human rights and the transformation of social imaginaries favorable to violence, naturalized and impregnated in behaviors, language, conceptions and in general, in the cultural and social life of the communities.

In this way, as Vincent Fisas points out "both war and peace are cultural fruits, they are the result of human decisions and social efforts" (1998, p. 4), therefore, these phenomena are

learned and unlearned. Consequently, children acquire a fundamental role, since they are a light within the process of reconstruction of humanity and in a context of extreme conditions of violation of rights such as those experienced in territories in armed conflict, actions must go far beyond the mere understanding of how social structures forge subjectivities and identities favoring social imaginaries of violence. This invites us to perceive children not from their condition of "victims", but as subjects with potentialities and capacity of agency from their own motivations and for this the look must be directed towards the process of social construction from human development (Alvarado, and others, 2012).

Therefore, it is necessary that, in addition to analyzing the process of individual and collective constitution of subjectivity and human identity, we arrange the economic, cultural, social and political conditions that make possible the existence of the subject and we help create a level of conscience of itself and of the world, in such a way that it generates its participation in its process of transformation, understanding that the subject experiences continuous conflicts that unbalance it within itself, reason why permanently it must resignify and reinvent itself and the world that surrounds it, creating new realities. Thus, human development is conceived as a process of intersubjective, contextualized and dynamic construction, which must tend to the integrity of children from its impermanent, transforming, complex, conflictive and imperfect essence (Alvarado, et al., 2012).

Because of this, the pedagogy for peace is presented as a means to potentialize human development and as a strategy for the creation of capacities oriented towards the transformation of realities disrupted by violence, conceiving that the object of the pedagogy "is the integral transformation of the human being, in his structure of conscience, in his knowledge, in his practices and in his

dispositions, for which men and women relate to nature, to others, to society and to themselves" (Zúñiga & Rocío, n.d.).

Thus the concept of peace becomes relevant, because, as mentioned, violence is composed of a triple dimension: direct, structural and cultural, so the notion of peace cannot be limited exclusively to the absence of war or violent actions, which would mean to allude to a negative peace as it has been called. Different authors have proposed a broader vision that goes from personal to social development of the individual, such as positive peace, imperfect peace, neutral peace and personal peace, which seek to recognize the social, political and economic causes that generate violence in order to create equitable and fair conditions in society through nonviolent actions, accepting also that peace is not an absolute state but a process of continuous restoration and evolution, where language and communication is indispensable for the reconstruction of social relations and the neutralization of cultural violence and each person from his/her daily life can contribute to its realization (Sánchez Cardona, 2016, pp. 68-74).

Consequently, peace should be thought of as a process rather than an end. Thus, within the theory of peace of Johan Galtung, this sociologist states that "if you want peace, prepare for peace" (quoted by Percy, 2009, p. 65) and for this he proposes *Peace with Peaceful Means*, a project that seeks to orient actions toward peace based on four fundamental aspects:

- Trust in man
- Peace as a process that can be learned and taught.
- The achievement of peace as a gradual process.
- Coherence between means and ends always resorting to non-violence (violence will always attract more violence).

Based on this, the pedagogy for peace must consider the conflict as inherent to the human being and to the society itself, without reducing it to something despicable and violent or to a mistake in relationships, but admitting its necessity and promoting its positive and transforming character. Authors such as Michael Apple, Johan Galtung and Xesús R. Jares have called this notion of conflict a *creative perspective on conflict* (Villamil, 2013, p. 28), which makes reference to the possibility of generating change and discovering potentialities in situations of disagreement, which is assimilated with the idea put forward by Fisas as "a growth in diversity that can be used to clarify relationships, provide additional paths of thought and options to act in a way not previously considered, and open up possibilities for improving the relationship" (1998, p. 13).

Thus, a fundamental task of pedagogy is to promote the establishment of a culture of peace, which is conceived, according to the educator José Tuvilla Rayo as "the set of values, attitudes, traditions, behaviors and lifestyles that, based on human rights, promotes creative relationships that contribute to the harmony of human beings with themselves, with others and with nature" (quoted by Sanchez Cardona, 2016, p. 75), based on three main components: non-violence, creativity and empathy (Galtung, 2004, p. 6).

