RECONCILIATION:
SEEKING PEACE AND JUSTICE THROUGH NON-OppRESSION

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Abstract

by

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Reconciliation should be seen as a process and not as a goal. The peacebuilders’ role is to make that process move forward. This thesis argues that oppression can be seen as a continuum in which oppressive reactions to oppression appear, limiting the reconciliation process. Specifically, it looks at the ways in which non-violent peace seekers react to oppression. The field of peace studies evolved as a reaction to the oppressiveness of violence, focusing on the ways to reduce it, rather than trying to understand oppression itself. As a result, reconciliation often means achieving “negative peace.” Criminal courts, truth and reconciliation commissions and peacebuilding strategies sometimes respond to reactions to oppression, contributing to the advancement of the vicious circle of oppression. The thesis also presents a tool to transform this circle into a virtuous one: non-oppression. Reconciliation, healing memory and conflict transformation are possible.
To the victims of violence and oppression
To the Peace students
# CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## FOREWORD

## INTRODUCTION

1. Presentation of Theses ............................... 1
2. Methodology ........................................ 9

### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING PEACE AND JUSTICE AS REACTIONS TO OPPRESSION

1. The Origins of Peace Studies and Its Dilemmas ............. 11
   1.1. The Origins and Evolution of Peace Research .......... 12
   1.2. A Peace Studies Dilemma: Peace or Justice? .............. 16
2. Fighting Oppression as The Reconciliation Between Peace and Justice: An Introduction ........................................... 20
   2.1. Just War Theorists and Pacifists Fighting Oppression .... 21
   2.2. Oppression as the Result of a Reaction to Oppression .... 23
      2.2.1. Violence and Oppression ......................... 24
      2.2.2. Oppression and Oppression ....................... 28
   2.3. Peace and Justice as Reactions to Oppression .......... 33
      2.3.1. Demystifying Non-Violent Justice and Peace Seekers .... 33
      2.3.2. Peace Students’ Reactions ....................... 37
3. Conclusions to the Chapter .................................. 53

### CHAPTER TWO: PEACE AND JUSTICE SEEKERS’ REACTIONS TO VIOLENCE AS OPPRESSION

1. Victims Who Forget ...................................... 57
   1.1. Those Wanting to Forget ............................. 57
   1.2. Those Who Forgot and Then Remembered ............... 61
2. Victims Who Remember .................................... 66
   2.1. Victims Seeking Accountability ....................... 67
   2.2. Victims Who Forgive and/or “Let Go” ................... 83
3. Conclusions to the Chapter .................................. 100

### CHAPTER THREE: RESPONDING TO OPPRESSION AND ITS DILEMMAS

1. Overcoming Oppression and Its Reactions .................... 104
   1.1. Freire’s Humanization ................................. 104
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Professor Denis Goulet spent long hours sharing stories, introducing me to the world of participant-observant techniques and their authors. He also made available to me his file of personal letters written by him and his personal friend, Paulo Freire. My discussions with him went far beyond the specific subject of the thesis, and I will always be grateful to him for sharing his experiences and knowledge with me. His careful
reading of the thesis and recommendations has helped me a great deal in understanding oppression and non-oppression.

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FOREWORD

This thesis examines oppression and the reactions to it. In this foreword, I have found it interesting to make the reader aware of the reasons for this paper as well as of the methodologies that have been used for its research and writing. The section on “methodologies” would usually go in the text of the thesis itself. However, the specific nature of the methodologies used here allows, and even require, that they would be explained in the foreword.

In researching oppression it soon became clear to me that it would be interesting to explore non-oppression as well, and in particular, “non-oppressive” methodologies. As I explain here, the thesis intends to apply this “non-oppressiveness” in the way in which it presents different arguments. I soon observed that the application of these techniques allowed further understanding of oppression and its reactions, while simultaneously disclosing difficulties in their application or else limits to their non-oppressiveness.

Here I try to explain what these methodologies consist of, while putting them into practice. In sum, the following exposition is shaped in the form of a story-telling structure, making the reader aware of the process through which the ideas presented were found. I hope the reader, you, will thus be able to establish a dialogical participatory position as opposed to becoming a recipient. The purpose of these first lines is also to make the reader aware of the use of these non-oppressive techniques.
Without such awareness, I believe, the non-oppressiveness of the techniques would be at least lessened. Also, I am consciously using the first person singular to tell this story. I explain the reasons for this choice in the following paragraphs.

The idea for this thesis started as a curiosity to better understand the choices made by the oppressed in choosing the means they would use to try to liberate themselves. Almost immediately, the title “reactions to oppression” appeared in an instinctive manner. My original idea was to explore what, again instinctively, seemed to be the main identifiable reactions when oppression occurs: violent, non-violent and passive. This thesis was supposed to be an analysis of literary works on oppression according to these three categories. However, as I brainstormed on the issue, I soon began to encounter some interesting difficulties. Why oppression? Why reactions? Would it be possible to find published works explaining or debating the feelings, doubts and issues an individual faces when confronted by a felt oppression and what factors make that individual choose between violence, non-violence and passivity?

At first, I assumed most of the books explaining these processes would be written by those choosing passivity. Because they had not been able to confront their oppressions, they would be the ones to feel the need to express their reasons. However, the first bibliographical search showed a very different reality. Most of the literary works I found referred to philosophical treatises written, for instance, by ancient members of the French resistance or by peace activists defending non-violent movements and strategies. The analyses of these works would certainly have been extremely interesting. The absence of personal accounts consciously explaining in the first person singular the different doubts present before choosing one response over another seemed even more
interesting to me. Before selecting the testimonial alternative though, I thought of substituting this lack of literature on the subject through the exploration of oppression in literature. Some readings were done toward that end. For instance, *Disgrace* by the Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee (Coetzee, 1999) showed an extreme understanding of some of the psychological processes and reactions experienced, for example, by victims of rape, occurring, in this case, in a society with a history of apartheid injustice. The temptation to continue in that direction was very strong. However, an incident in my personal life completely changed that motivation.

I was harassed in my own apartment. Besides the feelings of powerlessness and fear for my own security that I had at the moment, the worst part actually came later. For two weeks I felt my life had become hell. Although I realize the importance of the harassment situation in influencing my feelings and actions, I actually understood that an important part of my continuing feelings of fear, insecurity and powerlessness as well as the appearance of other feelings such as confusion, guiltiness and anger had more to do with the reaction, or maybe lack of reaction, from the people around me in general, and from those I asked for help in particular. Later I was able to understand that what I perceived as a lack of reaction could in fact be a simple *inability*. People wanted to help me, they did not know how. Some asked me to call the police, others suggested mediation, yet others, to forget and move on. I felt oppressed, and I reacted to that oppression in different ways according to different stages, which were influenced by others’ reactions to my concerns. Because of my own experience, I believe it is important to explore the possible roles of interveners towards those feeling oppressed so that feelings that could “easily” be overcome do not degenerate into violence (be it
psychological or physical) towards oneself or towards others, or both. I only needed to be listened to.

As the reader will see throughout the thesis, that experience shaped the ideas here presented in very important ways.

We must realize that the aspirations, the motives, and the objectives implicit in the meaningful thematics are human aspirations, motives and objectives. They do not exist “out there” somewhere, as static entities; they are occurring. They are as historical as men themselves; consequently, they cannot be apprehended apart from men. To apprehend these themes and to understand both the men who embody them and the reality to which they refer. But – precisely because it is not possible to understand these themes apart from men—it is necessary that the men concerned understand them as well. Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes the investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character. (Freire, 1970: 98)

Because motives, objectives, and consequences must always be understood in human terms, the choice to build the thesis upon personal accounts, written in the first person singular became more and more important. While fiction seemed to be very close to reality in presenting the subject of oppression, the idea of analyzing first-hand accounts slowly appeared to be more interesting. As a result, I consulted several books describing the ways in which to analyze “testimonios” and including some of the critics to this kind of “literature.” Basically, the authors of these books talk about the need to read these works in a very critical way, understanding the processes inherent in the effort of writing and of putting into words life experiences. These are distorted somehow, shaped by the author at his/her own convenience (Prada Oropeza, 2001 and Sklodowska, 1992). Also, the facts can be modified as to give support to a belief. While these are very valid criticisms, though, the importance of using testimonios here is justified by many other
reasons. As John Beverly suggests in his book *Against Literature*, quoting the work of Williams:

(…) testimonio-like texts have been around for a long time, centered on the “I” and personal experience, and serving those subjects—the child, the “native,” the woman, the insane, the criminal, the worker—for whom it was a matter of speaking or writing for themselves rather than being “spoken for.” (…) An important element in the popularization of testimonio was the importance given in various forms of sixties counterculture to oral testimony as a form of personal authenticity, catharsis, and liberation (…) [Testimonio] is not, to begin with, “fiction.” We are meant to experience as real both the speaker and the situations and events recounted. (Beverly, 1993: 71-73)

In these three sentences, used to describe some of the meanings of testimonios, the author summarizes what I understand to be the essence or the basic principles of non-oppressive methodologies.

First, those expressing the feelings and thoughts deriving from oppression, or an abuse, are the victims themselves who are not “spoken for.” That is, those making the decisions, expressing their thoughts, and doubts are not observers or external authorities deciding or taking the responsibility. Rather, the resulting product is entirely the expression of a free, powerful individual. Fortunately, the importance of understanding and respecting people’s choices, desires, and participation in matters concerning their lives is also found in the development field, as well as in the peacebuilding one. Non-governmental organizations are called to carry sustainable projects demanded by the local communities, which should not become dependent on the aid being received but should actually be able to become less and less dependent. Amartya Sen’s *Development As Freedom* could be considered to be the literate personification of this concept of peoples’ empowering (Sen, 2000). Within the field of peace studies, on the other hand, there also seems to be a rise in a preoccupation to respect local traditions and actually to make them useful to the purposes of peace. For instance, a group of peace students at the Kroc
Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame is working on the production of a documentary entitled “Unheard Voices for Peace: Dialoguing With Local Peace Initiatives” in which several reconciliation processes from all around the world as initiated by their own actors are filmed. The actors-subjects of these peace initiatives decide themselves the way in which they want to explain their story to the camera. At the end of the documentary, the actors of the different stories meet and dialogue together about their stories, after having seen the resulting documentary.\(^1\)

In the specific case of the testimonies, what is written might have been shaped, exaggerated, diminished or changed in other ways, but the victim him/herself has biased it, and the final product deriving from the writing can thus be understood as the victim’s “truth”—which is what constitutes the main interest of the reader. Interestingly, some of the methodologies used in different efforts to reconcile opposing parties, such as Third Party Neutral techniques (TPN), also promote the use of the first person singular (McQuinn, 2003). While not always made explicit, the use of the “I” can be considered to be non-oppressive, as the person expressing the thoughts and feelings implies these are the person’s own truth if maybe not the Truth. At the same time, the use of the “I” avoids the inclination for accusations, which can be felt very painfully by the receiving party. For instance, “You are scared of your own emotions!” has a different effect than “My impression is that” or “I have the feeling that you are scared of your own emotions.” “You destroyed my life” is different than “When you did such and such I had the feeling that my life was being destroyed.”

The second sentence of Williams’s quote, referring to the liberating aspect of the writing of testimonios is further seen as constituting a non-oppressive, liberating action:

\(^1\) Original idea and copyright by Mireya Garcia-Duran Huet and Brian Peter McQuinn.
through the whole argumentation of the thesis. It is non-oppressive, as William’s third quote indicates, because the reader of these testimonies is meant to experience as real what has been written. In this sense, then, the reader becomes not only an observer, but also a participant. It is liberating, both because it is not oppressive and because of the therapeutic effect of telling or writing a story. Teresa Godwin Phelps explains in her paper “Telling Stories in a Search for Justice: the Work of Truth Commissions” how this process may work:

Psychological studies have shown that victims of loss and violence are helped in their recovery by telling a story about what happened to them, that so doing engenders a transformation from victim to survivor (…) [Susan Brison] uses the metaphor of being broken apart and of being put back together using language in a speech act that effects a kind of healing. Several events occur in this healing: the “severed” past and present are reconnected; the victim “reconstructs” herself or himself as an actor in a “reconfigured” life; the victim changes from an object of violence to a subject in one’s own articulated story; traumatic memory is transformed into a “coherent narrative”; and the victim “reintegrated” into the world. (Godwin Phelps, 2003: 2)

But there is much more than that in the telling of stories, as expressed by Williams. In simple words, it is again not the same to tell someone “You should do this with your life” or even “My impression is that you should do this with your life,” than to actually express the same idea through telling a personal story: “I remember being once exposed to a similar dilemma: this is what happened … these are the doubts I had … this is what I did … this is what I regret, and this is what I am happy for.” The telling of such a story entails a giving of support to the person experiencing trouble and asking, or not, for advice. It also portrays a possible understanding of the situation and a willingness to discuss the different alternatives while giving the “recipient” the responsibility and freedom of choice. Again, third party neutral techniques seem to work under the same premise, even if those trained to be mediators, facilitators, are not made explicitly aware
of the non-oppressiveness rationale behind it. That is, a mediator is not supposed to tell
the parties what they are to do. They decide. Even if the possible agreement they might
come up with is not considered by the mediator to be based on the right principles; for
instance, the mediator is there to help the parties dialogue and see the causes and
consequences of their decisions as well as all the possible alternatives (McQuinn, 2003).
This process could be considered to be a non-oppressive way of raising awareness.

The cathartic and non-oppressive characteristics of stories told in first person
singular is best explored in Robert Coles’ book *The Call of Stories*. In this over-two-
hundred-pages book, Coles tells a story in order to expose all the ideas he is, at the same
time portraying about the importance of stories. From the way in which different persons
draw completely different meanings from a novel—again exposing this non-
oppressiveness in which it is the reader or the person who listens, who chooses what to
retain from it—to the therapeutic effect for the “patients” of a psychiatric institute and the
effectiveness for the counselor to understand the patients’ sessions as the story-telling of
their lives, the book is full of stories conveying again some of the principles already
discussed here and made explicit by Freire among others: a non-oppressive relationship
is the one in which there is no subject and object but in which the actors are all subjects-
objects-subjects in a dialogical and participatory manner.

The rationale behind basing this study in testimonies should thus be clear: they
represent non-oppression far better than studies performed and reported by a neutral third
party. Because the process of writing one’s story is liberating, because the thoughts,
feelings and ideas exposed in the first person singular present a personal perspective,
which can be taken by the reader or not, by immersing him/her in an observant-
participant dialogue with the writer while raising awareness about issues considered to be important by the author; testimonies could be considered to be the written manifestation of sharing ideas in non-oppressive ways.

To honor the centrality of non-oppressive methodology, originally, I was going to write this thesis in the form of a testimony. In the same manner I am trying to expose this section on methodology in the form of a story, including the personal processes lived in the making of the essay; this paper would have presented the same ideas through the telling of a story, written in the first person singular. However, two main factors changed that possible outcome. First, the graduate school at the University of Notre Dame establishes in the regulations for the format of master and PhD theses, the impossibility to use the first person singular, possibly in the hope that students would not get into the trap of expressing personal ideas without argumentation. In his forthcoming book, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Lederach complains:

> In the professional world of writing, whether about practice or even more in the academic universe of theory building, we lend a higher accent of legitimacy to models and skills, theory, well documented case studies and the technical application of theory that leads toward what we feel is the objectivity of conclusion and proposal. We view with caution, even suspicion, the appearance of the personal. (…) The disservice is this: When we eliminate the personal we lose sight of *who we are* and *how we are* in the world, for we lose sight of ourselves, our deeper intuition and the source of our understandings. In doing so we arrive at paradoxical destination: We believe in knowledge we generate but not in the inherently messy and personal process by which it was innovated. (Lederach, 2005: 6)

Second, the exposure of these ideas through the first person singular would have also supposed the need to invent a story, which would be mixing the results found in other testimonies. It seemed less “oppressive” to me to stick to the original work, making

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you, the reader, aware of the inclusion of a new voice—mine—, interpreting the testimonies, in the dialogue. Nonetheless, the way in which I have written the thesis still tries to convey a story telling which would engage the reader in a participatory manner. This is one of the reasons why my description of several testimonies might appear to be too extensive. My purpose is to make you be able to identify with the idea I am exposing through the telling of the story. You might find as you read the analysis of the testimonies, that you have also experienced some of the feelings they talk about.

At that stage, then, I was to explore the world of oppression in an inductive manner. I decided not to look up the meaning of oppression in a dictionary from the beginning, nor to study it in a theoretical way. Rather I wanted to explore its meaning for the authors of the diverse testimonies. In this sense, the thesis departed only from the bias or a priori intention to look at testimonies of individuals having reacted violently, non-violently and passively to the oppressions they had felt. However, I remained open to the finding of other categories or the redefinition of those. I later found these principles also responded to a non-oppressive pedagogical methodology, as expressed by Paulo Freire (and others), who warns teachers and researchers about the dangers of choosing the “itineraries”:

Just as the educator may not elaborate a program to present to the people, neither may the investigator elaborate “itineraries” for researching the thematic universe, starting from points which he has predetermined. Both education and the investigation designed to support it must be “sympathetic” activities, in the etymological sense of the word. That is, they must consist of communication and of the common experience of a reality perceived in the complexity of its constant “becoming”. (Freire, 1970: 99)

The bibliographical search looked for testimonies, personal accounts, biographies, without consciously excluding any possible category because of nationality, gender, race, religious beliefs or any other variable. It is obvious, however, that the finding of books
was limited to those available at the Hesburgh Library of the University of Notre Dame, the bookstore of that same University, and the buying of books through the internet. The bibliographical search also included presenting the idea to the peace students coming from all around the world, which permitted the possibility of including a non-westernized representation. Finally the inclusion of some personal accounts in this “story” and the exclusion of others respond first to the impossibility of including all the accounts and second, to the fact that some accounts included, in a more comprehensive manner, the variables present in the conjunction of all the testimonies. A conscious and unconscious choosing of one story over another should also be considered, though. I probably picked stories that more closely related to my feelings perhaps because of a shared language, or the culture, or for any other reason. As a result, I want to apologize in advance for the poor multicultural representation present in the development of my arguments. One could say then that what is argued in this paper is a subjective and instinctive reality, later rationalized to become an opinion based in an “observation [followed by] a ‘post-reflection’ consisting of phenomenological/philosophical treatment which goes far beyond mere correlational analysis or statistical inference,” as expressed by Denis Goulet in his “An Ethical Model for the Study of Values” (Goulet, 1971: 225).

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3 In this sense, Lederach says: The researcher, theoretician and academic will likely wonder: Where is the empirical evidence? Where is the framework of theory? In places I speak to some aspects of those concerns. For example, I tell four guiding stories, not case studies, to which I refer throughout the book. They are evidences of the moral imagination but they are incomplete. Questions can be legitimately raised: Are these stories too individual, microcosms of innovation but not systemic responses? Were the settings and processes not too particular, unique to a given context but not replicable? How are such stories relevant to large-scale macro change? All legitimate questions not fully addressed in this book. My effort here is not to propose rigorous academic definitions or whole new theories in the classical sense of the term. In fact the inverse may be true: I wish to hold myself close to the actual messiness of ideas, processes and change, and from such a place speculate about the nature of our work and lessons learned. (Lederach, 2005: 9)
The reading of the first personal accounts raised two new insights for the development and methodology of the thesis. First, the stories I was reading were told by victims of human rights abuses and direct violence. Second, I realized the peace students I was surrounded by could have been the authors of many of these stories. Some professors recommended other books, testimonies of other kind of oppression, a structural one, like poverty and hunger. However interesting they were, I was more interested in reading the accounts of those having experienced direct violence, and I slowly started to realize I was probably picking the stories recalling the ones of my classmates.

This also led me to the first articulation that peace students might choose peace studies as a result of their own oppressions, and further, as a reaction to those. I am still trying to figure the ways in which I have felt oppressed, but I am positive my tendency to avoid conflict and to be too understanding to others comes from somewhere. What is more important for this thesis is that I realized every time I was mediating a conflict in my daily life, I had a tendency to tell the parties to behave in the same way I used to: telling them to forget, to understand, and that the issues they were talking about were after all not that important. What this thesis is saying is that one has to be careful with these tendencies, and to try to understand from where they come. I wonder why some people asked me to call the police when I was harassed, while others suggested mediation. Where do these recommendations come from? I believe in many cases they are the result of these individuals’ own reactions to oppression. I became more aware of my own reactions because of observing these patterns among my classmates.

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As a result, my research shifted towards the investigation of **participant-observer** methodologies. It was only after reading Goulet’s article on Georges Allo’s understanding of participant-observant methodologies and their phases, that I understood I had, actually, been using this methodology. That is, I found myself immersed in confidence-full and trusting relationships, with people having felt oppressed and acting or studying for peace. Through constant dialogue with this group of people I started gaining a certain understanding of oppression, of the oppressive power of the reactions to oppression and of the possibility of peace seeking as one of those reactions. This “naïve synthesis,” (Goulet, 1971) had therefore been found in an intuitive manner, through which the researcher (me) had not established *a priori* an area of study but had rather participated in the formulation of an inductive synthesis. To do so, I had also followed other ethical or non-oppressive methods, with the bias of not being aware of them. That is, the “dialoguing testimonies” that had helped to reach, in an observant-participatory way, to that hypothesis, were only shared because of the building of a trusting relationship with the informants. This trust came from the already explained non-oppressive nature of the relationship, as defined by Freire. That meant, I (the researcher or observer) should not only expect to receive information, but also to give it. As Goulet proposes in another article, “Values Among Underdeveloped Marginals: the Case of Spanish Gypsies,”

The investigator resorted to numerous stratagems in order to gain entry and access. In all successful cases, he placed himself at the mercy of the Gypsies whose confidence he sought. Both authors agree that the researcher, as a matter of more general principle, ought to make himself vulnerable to those he wishes to study. (Goulet, 1971: 458)

The problem I faced then was the impossibility to use these testimonies, as those expressing them were not aware of that possibility. What was needed was to follow the
other steps described by Georges Allo and found in Freire’s work as well: *systematic observation* (the reading of testimonies and continuing conversations with a second group of peace students, this time aware of the purposes of the conversations) and *reflective synthesis by the research team* (the theoretical expression of these ideas in the thesis).

Even more importantly, the research had to include the feedback of the group of study on the hypothesis found. This is the last stage of Allo’s formula: *feedback of reflective synthesis to populace*, or “resubmitting the critical synthesis obtained in stage 3 to the informants who provided the naïve synthesis in Stage 1.” (Goulet, 1971: 222) This principle responds, again, to the same dialogical principle expressed by Freire in his understanding of non-oppressive relationships, and constitutes the basis of an observant-participant technique.

This last stage, the asking for feedback, was employed with the group of informants from the second group of peace students. However, time constraints have not allowed yet for the possibility of asking the authors of the testimonies quoted in the thesis for their feedback.

Finally, the use of these methodologies and the discovery of many challenges in applying them have been very helpful for better understanding the **limits of non-oppression**. There seems to be a very thin line between oppression and non-oppression. Although these factors are further developed in the third chapter of the essay, it is important to note here already that, if these methodologies calling for non-oppressive relationships through a dialogical communication based in the understanding of one’s biases and not in the imposition of ideas onto others, have been found to be very much represented by the telling of stories in the first person singular; none of this would have
been useful if the intention behind this format had not been expressed from the beginning. The ultimate principle of non-oppression might then be “awareness.”

In relationship with this need for awareness, another methodology used in the research needs to be explained. This thesis has also been profoundly influenced by the work of John Paul Lederach. Besides his conflict transformation and peacebuilding theories, which are further explored in the following chapters, the methodology used in his forthcoming book has helped in shaping the research methods for this study. This peace scholar and practitioner says in his manuscript:

I have often said the *Building Peace* framework does not suggest solutions. It poses a series of questions useful for thinking about and developing responsive initiatives and processes in settings of deep-rooted conflict. (Lederach, 2005: 5)

He further talks about finding the $x, y$ and $z$, or the variables deriving from a specific conflict and shaping them into a problem-posing question. As a result, right at the beginning stages of the research, my intention was to

(...) open the door for a liberating *conscientização* through a non-oppressive and non-directional methodology, concluding with the posing of a question reflecting the complexity of a reality (e.g. How to overcome oppression and the reactions to it while both succeeding to reconcile truth, justice and peace through non-violent and non-oppressive means?) (García-Durán, 2003: unpublished)

As you will see, my thesis fails to conclude in the form of a problem-posing question such as the one here exposed. However, the posing of that question in an intuitive manner during the first months of the research obviously had an effect on the way in which the investigation developed. Maybe this responds to Lederach’s new insight:

Peacebuilding is an enormously complex endeavor in an unbelievably complex, dynamic and more often than not destructive settings of violence. I had often thought about and suggested that a peacebuilder must embrace complexity, not ignore or run from it. “Complexify before you simplify,” I would often say in class (...) This was in fact my working definition of complexity: multiple actors, pursuing a multiplicity of actions and initiatives, at numerous levels of social relationships at the same time. Complexity emerges from multiplicity and
simultaneity. What I had not fully contemplated was the idea that perhaps simplicity precedes complexity. This required me to think about simplicity as a source of energy rather than the choice of reductionism. It was, as I will describe in a later chapter, a lesson in the haiku attitude. (Lederach, 2005: 41)

The question asked at the beginning of the research probably was a simplified expression of the complexity later found. I was really surprised to read that question again after the main thesis for this thesis—which you are about to discover—was finally found, only a couple of weeks ago, after five months from the moment I first posed that question.

Without wanting to extend this section for much longer, it is important to warn you (the reader) of the fact that the following chapters are written in a more traditional academic manner. While the research has tried to follow the methodologies discussed above, I found it necessary to expose the ideas in a clearer, more direct manner. I hope making the reader aware of her/his possible position as receiver of information versus participant in the dialogue, would diminish this effect sometimes found in the seemingly objective expression and development of arguments.
INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is a process starting in the precise moment in which separation occurs, followed by a myriad of necessary phases, stages or reactions. When those reacting to a feeling of oppression resulting from the separation fail to transform or change, the process of reconciliation is stymied. Reconciliation calls for strategies and methodologies capable of healing the wounds, identifying and dealing with the issues inherent in the separation, and helping to move from a hurting phase to a liberating one; it should also help those experiencing the positive change become more and more able to live and transmit their awareness in a non-oppressive manner. Peace and justice unite when they are sought in non-oppressive manners.

1. Presentation of the Theses

This paper tries to expose some of the complexities found in the course of understanding reconciliation as a process filled with reactions to oppression. It further presents non-oppression as a process characterized by the raising of awareness through participation, as the only possible manner to end with the vicious circle of oppression. Miroslav Volf, a Yale University professor coming from Croatia, where he suffered the pain and fear of being “interrogated” –as he calls it—by the Yugoslav army, begins his upcoming book on “Memory and Reconciliation” by expressing the idea that, as understood by Marx earlier on, the title of his book should actually be “Towards an Understanding of Memory and Reconciliation: An Introduction” (Volf, 2004: unpublished). John Paul Lederach, a renowned conflict transformation scholar and

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5 Here the use of “non-oppression” as a noun refers somehow to the concept of “non-violence.” The use of this word implies an understanding that those being non-violent are acting in non-violent manners, and not just not using violence. This thesis would advocate for the importance of not only acting in non-violent manners, but also in non-oppressive manners. Being non-oppressive is much more than just not using oppression. Non-oppression implies action.

In the same way, this master’s thesis does not pretend to be anything more than a personal, phenomenological, first exploration on the subject of reconciliation and its complexities. To be more precise, the intention of this study is to look at reconciliation from a different perspective. That is, it glances at the conflicts and dilemmas encountered on the road towards reconciliation through the *lenses*\(^7\) of oppression and the reactions to it. In particular, it relates the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, renowned for his in depth understanding of oppression and of different liberating means, with the field of peace studies, conflict management, resolution and transformation. As a result, this essay presents the existing different strategies for reconciliation being applied in post-violent-conflict societies as possible oppressive reactions to oppression. These strategies can only be successful and reconciled within them when transformed into liberating actions. That is, it examines the possibility that seeking peace and justice sometimes constitutes oppressive reactions to oppression, often determined, for instance, by a need to forget or to remember. As long as those seeking peace and justice respond

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\(^6\) “Books are, of course, always constructed around thoughts, insights, and ideas. But it is perhaps rare that the authors are explicit about the nature of sharing “thoughts.” Things that pass from the realm of the idea, emergent often in the course of multiple conversations, toward a thing that appears on paper. Black letters starkly standing on a white page take on a significance that belies the delicate nature of their actual existence (...) I should like to suggest the opposite. I want to share thoughts more in line with a conversation, hopefully clearly stated, but nonetheless dynamic and incomplete by its very nature (...) I align myself with Eric Hoffer’s intriguing statement in his work on mass movements when he suggested that his effort was not to create an authoritative textbook. Rather, he wrote, “it is a book of thoughts, and it does not shy away from half-truths so long as they seem to hint at a new approach and help to formulate new questions.” (Lederach, 2005: 11)

\(^7\) This term is used and further explained by John Paul Lederach in his book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Lederach, 2002).
to deterministic reactions and are not aware of the variables separating them, they prevent the process of reconciliation to continue, rather than offering a positive input.