Regarding non-violence and creativity, the concept of empathy has already been mentioned. According to a study of the research group "Education, Coexistence and Development" of the psychology department of the Los Andes University and of which the teacher Enrique Chaux is part (2012), it has been found that children who are exposed to contexts of violence more often tend to justify it and show low levels of empathy, that is, the ability to recognize or identify with the feelings of others, so they easily tend to respond aggressively to conflict situations and to pass over others to get what they want.



Consequently, this same research group has proposed the program “Classrooms in Peace” that seeks to develop citizen competences for peaceful coexistence such as empathy and assertiveness, understood as the ability to defend one’s own rights and those of others without aggression, in addition to the use of different strategies such as critical pedagogy, the delegitimization of violence through the confrontation of conflicts in a non-aggressive or passive way, the teaching of history from a more objective and analytical view, among others, allowing children to be a force of social regulation against abuse.

The importance of education within the implementation of pedagogies for peace and the construction of a culture of peace should be noted. As pointed out by teachers Manjarrés and Molano (quoted by Sánchez Cardona, 2016):

Education plays a very important and crucial role in the construction of a culture of peace, because it does not only contribute with information and knowledge, but also develops skills, competences and abilities for the internalization, appropriation and permanent strengthening of the experience and daily practice of values, attitudes and behaviors (Page 58).

Returning to the sociologists Luckman and Berger who have mentioned the importance of the process of primary socialization that takes place in childhood, which is fundamental for cognitive and emotional learning in the development of children and the creation of identities, it can be said that the school, after the family, is the main space for socialization, since much of the time during early childhood and infancy is spent in these educational settings. That is why education has been proposed as the basis for the integral development of the human being, having as a foundation the pedagogy for peace.

Thus, education for peace as a transversal axis of the entire educational system is the commitment of researchers of peace and conflict

issues in order to achieve transformations in violent scenarios. To this end, Delors (quoted by Fisas, 1998, p. 13) states that education must be based on four learning processes, which are also pillars that can guide education for peace:

- Learning to know, that is, acquiring the instruments of understanding.
- Learning to do, to be able to act on the environment.
- Learning to live together, to participate and cooperate with others in all human activities.
- Learning to be, an essential progression that is part of the three previous aspects.

In fact, education for peace must bet on a humanizing process from the intellect and above all from the affectivity, through the formation of values and principles essential for the construction of peace such as cooperation, communication, appreciation for diversity, positive expression of emotions and conflict resolution (Sánchez Cardona, 2017, p. 211), based on respect for human rights and human dignity, through a *Liberating Education* as proposed by the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997), with the axes of problematization and dialogue, that is, learning from social criticism, the recognition of the human being as an agent of transformation of his/her violent reality and horizontal relationships (Álvarez & Pérez, 2019, p. 288).

With this objective, strategies have already been implemented in educational institutions such as the Escuela Normal Superior Montes de María, located in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno in the department of Bolívar, which has suffered violence for years due to the armed conflict. On this experience, research was conducted to analyze how peace education through pedagogical strategies focused on values of peace, non-violent conflict resolution and human rights could contribute

to the prevention of recruitment and use of children and youth by illegal armed groups, school dropouts and the transformation of violent imaginaries (Perea M., 2015).

In this way, the analysis focused on the different pedagogical and culture of peace programs implemented by the institution, which began with the reformulation of the Institutional Educational Plan -PEI-, the inclusion of the Culture of Peace nucleus in it and with the training of teachers in Education for Peace, which allowed them to elaborate pedagogical projects with methodologies such as "Theater of the Oppressed and Historical Memory", with methods such as didactics, games, research and direct participation in conflict resolution, oriented towards categories such as a) education in values, b) holistic orientation, c) social change, d) integration to the environment, e) strengthening of self-esteem and f) playfulness.

As a result of the study, it became evident that the strategies implemented effectively managed to contain some of the causes that, from the individual, family and community levels, generate recruitment, given that the students were given a critical vision of the historical process of the armed conflict and not an idealization of the image of the warrior as a symbol of power and recognition. The positive impact that the use of recreational activities such as *forum theater and cinema* has on the transformation of violent images in children and young people is also highlighted, since it allows them to reflect creatively and generate opinions and emotions about specific situations in their environment, thus generating relationships of empathy and the transformation of conflicts.

Likewise, one of the main conclusions is that the visible effects of education for peace are not short term, therefore, they require a constant educational process and must be a model implemented in a transversal way to the curricula and not an independent professorship.