Theoretically, peace and justice go hand in hand. Respect for human rights and accountability for them seem to be basic variables, necessary for the successful building of a peaceful society. However, post-violent-conflict societies often encounter a dilemma between working for peace while holding the violators of basic human rights accountable for their deeds. Sometimes the idea that forgiveness is the way to avoid this conflict clashes with an inability or impossibility to forgive horrific crimes. Sometimes also the peace agreements, which were successful at ending the violent expression of the conflict, are not able to resolve its inherent issues. These dilemmas encountered in the path toward reconciliation are often described as a confrontation between those preferring peace to justice as opposed to those understanding that there cannot be peace without justice. This is apparently a conflict between peace and human rights activists. John Paul Lederach’s way of looking at these contradictions as conflicts between the living cellules or variables of the body of reconciliation, though, gives a different light to the issue:

If we have Truth at the expense of Mercy or Peace, we fall quickly into negativism, stuck in past repetitive cycles of criticism and failure with no hope for a way forward. If we have Mercy at the expense of Truth, we fall prey to manipulation, impunity, and complete lack of accountability. Justice without Mercy is a sharp sword controlled only by the victor, but Peace without Justice is façade and a betrayal, for it requires no change. Peace then becomes a dream deferred (…) (Lederach, 2001: 854)

Successful reconciliation processes in post-violent-conflict societies need to find a strategy, or a formula, which is able to reconcile first the different elements supposedly leading towards that reconciliation. The question then remains: How to reconcile Mercy, Peace, Truth and Justice? This thesis seeks to answer the question of why, in the first
place, they should be reconciled, or else, what are the elements that separated them. The hypothesis here is that Mercy, Peace, Justice and Truth are not in conflict. The conflict is present, rather, in seeking Mercy as a reaction, seeking Peace as a reaction, and so forth. The conflict exists between a need to remember only to forget, or between a need to confront conflict to avoid it (Mercy and/or Forgiveness as reactions), a need to forget or to avoid conflict (Peace as a reaction), and a need to remember or to confront conflict (Justice and Truth as reactions). The process of reconciliation is able to derive into the complementary appearance of mercy, peace, justice, truth, healing, memory, change, non-oppression, when the needs for forgetting and remembering find a transformed balance through a long, painful, healing process of raised awareness —or conscientização as explained by Freire—which naturally leads towards a non-oppressive approach to addressing conflicts in a non-violent, transformative way. Reconciliation thus results from healing memory and conflict transformation.

The different ways of using or dealing with memory and conflict are thus here presented as factors potentially able to negatively change liberating actions or processes such as the seeking of peace, mercy, truth and justice into oppressive processes which limit the possibilities for the reconciliation process to continue. Furthermore, this essay also explores the ways in which memory and conflict can cease to be a negative influence. That is, how to find healing memory and conflict transformation processes capable to constitute a continuous reconciliation within a society? Using the lenses of oppression and the reactions to it as explained by Freire here again, leads towards the understanding that only a non-oppressive raising of awareness about these processes of continuous interchangeability between reactions and actions, between oppression and
liberation, could alter the typical understanding of reconciliation as a goal, reachable through imposing models, to a continuous process of non-oppressive struggle against ignorance, determinism, oppression and reactionary motives.

The ideas here exposed have also been summarized and represented in graph 1, to illustrate visually a more complete idea of the different theses being argued in a simultaneous manner. A list of the various and interconnected theses present throughout the argumentation is also attached at the end of this section. The concepts present in the graph and only being summarized in this introduction receive a more specific and complete explanation in the following three chapters.

The first chapter provides the reader with a basic introduction to a fundamental conflict between the search for peace and justice, as it exists in the field of peace studies. Its origins and evolution permits to advance the idea that this field has originally been biased against the use of violence. This factor, in turn, has resulted in a preference for “negative peace” –or absence of violence—over “positive peace” –or absence of oppression. As a result, the study of oppression and its internal mechanisms has been neglected. This section argues peace studies ought to fight all reactions to oppression through a better understanding of oppression, rather than focusing only on violent reactions. Consequently, this chapter provides an introduction to the ways in which non-violent reactions to oppression can also constitute limits to reconciliation, peace and justice, by presenting an observer-participant study among peace students.

The second chapter is then devoted to the further description of each of these reactions through testimonies presented as case studies. While the first chapter has provided a basic introduction to oppression in all its forms while advancing the
hypothesis that the different reactions to it can also be oppressive, this chapter specifically looks at those reactions experienced by peace and justice seekers reacting to the oppressiveness of violence. It analyses the testimonies of victims of violent human rights violations and identifies their different reactions with the different reconciliation strategies being used in post-violent-conflict settings. The ways in which memory and conflict are used, are seen as the main variables determining the reactions.
The graph needs to be read starting by the smaller circles. They represent:
- three distinct reactions to oppression, or three possible phases in a reaction (therefore oppressive, unable to be reconciled between them)
- three distinct approaches for reconciliation
- three ways of dealing with conflict.
- three necessary components of true reconciliation (when they cease being reactions and become liberating actions, in the terms established by Freire)

These reactions are very much influenced by memory: its lack or presence. (Forgetting, remembering, and remembering in order to forget).

As long as these approaches are sought as reactions, they are oppressive: to those reacting, to others.

They appear as separate goals.

Only a process of awareness (conscientização) of this reality could allow for these reactions to become liberating actions.

This process needs to be done, however, in a non-oppressive manner.

The boundary between oppression and a necessary non-oppressive guidance is very thin. It is almost as if too much non-oppression could also be oppressive.

Those exposed to “non-oppressive methodologies” need to be aware of that debate as well.

True reconciliation, which includes a co-habitation of human rights accountability and respect, forgiveness and peace, is then able to start. It is not a goal, but a process. The goal is to make that process evolve.

Figure: Visualization of the Theses.
The third chapter proposes the need for raising awareness about these reactions and their causes among the victims of human rights abuses in post-violent-conflict societies, in non-oppressive ways. Drawing upon Paulo Freire’s theory of conscientização, the chapter explores ways in which non-oppressive awareness-raising has been applied in practice. In particular, this section looks at the mechanisms, inherent in these approaches, allowing the oppressed —here defined as the victims of violence—to liberate themselves and others through a non-oppressive healing memory and transformation of the conflicts. The limits to these “solutions” are also discussed.

The conclusion to the thesis summarizes the theses and conclusions while opening the debate on the ways the ideal model presented here can have a practical application in the real world.

It is also important to note that the meaning of the word “oppression” will be changing throughout the thesis. In the first chapter, oppression is analyzed as meaning what Galtung called “structural violence.” Then, the focus shifts to look at direct violence as a form of oppression. These two approaches are criticized with the inclusion of the idea, drawn from Freire’s work, that oppression can be seen as a continuum, formed by different kinds of oppressions —more or less harmful—, which feed each other. In this sense, the second chapter analyses oppression as the result of reacting against the oppressiveness of experiencing violence. The third chapter looks at the ways in which even the raising of awareness about the variables feeding these reactions can also be oppressive —contributing to the continuing existence of the oppression continuum—and thus presents several non-oppressive methodologies to break this vicious cycle.
2. Methodology

The exploration of oppression and the reactions to it led to the investigation of several “non-oppressive” methodologies, which are listed here in a summarized form.

Basically, this thesis has been built upon the use of three main principles. It has explored the subject of oppression in an **inductive** manner, drawing its different conclusions from the reading of *testimonies*, the use of *participant-observer* techniques, and the inclusion of a *phenomenological-philosophical* treatment of the findings. These three tools have showed the importance of using a *story-telling* format while using the *first person singular* so as to convey the sharing of ideas in a *dialogical* way. This principle also conveys the idea that the interlocutors in the dialogue cannot be “*spoken for*”, which means that if any conclusion is derived from the dialogue, it has to be resubmitted for *feedback*; or even that the dialogue should not end with a conclusion, but rather, in the form of a *problem-posing* question reflecting and simplifying the *complexity* of the given subject of the conversation.

While the inductiveness of the study is seen throughout the thesis, its dialogical aspect is somehow restricted by the requirements of the writing of an academic paper. This is why a more complete explanation of these methodologies has been included both in the foreword and the after word, which represent that dialogue. The apparent non-existence of dialogue in the exposure of the different theses is lessened by what this thesis considers to be the most importance principle of non-oppression: **awareness**. This is, the reader should be aware of the fact that this author wants to establish a dialogue, and not just to present information in a conclusive manner.
Before reading this chapter, one should probably stop for some minutes and try to brainstorm on what exactly s/he thinks is that precious goal called “peace.” By doing this simple exercise, one might realize the amount of diverse factors playing against and for its achievement. One could also become more aware of the fact that such a concept is not easy to define. For instance, Johan Galtung, one of the founding fathers of peace research, reminds us of the fact that different civilizations have given different meanings to the word. The Roman pax is more directed towards defining peace as the absence of violence, while the Greek eirene, as well as the Hebraic shalom and the Arabic sala’am combine a sense of the achievement of justice as the necessary element to bring peace. The Hindu shanti represents inner peace, an aspect also present in the Buddhist/Jainist ahimsa which seems to go further to include the notion of non-violent behavior as a consequence of this state of mind. Finally, Galtung talks about the Chinese concept of ho p’ing and the Japanese heiwa carrying a meaning of social harmony, peacefulness and adjustment (Galtung, 1985: 155).

As previously explained, this thesis tries to deal with all of these notions of peace while looking at some of the factors, present within the field of peace studies, that might be limiting the possibilities for these “peaces” to become one single realized unit. In this chapter, an introductory summary of the evolution of this field as well as of its more
crucial and current debates should familiarize the reader with the Roman, Greek and Hebraic notions of peace and with the challenges to reconcile a definition of peace that would exclude violence while including a search for justice. The rest of the chapter is then consecrated to the presentation of the idea that these debates could better be understood by looking at them through the lenses of oppression. In particular, the theories advanced by Paulo Freire are explained. The inclusion of Freire’s understanding of oppression and its processes becomes a new way of including the Hindu and Buddhist/Jainist concepts of peace into the equation. A “sociology of peace students” further helps to introduce the idea that peace seekers need to work on their shanti or inner peace in order to discover some of the reasons that might be influencing them towards working for the achievement of the Roman pax over the Greek eirene or the Hebraic shalom, or vice-versa. In Freire’s terms, the inclination towards one or the other could be the result of a deterministic, as opposed to liberating, reaction to oppression. This would lead to the need to include the concepts of ahimsa, ho p’ing and heiwa, further analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

1. The Origins of Peace Studies and Its Dilemmas

Peace studies were born as a reaction against the justification of violence. Since then, this field, often compared to medical science, has made great efforts to be initiating as well. However, the tension between peace and justice continues to withhold this discipline from working for peace and to stop being paralyzed because of its reaction against violence.
1.1. The Origins and Evolution of Peace Research

“In the beginning was Machiavelli.” Peter Wallensteen begins his article on the origins of peace research with this sentence, in order to convey the idea that the development of the field of peace studies began as both an intellectual and a moral challenge against the beliefs expressed by Machiavelli. The author of *The Prince*, Niccolo Machiavelli, was a Florentine politician and diplomat counseling some of the European rulers during the sixteenth century. In his most famous book, he argued that violence is omnipotent and inevitable. He understood violence as being instrumental and the ultimate source of power and thus recommended the rulers to accumulate the means to win over other States, which he saw as the primary actors of this system (Wallensteen, 1988: 7). Machiavelli is also considered to be, nowadays, the founding father of the realist political school of thought.\(^8\) This “realist” approach is confronted theoretically to another approach, usually called “idealism.” The idealist political school of thought has often been identified with the field of peace studies, while most studies in international relations seem to continue to be greatly influenced by the “realist” one.

Robert Johansen, summarizes Wallensteen’s views on the differences between the “realist” and “idealist” approaches as follows. They diverge in their focus, as the realists believe in a nation-state system while the “world order perspective,” as Johansen calls it, sees each individual, and the global community as the main political actors. This can also be understood as the result of the preference for “value free” studies (studying what “is”) for the former, as opposed to the “value oriented” (what “ought to be”) ones for the

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\(^8\) As one of my readers pointed out, Machiavelli completely changes his understanding and justification of violence later in his life. See for example: Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*. London: K. Paul, Trench & Co., 1883, which is nowadays considered to be the source of civic humanism. As this same reader pointed out, Pocok insists on this change in *The Machiavellian Moment*. 
latter. Past and present over future, seeing problems as discrete issues versus seeing them as interrelated, having as a goal the managing of problems to maintain the status quo of the institutions as opposed to democratizing them and mobilizing people, having an hegemonic discourse and not an egalitarian one, are then some of the main differences between the two. The most well known disagreements between the two, though, refer to their viewing of the policy goals (maximizing power and wealth over maximizing human well-being), their concepts of power (military and economic vs. legitimacy, persuasion and integration) and violence (“violence is an acceptable mean to maintain the balance of power” as opposed to “large-scale violence is unacceptable”) (Johansen, 2002: unpublished).

The origins of peace research, thus, lie in “empirically testing whether Machiavellian ideas are in fact founded in reality” combined with a certain utopism, based on the idea that “the world has to improve, no matter how we describe it today, because it is not close to the meaningful definition of peace” (Wallensteen, 1988: 8). The fact that the origin of the field of peace studies is based in this intellectual challenge to Machiavelli, though, should not necessarily continue to convey a parallelism between the idealist political school of thought and the field of peace studies. That is, peace research might be oriented towards finding the ways in which to achieve the goals established by the “idealists,” but it also draws its conclusions from an in-depth analysis and understanding of power-based relations.

The real challenge to a peace research drawing on utopian writing is not to show that there is a large undercurrent (or even a dominant current) of civil, nonviolent, peaceful activity. Rather, it is to show that such alternatives are equally or more effective for the attainment of particular goals. This is a central problem for research on nonviolence. It should not only show that there are alternatives, it is
also important to show that those alternatives can accomplish (some of) what military actions (allegedly) accomplish. (Wallensteen, 1988: 24)

This necessity to show the existence of alternatives to the use of violence finds its roots in the moral challenge described by Wallensteen: “The traditional thoughts on war and the reality of World War I contradicted each other. New thinking was required, and from this intellectual and moral trauma sprung what is today peace research” (Wallensteen, 1988: 12). From that moment, the growth of studies directed towards the finding of alternatives to violence emerged, following a dialectical process. That is, peace researchers chose their areas of studies, somehow as a reaction or in response to the circumstances that surrounded them at the moment. For example, the outcome of the First World War in peace studies was a historically oriented analysis of the causes of war while the Second World War and the following Cold War increased the interest in arms control and disarmament. Game theory and integration theories were then promulgated, while after the Vietnam War more emphasis was given to development theories and the economic factors. Currently, the emphasis has shifted to the understanding of ethnic and religious intrastate conflicts and the role of a global order in their prevention or resolution, leading to a vast literature on the need for military or humanitarian intervention. As stated above, the challenge here is to find some conditions that would not only reverse the current circumstantial situation of violence, but also would become a basis for peace and human rights to be plausible no matter what circumstances would appear. In this sense, John Paul Lederach argues:

We have to broaden our approaches to think beyond narrow, short-term, time bounded programs, one isolated from the other… reconciliation pushes us to build and support a multiplicity of needed activities, simultaneity of action, and interdependence of the energies though each is qualitatively different from the other. (Lederach, 2001: 854)
Wallensteen reminds us of the fact that peace research cannot become a mere reaction; it also needs to be initiating.

This initiating factor could be represented by the work of Johan Galtung. He did not understand peace research to contribute only to the criticism of violence and the search of strategies to solve conflict. This is the reason why he preferred the tag “conflict and peace research.”

I myself had a different worry: conditions of peace were more than worthy of being studied, but that also implied to ‘conflict’ without researchers necessarily having to focus on conflict resolution, in a peaceful way, all the time. The name, as devised by the present author in January 1959, was a compromise: “conflict and peace research.” (Galtung, 1985: 141)

But what Galtung is more famous for is perhaps his understanding and definition of peace research as compared to the field of medicine, as well as for his differentiation between “negative” and “positive” peace. In “Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses,” Galtung explains why peace research and researchers should always be trans-disciplinary, trans-national as opposed to inter-disciplinary and inter-national while also taking a trans-civilizational embracing approach, based in an holistic and global view over the matters of study. Moreover, he wishes to

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9 “The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, got its fledging start in January 1959 when the present author was given a grant by the Institute for Social Research in Oslo to draft a research program in the field of peace studies. The program was accepted, with the US social psychologist Otto Klineberg as a consultant, and administratively the work started on 1 June 1959, with five researchers and five research programs, and location at the home of Fridtjof Nansen, at Polhogda outside Oslo, Norway. Hence, 1984 is the twenty-fifth anniversary. Although peace research is as old as humankind I think it is fair to say that this was the first institute after the Second World War openly professing a dedication to the study of ‘peace’ in its very name. Even that had been problematic. Peace was in those years something identified in the West with communism, a very radical concern, just as ten years later –at the height of neo-marxism in Western Europe—it became the symbol of conservatism. From ‘peace in the world’ as a Moscow slogan to ‘peace in Vietnam’ as a Washington slogan, meaning roughly speaking the triumph of communism in the first case and the victory of the United States in the second, the time distance had been a short one. The Norwegian establishment was also skeptical. A high ranking official of the Ministry of Education was sympathetic in general, but told the present author: ‘peace research’, what a horrible word! To ‘war research’ there could be no objection.” (Galtung, 1985: 141)
(...) point out a parallel between peace research and medical science.

I think it can be argued that medical science is based on the same tripartite definition. There is an unashamedly explicit value-bias from the very beginning, in favor of health rather than disease. Medical science, however, is more than the research exploration of the conditions of health; the idea is also to teach (medical education) and to act (medical practice). As we shall see, peace researchers have been moving in exactly the same directions, although with less success. But then the first 25 years of medical science were perhaps not that successful either. And medical people have also found it extremely useful to explore further the concept of ‘health’; they are still doing so, in fact, and will continue to do so, for ever. (Galtung, 1985: 144)

The only difference between medicine and peace studies Galtung can find is the fact that

(...) the peace researcher faces a great difficulty: his advice and his practice may concern many more people than the individual surgeon, who after all is operating on only one person at a time. That should serve as a warning to peace researchers against becoming too self-confident, and against developing an easy consensus – easily done as long as peace researchers carry little responsibility and are mainly academic, engaged in criticism. It becomes more important, not if, but when responsibility comes. (Galtung, 1985: 145)

While this beautiful image is constantly quoted among peace seekers, his concepts of “positive” and “negative” peace have been much more criticized, constituting perhaps, the main debate present within the field of peace studies. This is because these concepts directly relate to the conflict between peace and justice.

1.2. A Peace Studies Dilemma: Peace or Justice?

In its origins, peace research was born as a challenge against violence and its justifications. However, the founding father of today’s field of peace studies had a different vision. To him, peace seen as the mere absence of violence could not truly be named as such. This is why he added an adjective to it: “negative peace,” which could also be identified with the Roman concept of pax. Galtung soon understood the dangers of trying to implement peace at the high price of letting another kind of violence, the “structural” one, continue to exist.
In a certain sense there was harmony, cooperation, integration. But was this peace? With the blatant exploitation, with blacks being denied most opportunities for development given to the whites, with flagrant inequality (…) There are settings within which individuals may do enormous amounts of harm to other human beings without ever intending to do so, just performing their regular duties as a job defined in the structure. Social-political consciousness is to understand how the structure works, an important step in the transformation of such structures.

Structural violence was then seen as unintended harm done by human beings (…), as a process working slowly as the way misery in general, and hunger in particular, erode and finally kill human beings. If it works quickly it is more likely to be noticed and strong positions for and against will build up so that moral stands emerge. Direct violence is intended, usually quick and for that reason easily discovered since the person who was very much alive a second ago is now dead –hence, an easy focus of attention. (Galtung, 1985: 146)

“Positive peace” then corresponds not only to the absence of violence, but also, to the absence of any kind of exploitation, oppression, and inequity. As Conrad Brunk quotes in “Shaping a Vision: the Nature of Peace Studies,” Galtung believed structural violence and therefore “negative peace” exist when “human beings are being influenced so that their actual (physical) and mental realizations are below their potential realization” (Brunk, 2000: 21). This could again be considered to be the meaning of the Greek eirene and the Hebraic shalom, or of what has more commonly been heard as the slogan “if you want peace, work for justice.”

Although Galtung’s differentiation could be considered to be extremely useful, Brunk clearly describes the problems and critiques that it encountered. First, the rise of “wars of liberation” during the 1960s and 1970s, led to a debate among peace scholars in which those favoring the seeking of negative over positive peace seemed to have a point. They identified many dangers in the persecution of this “utopian positive peace.” The distinction between “freedom fighters” and “terrorists” was disappearing. As Brunk puts it:
the revolutionaries fighting these wars claimed that they were not the ones who should be criticized for being “unpeaceful”. They were, in fact, fighting against the structural violence of the oppressive regime and for positive peace (as well as for negative peace in the long run). They needed to break the negative peace (with direct, personal violence) in order to achieve positive peace. (Brunk, 2000: 23)

The peace dilemma between peace and justice was thus set:

Even if we agree that the goal of peace research is to find ways to help these societies restore a peaceful situation (to “turn unpeaceful relationships into peaceful ones,” as Curle puts it), we must still ask whether this means finding ways to end the wars (restoring negative peace) or finding ways to end the oppression of the governments, against which the wars were being fought (restoring or creating positive peace). (Brunk, 2000: 23)

Among other authors, Kenneth Boulding, author of “Twelve Friendly Quarrels With Johan Galtung,” (Boulding, 1977) considered that these definitions of peace and violence were too broad, making them become synonyms to “justice” and “injustice.” He, as well as other authors, considered that they

(…) value negative peace too (…) and sometimes it comes into conflict with justice. When it does, we simply have to make a moral decision about which value is more important: whether the injustice is so great that ending it justifies breaking the peace by using direct, personal violence (…) This, Boulding argued, was exactly what Peace Studies and peace research should be seeking to do –to find effective nonviolent (“negatively peaceful”) ways of fighting against injustice. (Brunk, 2000: 24)

In a synthesizing manner, Brunks considers that the aim of peace studies is to “analyze human conflicts in order to find the most peaceful (negatively peaceful) ways to turn unjust relationships into more just (positively peaceful)” (Brunk, 2000: 25).

According to this synthesized definition, however, the field of peace studies continues to have a value-driven goal, which is not peace but negative peace. That is, according to this definition, peace research and activism would be committed to the finding of positive peace and the eradication of oppression, injustice, and any form of exploitation; but it does so only to the extent to which negative peace is not at risk. In
this sense, peace seekers seem to prefer the existence of oppression to the existence of a violence that could end it. Maybe one of the reasons behind this choice is the belief that those violently fighting against their oppressions would in turn become oppressors. Their violence then is not able to achieve the desired positive peace, but instead constitutes one more step in the continuation of a negative circle of negative peace, interrupted by war. It would be of an extreme interest to know what their understanding of the French Revolution, for example, is. On the other hand, some other authors, such as Mary Kaldor have wondered about the reasons that led the international community to become deaf to the constant cries for help, expressed in non-violent manners, by the Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova (Kaldor, 1999). It could be argued that because of that fear of violence, and acceptance of oppression over it, the message nonviolent movements can sometimes understand is that if they fail to use violence, they will not be listened to (as the violence carried by other groups in the former-Yugoslavia did get a response from the International community). In any case, this is not an easy debate, which relates, too, to the positions expressed both by “Just War Theorists” and “Pacifists.” These approaches are summarized as an introduction to the next section.

Before that, though, it also seems important to talk about the methodological criticism to Galtung’s theory as expressed by Boulding, as it could help in better understanding the approach presented in this thesis to reconcile peace and justice. Boulding considers that Galtung’s main problem, methodologically speaking, is his structuralism. Boulding, who defines himself as an “evolutionary”, believes the parts to constitute a whole, and detests Galtung’s way of defining concepts through the use of dichotomies such as positive and negative peace.
While no one can deny that dominance and oppression are real problems in the world, it seems to me a gross misunderstanding to attribute the mass of human misery to them. Our differences here illustrate very well I think the difference between the structural and the evolutionary approach (…) The structural point of view turns out to be inimical to the ideal of structure itself, and sees structure as the enemy of equality –which it is. The evolutionary point of view sees the whole evolutionary process as the segregation of entropy, the building up of castles of order in the crystal, in DNA, in life, in humans, and in their innumerable artifacts, both personal material and organizational, always at the cost, according to the second law, of increasing thermodynamic disorder elsewhere, in our case of course nicely segregated in the sun about which we don’t have to worry. The structuralist sees pollution in the structure whether it is smoke, slums or vice and says ‘away with it’. The evolutionist sees pollution as part of the price of evolution itself. (Boulding, 1977: 79).

What this thesis tries to explore is the possibility that, understanding oppression in an evolutionary way, rather than in a structural one, would actually be the best way to work against it, while recognizing the impossibility of its disappearance. In the evolutionary path towards positive peace, peace and justice unite by finding liberating processes against oppression, which are continuously put into practice. Reconciliation and positive peace are not seen as goals but rather as processes during which it might be not only necessary but also useful to go through the stages of negative peace or separation as long as these do not become the end of the story. These ideas though, need further explanation. The development of this paper is consecrated to that purpose.

2. Fighting Oppression as The Reconciliation Between Peace and Justice: An Introduction

Notwithstanding this seeming preference for negative peace over positive peace, several strategies show a continuous need to fight for justice and against oppression. However, these approaches derive again from a need to avoid violence, rather than in the study of oppression itself, and of the ways in which it can be avoided.
2.1. Just War Theorists and Pacifists Fighting Oppression

The peace versus justice debate existent within the field of peace studies rests on the difference between wanting to achieve what Galtung calls a negative peace, defined as the absence of violence, or intending to find a real, positive peace, defined as the absence of all kinds of structures and actions provoking harm. Some peace and justice scholars and activists have preferred to continue hoping and acting for the achievement of a positive peace. They differ, however, in their arguments and strategies.

One of these approaches has been dedicated to the regulation of violence so that, in extreme cases, this could be used for the ending of an unjust order. Just war theorists have been trying to establish boundaries between what could be considered just and unjust causes and acceptable and non-acceptable uses of violence. Their findings seem to argue that violence not only is acceptable but actually should also be used in determined cases where the impossibility of reaching the “just cause” through other means has been proven. For these theorists, the necessary elements for the argument of a just cause are: “there must be a substantial aggression; nonbelligerent correctives must be either hopeless or too costly; belligerent correctives must be neither hopeless or too costly.”

Just means respond to the following criteria: “Harm to innocents should not be directly intended as an end or a means; the harm resulting from the belligerent means should not be disproportionate to the particular defensive objective to be attained” (Sterba, 2003: unpublished). As the reader can observe, though, these criteria also need further definition. Michael Walzer is probably the most current and well-known just war theorist, and his book *Just and Unjust Wars* can be very helpful in better understanding these concepts (Walzer, 1977).
However, another approach, the “pacifist” one, sees these regulations as mere
tools with which to excuse violence, and understand that, not only can these theories be
used in order to create more oppression, but also and rather, violence in itself is to be
rejected, no matter whether the cause is just or not. “Violence triggers more violence,” is
what they argue, maybe thinking about the traumas, such as the Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorders detected not only in soldiers but also in a large number of civilians throughout the world today. There exist, however, three distinguishable kinds of pacifism. Nonviolent pacifism considers that “any use of violence against other human beings is morally prohibited.” Nonlethal pacifism holds that “any lethal use of force against other human beings is morally prohibited,” and anti-war pacifism argues that “any participation in the massive use of lethal force in warfare is morally prohibited” (Sterba, 2003: unpublished). Within the pacifist approach there is still some room for the use of force in certain circumstances. In any case, non-violent movements have developed all around the world, finding ways to transform the existing order without the use of violence. Their approaches and successes, as Galtung promotes, need further attention.

What is interesting in both cases, however, is that, be it violently or non-violently, just war theorists and pacifists look for ways in which to overcome oppression, or else,

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10 “Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, terrorist incidents, serious accidents or violent personal assaults like rape. People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, and feel detached or estranged, and these symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person’s life (…) About 30 percent of the men and women who have spent time in war zones experience PTSD. An additional 20 to 25 percent have had partial PTSD at some point in their lives.” National Center for PTSD, found at http://www.ncptsd.org on 6/7/2004.

11 In this sense, the reader can refer, especially to the writings of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. For some selections on their and other’s writings, see Barash, David P. Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
what they feel as oppression. However, rather than studying oppression itself, these approaches only debate on the acceptability of the use of violence against it.

### 2.2. Oppression as the Result of a Reaction to Oppression

For what right have the oppressed but one? The right to be filled with nothing but hate and contempt. And justly so, for they are kept in cages as threatening animals, forced into division, one against another – brother versus brother by scared oppressors who, in order to maintain their security and power have denied the people of any pride, heritage, education and love. People without history or memory. A man with nothing but ignorance, hatred and amnesia is confined to the hellish reality of having no life at all. Perpetually trembling... trembling.