Furthermore, for the effects to be lasting, it is necessary that work be carried out in an articulated manner among all the protective environments (family, school, community and State), in order to guarantee the conditions for the human development of the children.

This brings up the responsibility that not only the school has in the implementation of pedagogies for peace, but also the active and articulated intervention that the State, the family and the community must make in the process of building peace. The State cannot limit itself to militarization and combating insecurity, nor can it limit itself to the mere formulation of public policies.

For its part, the family, as the fundamental basis of society and as the first instance of interaction and socialization for human development, must be an essential part of the educational processes for the eradication of violence in children. Therefore, the empowerment of families must lead to their re-signification, strengthening their powers and capacities in such a way that they can collectively and participatively rebuild their internal structures through social values such as justice, equity and respect, thus contributing to their own development and that of their communities (Alvarado, et al., 2012, pp. 193-197).

As far as the community is concerned, the pedagogues Paulo Freire and Abraham Magendzo have made great contributions to the pedagogy for peace from the thought of popular education or critical Latin American pedagogies, which aim to support the empowerment of people and communities in education for peace, understanding this process not as a civilizing task, but as a proposal for social-community construction, which implies three aspects: a) the reconstruction of the structural conditions that generate violence, b) the creation of alternative community proposals in the face of situations of

oppression, and c) the practice of transforming actions based on the alternatives proposed by the community. That is why, within this theory, the learning process occurs through practice, experiences, reasoning and the social context of the individual and the communities (cited by Muñoz Gaviria, 2016, p. 60).

Thus, as Galtung has put it, "educating for peace is teaching people how to deal more creatively, less violently, with conflict situations and giving them the means to do so" (quoted by Fisas, 1998, p. 13), but as it has been explained, this is a long road in which steps must be continuous and joint, directing special attention to the effects that armed conflict has left on children, understanding that it is in this first stage of life that the foundations for human development are laid and where one learns to interact in a peaceful manner.

Conclusions

The reflections carried out lead to establish that some of the greatest affectations left by the armed conflict and the three-dimensional violence generated around it are the traces that remain engraved in childhood and that alter their individual and collective construction. Therefore, a process of construction of peace, beyond the attainment of an absence of war, must tend for a sensitive peace for children, where their human development is a priority. Thus, one of the challenges in the region of Catatumbo is to bet on a regional agenda where the attention is focused on the integral development of children and, for this, political will and active citizen participation from sectors such as education, culture, community, among others, is essential.

In addition, a change in reality requires a cultural transformation. This is possible from the understanding of reality as a social construction and the recognition of the capacity of the human being to transform it. A starting point is to become aware of the

situation, since what is not known cannot be transformed. This is what Paulo Freire proposes through his methodology and, therefore, it is necessary to understand what it means and entails to be a child in an armed conflict zone, as well as the potentialities and capacities that can be developed by them within their process of social construction.

Therefore, since social imaginaries are a basic mechanism for the construction of realities, it is indispensable, as pointed out by the philosopher and historian Bronislaw Baczko (quoted by Riffo Pavón, 2016), to control their reproduction, dissemination and management in order to ensure their impact on individual and collective behaviors and activities. Thinking about the change from social imaginaries of violence to social imaginaries of peace leads to rethink the uses of language, practices, symbols, cultures, among other aspects, in order to eliminate from them the violence that has been impregnated through time and to generate environments of socialization that promote, from early childhood, learning based on affection, non-violence, values and respect for human rights.

In this way, understanding that actions transform conscience, the pedagogy for peace is a fundamental strategy for the potentialization of the human development of boys and girls, by means of the strengthening of their capacities and the interiorization of a culture of peace, developed in an articulated way through different methodologies and strategies compatible with the context and the needs of the territory, which entail to unlearn violent behaviors and to legitimize the culture of peace in a progressive way.

Finally, the pedagogy for peace must become a permanent working tool both in educational centers and in family, governmental and community spaces, which makes it indispensable for public officials, teachers, parents, social leaders and the community in general to be

trained in human processes and peace actions, as well as in innovative methodologies applied in similar contexts that have generated positive results, such as the Theater of the Oppressed, historical memory, critical pedagogy, among others, that promote meaningful learning, education in values, human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, understanding the transcendence of these practices for the life of the human being and the repercussion of these exercises in the achievement of a less violent and more humane society.

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