(Anonymous poet, quoted in Mohan, 1993)

This anonymous poet, quoted by Brij Mohan in his book *Eclipse of Freedom: the World of Oppression* intuitively perceives the definition here proposed for oppression: the oppressed are those “without history or memory (...) a man with nothing but ignorance, hatred and amnesia.” This section presents the lack of conscientização, or awareness, as defined by Paulo Freire as the main component permitting the continuing presence of oppression. In particular, it introduces the idea that the oppressed are oppressed not only by their oppressors, but also by themselves. Before entering into that discussion, though, it is important to look at other definitions of oppression, which show the continuity of the debate on the acceptability of the use of violence. That is, most oppression theorists differ from peace scholars in that they seem to be more open to the idea of using violence as a means for liberation. This is because they focus more in the study of oppression than in the study of violence. However, based in these theories, Freire is able to break with that discussion and make one step forward in the path towards reconciliation. The discussion about the acceptability of violence disappears and a new dilemma becomes apparent: how to avoid reactions to oppression?
2.2.1. Violence and Oppression

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to oppress is

(…) to affect with a feeling of pressure, constraint, or distress; to lie heavy upon, weigh down, burden, crush (the feelings, mind, spirits, etc.) [and] to trample down or keep under by wrongful exercise of authority of superior power or strength; to load or burden with cruel or unjust impositions or restraints; to tyrannize over. (Dick, 1979: 3)

A dictionary definition, though, cannot embrace all the possible meanings of oppression. Sometimes, it is more useful to relate different concepts together in order to obtain a fuller vision and understanding. This might be the reason why James C. Dick wrote a book on *Violence and Oppression* (Dick, 1979). As can be observed, the word violence does not appear in the dictionary definition. In the previous discussion on the goal of peace studies, Galtung already noted that oppression could be a form of violence, as his “structural violence” concept seems to be directly connected with the word oppression. The question that remains unanswered though, is whether the use of violence can be justified when directed to the ending of that oppression, or as a liberating means. As has been seen, the field of peace studies is divided on that issue.

Although Dick seems to be originally biased against the use of violence, his work is also directed from a sincere concern to deliberate on the morality of its use in certain cases, driven from a profound respect towards those who decided to use these means to become liberated:

About violence there is one certainty: it does harm and wreaks damage. It may do some good as well, but this is no certainty. When, despite these verities, are the victims of oppression justified in resorting to deadly violence? (…) The men and women whose actions are considered in these pages did not take up the gun without some deliberation. They made decisions of moral import, and it would be demeaning and disrespectful to belittle or ignore their capacity for acting responsibly. (Dick, 1979: introduction and preface)
As a result, the author concludes in the same lines described above as constituting the main thinking of just war theorists. Dick, thus, identifies five main criteria that would justify the use of deadly violence by the oppressed: the criterion of injustice, the criterion of prematurity, the criterion of gratuitousness, the criterion of wastefulness and the criterion of legitimacy (Dick, 1979: 149-191). As interesting as his work is, though, his conclusions do not seem to shed any further light on the debate between peace and justice, which has been argued here, can better be understood through the lenses of oppression. The reason for that might be that his work is again based in the discussion about violence rather than on the understanding of oppression itself.

On the other hand, the work of Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and humanist considered by many to be a revolutionary, elucidates the relationship between oppression and violence. This Algerian author describes these two processes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963), in which he analyses and severely criticizes the oppressive French colonialism in Algeria. He also condemns those individuals not taking action against their oppressors. First he elaborates on the interests of the bourgeoisie not to take sides with their fellow citizens, but more importantly for this discussion, he ridicules those afraid of taking the arms.

Moreover, there are some individuals who are convinced of the ineffectiveness of violent methods; for them there is no doubt about it, every attempt to break colonial oppression by force is a hopeless effort, an attempt at suicide, because in the innermost recesses of their brains the settler’s tanks and airplanes occupy a huge place. When they are told “Action must be taken,” they see bombs raining down on them, armored cars coming at them on every path, machine-gunning and police action… and they sit quiet. They are beaten from the start. There is no need to demonstrate their incapacity to triumph by violent methods; they take it for granted in their everyday life and in their political maneuvers. (Fanon, 1963: 63)
The author also describes in great detail the strategies used by the enemy, the colonialist power, in order to introduce a separating conflict among the insurgents, giving a clear understanding of the extent of the oppression he describes and analyzes throughout the book:

The enemy, in fact, changes his tactics. At opportune moments he combines his policy of brutal repression with spectacular gestures of friendship, maneuvers calculated to sow division, and “psychological action.” Here and there he tries with success to revive tribal feuds, using agents provocateurs and practicing what might be called counter-subversion (…) And these miserable methods, this eyewash administered drop by drop, even meet with some success. The native is so starved for anything, anything at all that will turn him into a human being, any bone of humanity flung to him, that his hunger is incoercible, and these poor scraps of charity may, here and there, overwhelm him. (Fanon, 1963: 136 and 140)

Consequently, it could be argued that Fanon sees violence as a means of liberation that is not only justifiable but also necessary in innumerable circumstances.

However, a closer look at the way in which the book is written, as well as a consideration of his last chapter in which he exposes the cases of several individuals traumatized as a consequence of this same violence, could entail a different analysis of his work. While Fanon’s acceptance of violence against oppression is not doubted here, it is important to observe the shape his words take and the sensations the reader has.

Fanon’s analysis is deep, but it is not presented in an argumentative manner. Rather, the author presents his thoughts in the form of a story. But again, that story is somewhat particular, as it portrays by itself the madness of the living situation it is describing. His sentences are short as are the different paragraphs. In between each paragraph, Fanon jumps from the analysis of the actions taken by one of the parties or actors to the consequential action taken in response. And the story does not end there, as again, the first party re-acts again and again and again. His sentences imply a deterministic sense of
response, a consequential dynamic, constituting a chaotic madness full of individual sense. Furthermore, Fanon also analyzes the organizational structure of the “insurgents,” discovering other kinds of oppression within them. In particular, he identifies the presence of leaders, only inclined towards making the masses educated and conscious in order to fight against the enemy. This quote can give a sense of these two ideas:

The discovery of this inability inherent in the native is a frightening experience for the leaders of the rebellion. At first, they are completely bewildered; then they are made to realize by this new drift of things that explanation is very necessary, and that they must stop the native consciousness from getting bogged down. For the war goes on; and the enemy organizes, reinforces his position, and comes to guess the native’s strategy. (Fanon, 1963: 140-141)

Moreover, in his last chapter, Fanon depicts the extremely negative effects of both violence and oppression—which many times are the same thing—through the stories of his patients. Probably one of the more interesting aspects of that description is his discovery that he is simultaneously treating the perpetrator and the victim. A French soldier is traumatized by his torturing of an Algerian, but does not want to recognize this direct effect as he sees no escape from having to continue this activity. He therefore asks his psychiatrist to make him able to torture without remorse. Fanon writes:

With these observations we find ourselves in the presence of a coherent system which leaves nothing intact. The executioner who loves birds and enjoys the peace of listening to a symphony or a sonata is simply one stage in the process. Further on in it we may well find a whole existence which enters into complete and absolute sadism. (Fanon, 1963: 270)

The Algerian victim is obviously traumatized because of the torture experience, leading Fanon to conclude:

The Algerian’s criminality, is impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequence of the organization of his nervous system or of characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation. (Fanon, 1963: 309)

As a result, he calls his fellow Algerians, as well as others, to build a new, more humane
society, not based on the European model:

Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature (…) For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (Fanon, 1963: 315-316)

The discussion about violence and oppression brings a new light to the discussion about violence, justice and peace in the sense that it describes in more depth some of the oppressions many peace scholars want to solve, merely by the means of negative peace. However, the issue on the acceptability of the use of violence to fight against oppression continues to be confusing. If based in the work of these two single authors, the concluding idea seems to be that violence should be acceptable in determined cases, or rather, that it is a natural outcome which can be useful in the process leading to positive peace, when those trying to liberate themselves are able to overcome this circle after having achieved part of their purpose. The work of Paulo Freire, however, promises a more useful and fulfilling perspective.

2.2.2. Oppression and Oppression

Although Freire does talk about violence as a legitimate mean for liberation in determined circumstances, his work goes further to differentiate between “humanizing” and “non-humanizing” violence. His work differs from others’ in that he analyses oppression itself. As a result, he is able to describe both the ways in which oppression can result in the appearance of oppressive reactions to oppression (even if he does not use these exact terms), in the form of a vicious circle; and the ways in which these reactions can be overcome to become liberating actions or responses in a virtuous circle. The
discussion about violence disappears, and the focus changes to fighting oppression through non-oppression.

A large part of Paulo Freire’s work is dedicated to finding non-oppressive methodologies for educating illiterate adult populations. However, his understanding of oppression and its consequences, as well as the ways to overcome them, go far beyond pedagogical purposes. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he develops his theory by arguing that the oppressed often become oppressors, establishing a vicious circle, and that the only way for the oppressed to liberate themselves is actually to work to liberate their oppressors:

> This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. This, then is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well (...) But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors. (Freire, 1970: 28 and 30)

Freire’s theory might seem simplistic and innocent at first glance. A first reaction might be that the oppressed have enough trouble already to become responsible for the grievances of their oppressors. His theory can also be understood as a strong basis for non-violent movements. However, the arguments given by the author in order to explain and develop his thesis go in a rather different direction.

It can be argued that Freire was greatly influenced by the work of Frantz Fanon. The fact that the oppressed often become oppressors is largely exposed in Fanon’s story. Moreover, one could understand Fanon’s conclusion on the need to find more humane methods “for Europe” in the first place, as one of the bases for Freire’s statement that the oppressed need to liberate their oppressors. Another possible influence of one author on the other might be the consequential and reactionary manner in which Fanon seems to
understand and portray the fight for liberation in violent ways. In fact, Freire’s position on the acceptability of the use of violence is made clear through a sentence, which seems to summarize Fanon’s position:

Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized (…) Yet it is—paradoxical though it may seem—precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human. As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. (Freire, 1970: 41 and 42)

It could be considered then that Freire also justifies violence under certain circumstances. However, the difference between Freire and other authors is present in the variables making violence acceptable. While just war theorists, pacifists, and other oppression theorists look at violence as oppressive and might accept its use to fight another kind of oppression that might be more harming, therefore quantifying or qualifying different oppressions as more or less oppressive; Freire seems to understand all kinds of oppressions—defined as dehumanizing actions—as parts of a whole. That is, although Freire does not disqualify the fact that there might be degrees of harm and oppression, the reading of his work gives an idea of oppression as a continuum, in which the smallest form of oppression can lead to more harming forms.

Furthermore, what is crucial in his theory is the fact that Freire does not talk about specific actions as oppressive by themselves. Rather, the factor making different actions or strategies for liberation be oppressive, is not their specific nature (violent or not), but the factors leading to their implementation. That is, a specific liberation strategy would
be liberating only when it is humanizing for both the oppressed and the oppressors. This humanization is only possible when those carrying the specific responses to their oppression have gone through a process of **conscientização**.

The development of this concept is probably the most important contribution to the theory of oppression advanced by Freire. This author considers that the first step in the process of liberation starts with the realization, or becoming aware, of a person’s reality. Only if the individual is able to identify the ways in which s/he might be oppressed, would s/he be able to start a process of liberation from that oppression.

As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically ‘accept’ their exploitation. Further, they are apt to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self-affirmation.

The central problem is this: how can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy. (Freire, 1970: 51 and 33)

However, he warns from the beginning of the difficulty for such a process to begin: “One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge men’s consciousness” (Freire, 1970: 36). This is why liberating strategies appear not only through the raising of awareness, but also through the raising of this awareness *with* the oppressed, rather than *for* them:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 1970: 39)

That is, the appearance of humanizing and liberating responses—which this thesis opposes to oppressive reactions—is only possible when those putting them into practice have become aware of their oppressions in a non-oppressive and participatory manner,
being able to act as a result of praxis, combination of reflection and action in a dialogical
manner.

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete
situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection—true
reflection—leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action,
that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the
object of critical reflection.

When men are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the
process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization.
(Freire, 1970: 52)

In this thesis, thus, Freire’s theory is understood as seeing oppression as a
continuum, all forms of which need to be fought through the non-oppressive raising of
awareness of their existence, leading to the appearance of liberating actions or responses,
rather than oppressive reactions. Freire has already established the fact that violent
actions can take both forms. That is, violence could either constitute an oppressive
reaction used by the oppressed to liberate themselves from the oppressors, who, in turn
become the oppressed; or a liberating action, resulting from non-oppression. Some could
argue Freire’s justification of violence is paradoxical with his theory though, as it seems
difficult to imagine circumstances in which the use of violence could be humanizing.
These situations are perhaps the ones just war theorists talk about. However, Freire’s
theories can shed further light on the debates inherent in the field of peace studies. His
theory shows a need to study oppression itself, together with its inner mechanisms and
the reactions to it, which might derive in the appearance of further oppression,
contributing to the continuity of a vicious circle. In particular, his theory calls for the
analysis of non-violent strategies against oppression and not only of the violent ones. It
seems important to look at forms in which non-violence could also be oppressive. As a
result, the following section looks at non-violent strategies as possible reactions to
oppression. Their oppressiveness—which can obviously be understood to represent a lesser harm than the violent reactions, but which nevertheless exist in the continuum of oppression and needs to be taken into account—is further explored in the following chapter.

2.3. Peace and Justice As Reactions to Oppression

Many justice and peace seekers fight against oppression through non-violent means. How could they be oppressive? Seeing Freire’s theory in that new light, this hypothesis would only be true if their motivation in seeking these outcomes constituted a reaction rather than a conscious and liberating action. This possibility is here introduced through a description or “sociology” of peace students’ motivations and experiences.

2.3.1. Demystifying Non-Violent Justice and Peace Seekers

The idea that the use of violence can be the result of an oppressive reaction to oppression seems to be something accepted by all. Pacifists could make their motto out of it, while just war theorists would agree while arguing that they have found the boundaries that would transform violent oppressive reactions into liberating, non-oppressive actions. Even more specifically, a need to better understand this assumed reaction has led towards the necessary and interesting studies of groups labeled as “terrorists”—whose violence would therefore not go under the classification of acceptable under just war theories. For example, the anthropologist Cynthia Mahmood published a book on the Sikhs, including those violently fighting for independence from India, in which she demystifies many of the pre-conceptions about “terrorists” and their psychology, without justifying their violent actions (Mahmood, 1996). Terror and
Taboo, by Zulaika and Douglass, also works on these lines through a study of ETA in the Basque Country in Spain (Zulaika and Douglass, 1996). While these studies seem to confirm the thesis that their cases could be considered as clear examples of reactions to oppression, they are also useful reminders of several facts. They show that “terrorists” are not born, they are made. Although it is easy to stick only with the most visible result of their reaction to oppression—the killings—it is important to remember that those are human beings with feelings and reactions like anybody else, and that their violent acts can be the result of a process during which they might have experienced different stages and phases. What is necessary is to look at the factors that made them react in a violent way rather than in a non-violent one. These studies are very useful in understanding some of the cultural and other external pressures and availability of resources that could influence this outcome. Other works, such as psychological studies, might be better at explaining the internal processes that could make some people more prone to violence than others. In any case, what is made clear by looking at violence as a reaction to oppression is that there might be both internal and external pressures that would make an individual react to oppression in a violent way.

In the case of non-violent actions directed towards ending any specific oppression or felt oppression, the same pre-conceptions seem to apply, although in this case with very different consequences. That is, in general, terrorists would be characterized as the evil and most people would not go further to look at the details of their evolution. Because their actions have been taken as a serious risk for security and as oppressive actions, interest in analyzing their background is becoming central in the field of peace.

For a testimonio from a Kashmiri “terrorist” who decided to give up the arms, see: Sinha, Aditya. Death of Dreams: A Terrorist’s Tale. Penguin India, 2002.
studies, for instance. By contrast, saying that the non-violent responses to oppression can also constitute oppressive reactions to it does not seem to be of great interest. Those working for peace and justice as for the overcoming of oppression are supposed to be good people, altruistic human beings who dedicate their lives to others. Michael True, for example, has collected the biographies of over sixty justice and peace makers in two different volumes in an effort to understand the ways in which to achieve justice and peace through non-violent means as well as to show the difficulties inherent in such a process (True, 1985 and 1992). Consulting these volumes would probably give the reader the idea that such people were quasi-saints, as they sacrificed a lot in order to advocate for their beliefs through non-violent means. True seems to have that same idea:

Every age collects its heroes and heroines, who serve as examples for tasks that need doing. In a violent age, we do well to remember those peacemakers and justice-seekers whom we might look to for inspiration and guidance. Internationally famous or relatively unknown, they worked for the common good. Because of them, others enjoy some semblance of hope, a possible future. (True, 1985: 1)

Their work and achievements have, no-doubt, been impressive and very positive. But looking at their stories more closely one would also see how the findings of many psychological studies, which argue that the main characteristic of volunteers working in these areas is the fact that they are “morally concerned” and “impelled by conscience” in an “altruistic” manner, needs to be amplified (Abdennur, 1987: 31).

Many non-violent movements directed towards both the achievement of justice and peace are born and develop as a way to end what they feel to be an oppression, and not only for the sake of it or to help others. In this sense, Ira Goldenberg argues in *Oppression and Social Intervention*:

Social interventionists are not born, they are made. Unlike some athletes, creative artists, and others in whom there appears to have taken place a mystical process
whereby genes and social destinies have been joined, the social interventionist is almost totally the product of his interactions with the environment. His vocation and often his entire existence are firmly embedded in the experiences and analyses of the settings and conditions in which the human drama is being played out. (Goldenberg, 1978: 29)

By “social interventionist” the author means those who dedicate their lives to the prevention and/or change of oppressive actions and systems. According to him, then, social interventionists would not be moved singularly by moral standards, but rather and also, by their own experiences. Another common preconception is that students enrolled in peace and conflict resolution programs are likewise good people concerned for others, moved by idealistic motives. Their motivations do not seem to bear a great importance.

John Paul Lederach pays attention to this issue in his upcoming book, The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace as he confesses:

> Beyond profession, my concern has been to find and follow a deeper sense of voice. In the truest sense of the word vocation is that which stirs inside, calling out to be heard, calling out to be followed. Vocation is not what I do. It finds its roots in who I am. (Lederach, 2005: 25)

What are the factors inspiring what these authors consider to be a “vocation”? The psychologist Alexander Abdennur explores the possibility that a proven interest in conflict resolution and peace studies would come from a conflict avoidance personality. In The Conflict Resolution Syndrome, he becomes very critical of some of the studies presenting volunteers as moral and altruistic people. Specifically, he is very critical with the research methods used to reach these conclusions. Being himself a psychologist, he argues that there exist “three basic qualitative modes in the process of response to and resolution of conflict: confrontation, conflict reconciliation, and conflict avoidance” and that, if anything characterizes most volunteers it is their persistent conflict avoidance, rather than reconciliation, as would be initially thought. He fails, though, in looking at
the consequences such a reality would have, if it had to be true (Abdennur, 1987: foreword). Could it be that peace seekers, in their goal of ending violence and achieving a negative peace, would have also embraced the idea of ignoring conflicts for the sake of non-violence?

In any case, the same lack of understanding of the factors leading terrorists to use violence seems to be present for the peaceful movements, strategies and studies. A possible reason behind this gap might be the belief that, because they are not violent, the actions pursued by peace seekers cannot be oppressive.

The following section introduces different ways in which individuals, and peace seekers in particular, may react against their felt oppressions. In this specific case, the term oppression is used to signify having been victim of violent human rights violations. As has been seen through the evolution of the field of peace studies, it might be that peace seekers are reacting to violence. The next chapter makes a better case of the fact that these reactions can be oppressive rather than liberating.

2.3.2. Peace Students’ Reactions

The exposition of this study is useful for several purposes. First, it shows the “sociology” of two groups of students of peace, demystifying some of the preconceptions usually held about them. At this point though, it is also important to emphasize again the fact that the variables studied within these two groups are not the result of the previous theory having been presented. Rather, the way in which the theoretical introduction to this chapter has been exposed has been shaped by the inductive findings of this participant-observer study.
This study shows how, maybe in a special way for the two chosen groups, peace and conflict are not mere concepts but a very close reality, which they understand better than anyone. At the same time, though, the study also critiques a lack of awareness of the ways in which personal experiences might influence the peace students’ views on these issues. This presentation implies a need for those seeking peace and justice to work on their shanti or inner peace, in order to discover some of the reasons that might be influencing them towards working for the achievement of the Roman pax over the Greek eirene, or the Hebraic shalom, or vice-versa.

Second, the study substitutes somehow a study of personal accounts written by victims of human rights abuses who would explain the reasons behind their valuing peace over human rights accountability. In this sense, this section does not only look at the possibility of peace as a reaction to oppression but also at its consequences. This study is helpful in showing that many of those studying for peace have also been victims of human rights abuses but that, instead of writing their personal accounts, they study the ways to prevent, solve, and transform conflict as well as the ways in which to reconcile groups and nations. This idea is also further developed in the second chapter, which describes three peaceful reactions to oppression. This description could thus be considered an introduction to the different aspects considered to influence these reactions: different uses of memory (remembering, forgetting, or remembering to forget), and different views on the need to express conflict.

As explained in the foreword to the thesis, this study should actually be focusing only on one group. At least, the different steps configuring the participant-observer methodology being used here, demanded that the exposure of the hypothesis, as well as
the request for feedback—the two final steps of the cited methodology—were “applied” with the same group of students from which and with whom this hypothesis appeared. However, the impossibility for this led to separate the implementation of the process in two distinct but similar groups. Students from the first group were classmates to this author and her sense of belonging was much stronger than with the second group. This is probably why she was able to acquire the necessary information for the formulation of the hypothesis that studying peace can be a reaction to oppression. While the breaking of the methodology presents the problem of losing a great deal of information in favor of an ethical value not to release information shared in an atmosphere of trust, with no knowledge about its possible use for a study; this circumstance also had its advantages. It allows this author, for instance, to affirm that her study was not pre-determined in the variables of study from the beginning. That is, the conversations with the first group of students had no goal; they themselves led towards the finding of a hypothesis. On the other hand, this also permitted a contrast with a second group sharing the exact same characteristics with the first group (peace students, coming from warn-torn areas all around the world). As is here presented, the differences between the two groups are not of great importance. They both share the same diversity and the only observable difference is the existence of a different sense of group dynamics.

The following presentation thus, begins with the presentation of some of the aspects characterizing the first group of students as a way of showing the way in which this “naïve hypothesis” was found. In particular, the fact that many of them have been oppressed is exposed, as well as the different ways in which the students dealt with it. Second, the feedback given by the second group of students, as well as some observations
of their behavior as compared with the first group are also shared. This structure responds, as earlier explained, to the methodology advanced by Georges Allo for the study of groups and their values in ethical ways (Goulet, 1971b).

The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies of the University of Notre Dame in the United States hosts, each year, two-dozen students coming from all around the world. They have demonstrated a practitioner or scholar interest in justice and peace issues and come to the program to master their understanding of these matters in an ambiance of high intellectual stimuli as well as of incentive to constantly dialogue among each other. They all live together in the same building in two-bedroom apartments. The institute tries to promote this dialogue through different means. One of them is the inclusion of a three-week to one-month-long “orientation”. During this time, students are introduced to the functioning of the University as well as to professors and staff. More than anything else, this period of time allows them to begin knowing each other. One of the introductory sessions being held each year focuses around the question: “Why are you here?” The answers to this question are very interesting, especially when compared among individuals and the two groups being presented here.

Within the first group of students, this question was repeatedly asked in several sessions, always in the presence of some of the staff or professors. The first answers seemed to be oral resumes. That is, the students expressed more or less the same arguments they would have presented in a statement of purpose to apply to the program. The range of experiences and scholarly work carried out by the group as a whole was remarkable. However, what is more interesting to note here is the way in which the answers progressively shifted as the same question was posed again and again. In one of
the last sessions dedicated to this subject, one of the students took more than half an hour to describe the atrocities he had lived through in his home country. Among many other horrors, he explained, clearly and calmly, how he had witnessed militants force his parents to get inside their home, to later set it on fire. He remembers the perpetrators laughing, having a good time.

This description was felt differently by each of the students. Some expressed their sorrow, even crying while these atrocities were explained. They felt it as a very intense moment. Some others did not cry. Some were in shock. Others did not understand the purpose or need to explain such things: “We have all gone through the same, we know these things happen everyday in the world… we are here to get to find the ways in which to avoid this, not in order to complain.” However, after this first story was told, others came along.

It might be useful to understand, at this point, the specific nature of the program and of the students being involved in it. In the application package, the Kroc Institute clearly states as the criteria for choosing the students a previous proven commitment to justice and peace, but also, a preference for individuals coming from war-torn areas. Not surprisingly then, some of them have had to experience horrors such as the above mentioned. Not all peace students share these characteristics though. Even within this program, other students report that they have never lived any kind of traumatic experience. In particular, the program also invites each year three to four U.S. students as well as other individuals coming from what would be considered as “peaceful” countries. For some of them, then, this was an introduction to some of the realities they had only read about before.
However, one of the students in group 1, coming from a seemingly peaceful country expressed her concern that she did not know the real reasons why she had picked this career but that she really felt at home, understood, among her classmates. Another student wondered too why she was willing to sacrifice a certain standard of living and a successful emotional relationship in order to work in peacebuilding all around the world. They thought it might just be normal, given the fact that they had been raised in conditions valuing altruism, equality and human rights, in a world more and more interrelated. Another of these students, though, admitted she was in the program in order to solve her inner conflicts. She later was also to confess she did not really know what she meant by that, when other students expressed their admiration for “such a brave statement.”

Other personal conversations also confirmed the idea that many had felt oppressed. Some had openly explained these processes to the whole group. Others only shared these moments with those they trusted the most. One of them would not even say specifically what the traumatic moment was all about but would constantly be reminding of the existence of that big secret. That person said to be conscious about it but did not see the need to think too much about it. At other moments, the person would say to realize the importance of actually expressing it, thinking about its consequences and being able to “overcome” it, but would later decide it was better to continue looking at the future than to look backwards. Many different reactions could be exposed. However, these conversations were carried in an ambiance of trust in which the possible need to portray them in a study was not realized by any of the interlocutors. As a result, they need to remain silent.
In general, during all the group and interpersonal conversations held with the first group of students, the diversity of their views was the rule over some of the most important subjects such as the acceptability of the use of violence in determined situations, the need to abide by human rights standards even when personal security is at stake, or the need for peace over justice, for example. Again, their diverse understanding could be understood as very positive, as the conflicts appearing behind each of these issues were exposed, not only theoretically, but also through accounts of humane and personal experiences. In this sense, each of these subjects was treated in depth. At the same time, though, the idea that the differences in perspectives actually came from different personal experiences that sometimes limited the acceptance of other possibilities was also rejected by some of them. This is, in some way, how the idea that seeking peace can be a reaction to oppression became a “naïve hypothesis” more or less consciously expressed by the first group, or else, observed in the first group.

“Why are you here?” was asked to the second group of students in a rather different context. The session was held in the same building in which they live, in a common apartment available to all of them, and not in a classroom. The students immediately started sharing their experiences: torture, rape, sexual abuse, and accusations, living with incessant fear, constantly surrounded by violence.

The second group of students thus seemed to be much more open to express their victimization and experiences of violence as the reason “why they were here.” However,  

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13 These words are often used so as not to have to explain the horror that is behind them. Cathy Winkler and Penelope J. Hanke describe the experiencing of a rape in “Ethnography of the Ethnographer,” in *Fieldwork under Fire*. University of California Press, 1995.

14 It must be noted here that this researcher, observant-participant within the two groups, was however not present during that session. The observations here exposed are therefore the result of the explanation given by other students about what happened during that session.
many expressed their concern that, after such an intense session, the group had bonded in a way that could not be maintained for long. Apparently, everything had already been said. In fact, if these students were to talk again about their experiences, it would be in a rather different manner. It was somehow shocking for an observer to see how they would talk about the fact of having been victims of serious violations of human rights, as if it was the most natural thing on earth, or, as one of them said, “as if I was saying I had just eaten an apple.” In two cases this detachment toward the situation was said to constitute a real “overcoming” of it. The detachment came from accepting that this violence had occurred, that the speaker had suffered from it and that it had been normal for him/her to feel the way s/he felt. Apparently, the possibility of expressing their feelings about such atrocities had also allowed the students to slowly start feeling better, and they therefore did not want to talk about it in a “victimized” manner. More than anything, they did not want other people to feel sorry for them.

In other cases, though, this detachment could have a completely different meaning. It could portray a need to forget, a non-acceptance of the fact that such moments had any kind of effect in their lives. It was as if the horrible events had never happened. For instance, these students were asked to voluntarily contribute to this study by explaining the ways in which they had been oppressed. One of them expressed her interest in helping the day after this possibility was exposed.¹⁵ She explained she had become a refugee during the war in the former Yugoslavia and how hard this experience had been. She further described how she had been scared of the possibility of being raped, or at least, interrogated, when several soldiers were trying to get into her

apartment. She further specified that, in a way, she knew this would not happen, as she was ready to escape through a window. Fortunately, one of her neighbors, who knew the soldiers, defended her. After telling these experiences, she further added she could not be of any interest to this study: “so, I wish I could help you but as you can see there is nothing in my life that could interest you. I have never been oppressed.” She was further questioned on whether she believed these experiences had had anything to do with her choosing this specific kind of studies. Her response was, at first, negative.\(^\text{16}\)

One of the principles established to conduct this research has been not to interpret the feelings and thoughts expressed by those having been interviewed. The participants know better than anyone what they feel and think. Here thus, it would not be stated that this specific student actually chose this career as a result of the oppressiveness she could have felt during the war. She probably did not. In fact, her personality and seeing the way in which she is able to take problems in the most joyful manner could actually be a sign that she, in particular, did not feel these experiences as oppressive, but just as part of life. In any case, her initial denial of having been oppressed has been here reproduced as a representation of a pattern, often found among these peace students. At the same time, the hypothesis that, inevitably, these experiences must have had some kind of impact on her way of understanding conflict and on the ways to solve it is being presented, while including her and other students’ feedback on the issue.

\(^{16}\) When asked to read this passage and confirm this is what she meant in the first conversation, Biljana specified that she believes not many people having had this kind of experiences are willing to accept their oppressiveness or else, the fact that they themselves went through a “bad” experience. She said she believes this is a natural defense mechanism and further recommended a movie which shows a therapy session with victims of torture, who keep saying their experience was not that bad, or even deny the fact that it occurred. On the subject of her choosing this career as the result of her experiences during the war, she said, in this second interview, that she believed the war had led her to want to study peace to better understand what happened around her. However, she insisted in the fact that her experience as a refugee was hard specifically because of the witnessing of others going through terrible experiences, and not so much because of her own. Interview conducted in June 2004.
Some peace students have been oppressed, some not. Some would say they have been able to “overcome” a specific act, almost always a violent one, constituting that feeling of oppression, and feel now liberated, understanding the effects such traumatic moments had on them, and having been able to express these feelings. Some others have experienced the same kind of violence but do not believe this factor to have any effect on them. They all have chosen to study conflict and peace. Those who come from war-torn areas are probably the best to talk about what conflict is really like, while those coming from “peaceful” areas might have a better understanding of the necessary conditions for peace to be possible. Sometimes, though, the expression of their beliefs in these issues shows the exact opposite. Those having been in conflict imagine ways in which peace might be achievable, while those having never experienced it seem to fear its appearance, therefore becoming more aware of the reasons that might trigger it. In any case, the combination of the two in the same program seems to be very productive, as both experiences are present and in constant dialogue. This very positive interaction is also found in the fact that if anything characterizes both groups of students it is their variety. They have different experiences, different backgrounds, different cultures, religions and gender. They also have different ideas and feelings about peacebuilding. In fact, they disagree, even, on whether conflict should be expressed or not.

In one of his first classes, John Paul Lederach, who teaches in the program, asks his students to place themselves in different corners of the room according to the extent to which they believe conflict is good and should be expressed, or rather, how they themselves act on the face of it. Do these students express conflict: “always, sometimes or never?” Again, the rule for these students is their diversity. But there are students in
each of the categories. When the students in the first group were asked about their reasons, those always expressing conflict differed in their responses. Some became nervous and nearly shouted saying injustices need to be spoken out. Others, maybe having read Lederach’s books in advance, talked about conflict as something natural, which needs to be accepted. They further talked about the need to “transform” it into something constructive rather than destructive. On the other hand, some preferred to express conflict “sometimes.” They also seemed to understand the possible positive outcomes of conflict, but believed there are times in which its resolution or transformation into something positive is impossible or so difficult, that it should just not be expressed. Finally, some peace students “never” expressed conflict. “Nothing good can come out of it” is what some believed at the beginning of the program. Others thought they had never experienced conflict or the need to express it. Some others also confessed that their expressing conflict or not had changed over time. In this case only, diversity disappeared. All students were less able to express conflict in the past. One student who moved from “never” to “sometimes” in a year’s time said she had understood the need to express conflict but that she still had to convey it only sometimes, precisely because she was so prone to it, she was scared of herself and preferred to include some control.

The refusal to express conflict by some students in the first group and its negative consequences were seen in several instances. For example, the feeling of some of the students in the group of having been excluded in several activities both by professors and other students was only expressed during the last weeks of the program, in a feedback session organized by the institute. As a result, this conflict was talked about in a one-to-
one basis, but the feeling of division—felt as racism by some—probably prevailed as the students left the program. Many of those who had been “accused” of excluding others also complained of the fact that these issues had not been raised earlier. The fact that all these students live together in the same building helps in the possibilities to establish dialogue, but, unfortunately, does not guarantee it.

Concerning the second group, the same dynamics could be observed. As an observer having been able to live within the two groups, this author had a constant sense of the fact that those in the second group expressed conflict less often than the first group. However, she became critical with this observation. First, it could be that her view would be biased by the fact that she was not attending classes with the second group. Even if the observer believes to be considerably integrated among the second group, it is also possible she missed the possibility of witnessing a great part of their co-habitation. Second, the observer expressed this feeling among students in the second group in several occasions. They answered this was a group characterized primarily by tolerance and respect of other human beings and their freedom to live their life in their own way and to have the beliefs they would want to have.

To this observer, the main difference between the two groups was, in fact, their different approaches to conflict. Even if the diversity of views of each individual was present in both groups, the first group seemed to confront conflict, the second group to avoid it. A real balance between the two, or a transformation of the conflict, was rarely perceived. The differences between these three ways of dealing with conflict were thus first observed among peace students, and are further developed in the next chapter. For now, it is important to remember that some of those always expressing conflict said to do
so, in a nervous manner, “because injustices need to be spoken out.” Those avoiding
conflict in the second group explain by themselves some of the reasons behind their
behavior in another study conducted on this same group of students (Conway, Aberger,
Gharakhanian, Peterson: unpublished):

Fitpatrick proposed that this particular group’s dynamic emphasizes harmony and
peace over confrontation. She suggested that perhaps rather than an
institutionalized pressure to conform ideas, students engage in self-censorship as a
method of preserving the peace. (Conway et al, 2004: 8)

One drawback is that the students spend all of their time together. One student
wrote that she avoided disagreement in class to “make her life at home easier.”
(Conway et al, 2004: 17)

The main characteristics having been observed in the two groups thus are the fact
that many of those studying peace have themselves been victims of violence. Among
them, many refuse to see themselves as victims and rather work to help others. At the
same time, this study also shows the existence of a debate on the need to express conflict.
In general, though, avoiding conflict seems to be easier, or more common than its
confrontation, and its transformation is rare. Could it be that studying peace, forgetting
the experiencing of oppressive violence and avoiding conflict could be correlated?

The second group of students was informed about the purpose of this study as
well as the reasons for the need of their feedback. The exposure of these reasons was
done, as explained in the foreword, through what could be considered to be “non-
oppressive” methodologies. Specifically, the students were presented with the story of
one of the informants to the thesis. They were also warned, before the story was told,
about the personal character of it and of the variables that were being expressed through
the story. That is, the students were not told, “the thesis states that you chose this career
because you have been oppressed and the way in which you understand conflict and its
resolution is often marked by your personal reactions to previous oppressions.” Instead, they were introduced to Paulo Freire’s definition of oppression and to the debate existing between peace and justice as well as to the idea that seeing peace and justice as reactions to oppression could help in understanding one of the factors behind this dilemma. The story of one of the informants was then presented. Seventeen out of twenty-four students attended the meeting. Others expressed their interest in having individual conversations.

Their feedback was interesting in many ways. Besides the problems encountered in the presentation, which will be explained in the third chapter of the thesis, students’ reactions to the idea that peace could be sought as a reaction were rather negative. Chayanid Poonyarad, a student from Tailand, first raised the issue of the different cultural understandings of oppression: “Oppression can be defined differently individually, and based on each individual’s cultural context. Based on my personal understanding, I don’t think I have ever been oppressed.” Another student, Elias Omondi, wondered whether any of the students in the program had actually expressed his/her feeling of oppression: “Did anyone in the group give you their testimony? (…) I think it is only because you put all this in terms of oppression and non-oppression that we might say we have been oppressed. So, it is only one way of seeing it. With such a broad definition, who has not been oppressed?” Willow Wetherall, having lived in the building with three different groups of peace students commented that, “If all those having been oppressed in the world responded to their oppression by becoming peace students, there would be no need for us any longer!” Also, and besides the constant reminder that the thesis was not

17 Willow Wetherall however, later expressed her interest in the idea that seeking peace and accountability for human rights could actually be connected to individual or group needs to remember or forget. She recalled the case of two distinct groups in Cyprus, where she was conducting her study on missing persons. She explained how she had witnessed how those asking for peace were in a sense asking
stating that all peace students have been oppressed nor are they all reacting to it, many started their feedback by saying: “When you say we have all been oppressed… I know in my case this is not true.” Marissa Pay de Guzman, for instance, started her intervention in those lines and further added: “It is just the opposite. It is because I have had experience working with the marginalized farmers and benefited from that relationship that I feel the need to prepare myself here to commit to giving something back to them.”

Others were not reluctant to entertain the idea. In particular, Mark Canavera admitted: “I think if you had said exactly the same during the first session we had on “why are we here,” people would have been less reluctant and more open. That is exactly what I said in that session: oppression is what ties all of the threads of my work together. I have been oppressed as a gay, and look at the work I am doing.” Mirak Raheem commented that in his case, he had noticed how “most of us here feel we are special among our societies, we are somehow insiders-outsiders and we feel the responsibility or guilt sometimes of having had a better life and opportunities, we may be reacting to oppression, but not to our own, we wonder why it was them and not us, we acknowledge the fact that it could have been us, and that is why we are here.”

Some of the students stayed in the meeting for longer than others. Those who remained for longer spent six hours talking about the subject. The last hour was more than anything consecrated to getting feedback on how the session had gone. The idea that probably many students would ask for personal interviews later on and that it was interesting to see the difference of feedback in the large and smaller groups was stated several times. During the following days, several people expressed having been thinking to “forget” the past, while those asking for accountability, especially regarding their missing family members, needed to remember.
about the subject and wanting to give further feedback. Some others did not directly express the fact that the subject of oppression was present, but kept joking about it: “I have been oppressed because…”

The peace students that have been represented in this study are well-educated people with lots of experience in different organizations and projects as well as having lived “in the field.” They are, in fact, very brave people, who work in violent settings, being very much aware of the risks that such a work might entail. In this sense, they are not “conflict avoiders.” Rather, they prepare themselves in order to be able to bring security and peace to the people with whom they would be working.

What this interaction shows, however, is the fact that most of these students are not aware of the reasons that might give them that strength and willingness to put themselves at risk. Because of this lack of awareness, the “vocation” Lederach talks about constitutes an instinctive reaction, rather than a conscious action. Furthermore, these reactions seem to be directed against oppression, and in particular, against the oppressiveness of violence. Because these students come from war-torn areas, or because they have witnessed the horror of war as a result of their work, many of these students have themselves been victims of oppression.

Most of them are reluctant to understand the experiences they have lived as traumatic and oppressive. This factor could have negative consequences for them, as would further be argued in the next chapter. Moreover, it prevents these students from becoming aware of the reasons behind their individual understandings of conflict and of the ways to address it. Different individuals have different opinions on whether conflict should be expressed or not. In general, these peace students, many of whom have been
victims or have witnessed violent human rights violations, either react by avoiding conflict or by confronting it, by forgetting or by remembering in a painful manner. Their capacity to transform their daily conflicts might increase as the course of the program advances. However, this capacity might be limited by their being unaware of their own tendencies to forget or remember, avoid conflict or confront it, as well as for the reasons behind these tendencies. Only a few confess to have been able to accept the fact that they lived traumatic experiences, and to have gone through a healing process.

The observation that most of them have suffered from violence helped this author in the theoretical presentation of the development of the field of peace studies. It is through this inductive observation then, that the idea that the field of peace studies is too focused on violence rather than in oppression appeared. The co-habitation with these two groups of students further helped in understanding the different reactions the oppressiveness of violence entails. These are further developed in the next chapter.

The reader should remember, when reading the following chapter, that these peace seekers have been victims of violent human right violations. They are survivors. They don’t react violently. They don’t even write their testimonies, nor complain about their miseries. Instead, they try to find out ways to prevent further violence and oppression. The hope of this thesis is that they would do so in a liberating manner, becoming aware of their reasons as well as of the prejudices and limiting reactions that might be influencing their job.

3. Conclusions to the Chapter

The field of peace studies has often encountered a dilemma in choosing between fighting two kinds of apparently different oppressions: “structural violence” and “direct
violence.” Instead, seeing oppression as a continuum, allows integrating the two in a broader framework. Oppression seems to work in terms of vicious or virtuous circles, determined by the existence of oppressive reactions or liberating actions or responses. Here, the possible existence of a less harmful form of oppression, the one of seeking peace as a reaction, has been presented. Non-violent movements can also be oppressive when their actors are not aware of their oppressions and/or of their reactions to them. In particular, seeking peace as a reaction seems to be characterized by a need to forget oppressive violence and a tendency to avoid conflict. This does not mean, however, that its opposite, remembering the traumatic experiences and confronting conflict is the solution, as is seen in the next chapter.

The oppressiveness of these reactions has only been established theoretically here. According to Freire’s theory, the oppressed would become oppressors as long as they are not aware of their oppressions or if the process of conscientização is conducted in an oppressive manner. The existence of these two elements in the different reactions experienced by victims of direct violence is also further explored in the following chapters.

Moreover, this chapter has also shown that, many times, violent fighters and peace workers are, in fact, seeking the same outcome: the end of oppressive systems and the appearance of positive peace. However, their efforts fail to achieve the desired goal. This is because their actions are the result of oppressive reactions to oppression, which oppose each other. Peace workers’ tendency to avoid conflict and to forget –resulting from the experiencing of violence—, when imposed on others, can provoke rejection in those needing to confront conflict and unable to forget. This rejection can result in a
violent reaction, which, in turn, feeds the peace seekers’ reaction and pressures to work for negative peace. Not all peace efforts are moved by reactions, but all peace efforts should work against all kinds of reactions to oppression, and not only against violence as a reaction.
CHAPTER TWO
PEACE AND JUSTICE SEEKERS’ REACTIONS AGAINST VIOLENCE AS OPPRESSION

The first chapter has presented the difference existing between the Roman pax and the Greek, Hebraic and Arabic concepts of eirene, shalom and sala’am respectively. It has been seen how the acceptance or non-acceptance of violence separates the two different concepts of peace. It has also been proposed that the field of peace studies should try to understand oppression and its mechanisms rather than focusing only on the conditions to find peace in non-violent ways. Moreover, this proposal has led to the understanding that peace seekers might themselves be reacting to the oppression of violence.

In this chapter, the different forms these reactions might take are explored through the analyses of testimonies of different victims of violent human rights violations, and at the same time, their reactions are identified with different reconciliation strategies used in post-violent-conflict societies. The reader should note that these “reactions” could also constitute phases in one single reaction, or in the process of liberation. This is perhaps better portrayed, in a visual manner, in the graph included in the introduction to the thesis.

This section then, looks at the Buddhist/Jainist variable of the concept of ahimsa, calling for a non-violent behavior, as incomplete when it does not include as well the
inner peace or (Hindu) shanti. That is, this section calls peace and justice seekers as well as all victims of violence to be open to the ways in which their responses to violence might constitute a reaction, limiting the possibilities for ho’ping (Chinese) and heiwa (Japanese), which are characterized by the appearance of social harmony, peacefulness and adjustment.

1. Victims Who Forget

Trying to forget traumatic, painful experiences is a natural human response. Here the translation of this human need in the articulation of peacebuilding measures in post-violent-conflict societies shows to have had a positive impact. However, the testimonies of victims having forgotten and then having remembered show the importance of remembering while introducing some of its oppressive consequences. It is in these cases that the conflict existing within those needing to forget and those needing to remember becomes more apparent.

1.1. Those Wanting to Forget

Probably all victims of human rights abuses would like them to never have happened. It could be perfectly understood that they would experience a need to forget.\(^{18}\) In fact, almost everyone has at some time experienced this process or recommended it to somebody else. How many times have you thought your pain is less important or not comparable to that of others? How many times have you told a friend “come on, be

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\(^{18}\) Miroslav Volf recalls his own process: “Remembering and not wanting to remember, not daring to remember, rejecting memories, being prone, pull back into them, and finding redemption on them too (…) Returning to my memories of the long hours of terrifying interrogations to which I was subjected in the Spring of 1984, by the officers of the Yugoslavian army. The reason is simple, I don’t like to re-live those experiences. For as long as it is remembered, the past is not just the past, it is taken up into the present and given a new lease of life.” (Volf, 2004)
strong,” or “you need to move on!” This seems to be a common response to pain, which is very much impregnated in western societies. Clinical psychologists opine “such clichés may help the one saying them, but are rarely helpful to the griever” and instead recommend, in the case of loss or death as in other cases such as the survival of traumatic experiences, to “make contact, provide practical help, be available and accepting and be a good listener.” Only by being able to follow such a process could the “healing” process start (CCUI, 2004).

That is, forgetting could have very positive outcomes. Not looking at the past in order to work for the future allows those forgetting to be able to achieve the desired negative peace. At a minimum, there is no more violence. However, psychologists warn about the perils of forgetting, and insist about the necessity for the victims to remember in a healing manner. “The survivor often wishes to forget the incident and return to ‘normal.’ It is common to want to suppress feelings in order to forget about the incident and regain control. However, the crisis is not resolved” (CCUI, 2004). The writing in detail of the different experiences that were felt as oppressive—which is precisely what those forgetting fail to do, just as most peace students—could then be identified as being part of the already mentioned healing phase: “The survivor is ready to begin to deal with the feelings associated with the assault/abuse. This phase usually involves re-experiencing feelings, thoughts, and memories of the assault/abuse. This healing process may vary in duration” (CCUI, 2004).19

19 Miroslav Volf quotes Freud: Unexpressed traumatic experiences are like a foreign body “which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work. Healing is possible, only if a person recollects the event along with the emotional state which accompanied it. By bringing the event into the light of knowledge, therapy provides an opportunity for the normal discharge of the processes of exitation.” (Volf, 2004)
The description of peace students’ reactions to the oppressiveness of violence has showed that some of these individuals prefer to study and practice the ways in which to achieve peace than to complain about their miseries while still looking for peace. That is, peace seekers show a tendency to wanting to forget. In some cases, this need could translate, in post-violent-conflict settings, in their valuing and recommending the persecution of negative peace, or the end of violence, over the persecution of past violations of human rights. The so-called “peace activists” are big advocates of the advancement of human rights in the world. However, they believe in the importance of first guaranteeing a somewhat stable peace and only then think about accountability, especially in settings in which, they argue, the persecution of crimes could lead to a renewed violence.

Our study found that international human rights organizations have asked for too much and for too little with regard to human rights and peace implementation. They have asked for too much by insisting on a doctrinaire approach to human rights protection in environments that are ill suited for such an approach. They have asked for too little by dogmatically refusing to help new governments work toward greater human rights standards and to see that all subgoals of peace implementation should have a human rights component. (Stedman, 2001: 748)

In this sense, one could argue that the panacea or preferred model advocated by these peace seekers is the one the Spanish government followed after the dictatorship of General Franco. The country had experienced a civil war after which a dictatorship, which lasted for forty years, was established. Under the regime many abuses were committed and many liberties restrained. However, both sides in the war had committed cruel violations of human rights. When Franco died, a new generation not having experienced the war and looking at the future and at the dream of becoming part of the European Community, preferred to follow a policy of tabula rasa, forgetting the past and working for the future. This seemed to be the only chance for the establishment of a
stable democracy as President Suarez elected by King Juan Carlos I, had to negotiate and open the door for democracy “entre bastidores” (“behind the scenes”) (Prego, 1995). No criminal courts were established, and a general amnesty was accorded to political prisoners, while the military reform was carried through stages. This transition to democracy culminated with the writing of a new Constitution, which, for the first time in the Spanish history, was negotiated and agreed by all the parties. Since 1976, Spain has been able to live in peace, with, it is true, some of the negative consequences of its past still arising and provoking deaths. While a large autonomy was guaranteed to the “historical regions” which had suffered the repression of a system wanting to disregard the cultural differences; the separatist and terrorist group ETA asking for the Basque Country’s independence, continues to kill. The autonomic model is still one of the biggest political debates in that country. However, the Spanish case can be seen as a clear example that reconciliation is a process that never ends. The goal is to make that process continue forward and not be paralyzed.

The Spanish model thus calls for the forgiving or forgetting of past deeds for the sake of a better future, and could be considered to be the ideal model for many peace activists. In fact, one could wonder how the establishment of an international criminal court in the transitional Spain would have affected its stability.

However, its imposition in other societies has proven to be inadequate. The dilemmas encountered by peace and human rights activists in diverse post-violent-conflict settings are often more complicated, maybe because the events are usually more
recent than they were in the Spanish case. Sometimes, like in the Chilean case, societies show a neat divide between those asking for accountability and those rejecting it. The conflict seems to run the risk of raising further violence in settings in which the initial issues leading to the violent conflict have not only not been addressed, but further suffering has increased the potential for further violence. An example of these cases and further development of this discussion is later included through the presentation of the testimonies of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina.

When seeking peace means forgetting traumatic moments though, psychology tells us that reaction is oppressive to the person who forgets, even if it also constitutes a normal and probably necessary first reaction. This oppressiveness can also become oppressive to others as the following example will show. Moreover, as is later developed, if this tendency is imposed in others—especially those needing to remember—it its oppressiveness increases.

1.2. Those Who Forgot and then Remembered

A common prejudice against those having lived in settings of violent conflict and wanting to forget is the idea that, if they want to forget, it is because they feel guilty. “Victims want to remember and perpetrators want to forget,” is what is often said and believed. However, there are numerous instances which show the pain is sometimes so strong, the victim is unable to remember. This is what is usually called in psychology the “denial” stage. This section further shows the importance of letting the victim follow her/his own pace and the perils of failing to respect this process, while showing the clash

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20 One of the readers of this thesis pointed out that some forms of truth and reconciliation commissions naturally appeared among citizens themselves, in their own communities, although not in an institutionalized manner.
sometimes resulting between the different needs to forget and to remember, or between individuals facing different phases of a same process. This clash is precisely the factor this thesis proposes to constitute the conflict between peace and human rights activists.

These insights were found through the reading of *After Long Silence*, the story of Helen Freemont and her family. This national bestseller explains with great detail the ways in which horrible crimes as the ones committed by the Nazis during the Holocaust can be forgotten, or need to be put behind. It also demystifies the idea that those wanting to forget do so because of guilt. It further shows how this amnesia has also carried negative effects.

Helen Freemont discovered, while she was in her thirties, that her parents, who had raised her and her sister as Roman Catholics, were in fact Jewish having survived the Holocaust. A simple and casual conversation with a lawyer who explained other similar cases was sufficient for her to start looking backwards at all the signs that were telling this was actually her case too. Helen explains how she had always felt there was something weird at her home, how she had wondered about being Jewish before. From the moment in which the suspicion is accepted, Helen and her sister conduct a narrow investigation and are able to re-build a large part of their story. At the beginning though, they have the feeling that these news must be kept a secret and that it should never leave their family: “I was amazed and embarrassed by my emotion, which seemed to have arrived like an alien invasion, and I realized that I must never speak of our family, that our story must be kept a secret” (Freemont, 1999: 17). However, the more their
investigation advances, the more they feel the need to talk about these issues with their parents, as a way of completing a new sense of identity and understanding.  

I was exhilarated by the revelation. I had to admit, I wanted to be Jewish—if for no other reason than because it simply made sense. I began to recognize myself as a person with roots and a past, with a family history, with an identity. The stories of my childhood suddenly took a new meaning—everything seemed to be shifting, an underground movement of tectonic plates slowly clicking into place, finally fitting.

But an unsettling feeling gnawed at me when I thought about my parents. What had kept them in hiding all these years? What had made them hide from me? (Freemont, 1999: 32)

What had made her parents hide from her is not a complete mystery any longer. A story of persecutions, of hidings, of identity changes to survive, of witnessing deaths, of losses, of separation made Helen’s parents become convinced that they would only be safe by never returning to their original identity. Them, as well as Helen’s aunt had changed their identities forever, they had started a new life. However, the author clearly explains how her parents were overprotective and kept reminding their daughters about how lucky they were for everything they had.

More interesting for this analysis might also be the way in which her parents reacted when confronted with the truth, after long silence. The idea that each individual needs to follow his/her own pace to remember after a traumatic incident, is expressed first by Helen’s sister, who is a psychologist specialized in post-traumatic stress: “We can’t just rip off their new identity (…) If we confront them with the truth, it could shatter them.” (Freemont, 1999: 33) Nonetheless, Helen confronted her mother with the truth.

21 On the subject of memory and identity, Miroslav Volf states: “Memory is not only connected with our feelings, but also with our identities (…) because we are what we remember of ourselves (…) Memory (…) is central to our private and public identity. To the extent that we sever ourselves from memories of what has happened to us we will lose our proper identity. If suffering was part of our past, pain will be part of our identity. We need to embrace our memories along with pain that they contain, otherwise we will never be true to ourselves. In this second sense salvation lies in that memory protects us from distorting our very selves and living a lie.” (Volf, 2004)
The evolution of her reactions is worth taking note of as they show again, the possible oppressiveness felt by those who want to forget and who are forced to remember:

My mother’s lips were pressed together in a minus sign. She seemed to sense what was coming; her eyes glared with a ferocity that unnerved me (…) “about your past. We wanted to—“ “Ah, no!” she said, pushing back her chair and throwing up her hands. “I told you, I don’t want to talk about that! I told you! It’s too painful for me! I cannot do it! She jumped up from the table and marched across the living room. (…) “Read this,” she commanded. “It is exactly how I feel about all this business of the past, all this cultural baggage. Read it.” (…) “Look here,” she said, “you see, she feels exactly the same way I do! Until I saw this I was beginning to think I was crazy! But here, she says the same thing! Who needs all this baloney about the past?” A bullet of saliva hung at the edge of her lip and shot off with her next words. “Enough with the past! Forget about the past! Look forward! Enjoy today! Think about tomorrow!” (Freemont, 1999: 41)

After several months, she became more open to talk about the past, especially as she realized that her daughters knew what had happened to their grandparents. Helen’s mother had lost her parents, but had never asked what actually had happened to them. She had tried to erase all trace of her past, and that meant, also, to forget about her family. Helen’s mother, and further her father as well, slowly started to accept their past and were able to talk to their children about many of the painful experiences they had decided to forget. It took years, but it did happen. Helen’s parents seemingly succeeded finally in expressing some of the pain; they cried, thus started the healing process described by psychologists. At the moment in which Helen published her book though, they still preferred to forget and did not understand Helen’s need to explain her family’s secrets to a wide audience. However, Helen’s parents healing process had started, with positive consequences, not only for them, but also for their children. Apparently, the two sisters had always felt overprotected in a pressuring manner. They had always felt pressured to be happy, and not to suffer as their parents had already suffered enough.
Helen’s parents’ decision to forget, thus, had been oppressive to them, to others. This might be the reason why their daughters decided to push them in the direction of remembering even if they wondered about the morality and need for such an action:

“I was afraid of confronting our parents. I wasn’t sure we had the right to find out about them. “It’s not just about them! Lara said. “It’s about us! About who we are!” (Freemont, 1999: 159)

In this case the needs to remember and to forget seem to clash. Which one should prevail? Ivan Orozco Abad, a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute of the University of Notre Dame explores these issues in “La Posguerra Colombiana: Divagaciones Sobre la Venganza, la Justicia y la Reconciliación.” He quotes Tzevetan Todorov: “Perpetrators want to forget, while victims cannot forget. This is why the victims have the right to forget, while perpetrators are obliged to remember.” (Orozco, 1999) The obligation for the perpetrators to remember has not been explored here. However, the affirmation that victims have the right to forget seems to be contested by the fact that their amnesia might actually have negative effects on others.

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22 Others have also expressed the advantage of remembering for the purpose of having a complete sense of identity. Very recently, Juan Cabandié learnt his suspicions were true. He was born in the Escuela Superior de la Mecanica de la Armada (ESMA), where several “disappeared” were tortured and kept in captivity during the dictatorship in Argentina in the mid 1970s. His mother had been kidnapped when she was nineteen and had been kept alive until she gave birth. Juan was then given in adoption to a couple favoring the new order. He says he could not understand why he was so interested in social issues when he had been raised in such a different environment. He says these signs, accompanied by the lack of love and respect he received from his “adoptive” father, made him start an investigation. He was invited to talk about his experience in the same place in which he was born, the ESMA, where the new government has worked for and approved, after more than thirty years, the establishment of a museum to the memory of the disappeared. He said to still be overwhelmed by the news but very happy to think that his kidnappers did not succeed in their purpose.

-What was the worst part of this process?
- The hardest part is to acknowledge that the reality you have lived with until that moment is not real. The hardest part is to live the incertitude that you experience in these moments. The hardest, in my case, was to look for something without knowing what it was.
- And the best?
- The best part is that now I am free. (Cabandié, 2004)
Should the victims of direct violence remember then? Should they be forced to remember? The next section explores some of the perils of remembering,\textsuperscript{23} while understanding the need to remember experienced by the victims.

2. Victims Who Remember

Some differences can be found among those who remember. Some of the positive effects of remembering after having forgotten have just been presented in the hope that some of the victims forgetting, or trying to forget, or having decided to forget, would find some reasons to remember. However, remembering \textit{per se} is not the solution. Here, the testimonies of the victims asking for accountability, trying to forgive, and wanting to “let go” are presented. Their accounts continue to convey a hope to forget, to return to normality, or to avoid conflict. In some cases these factors lead towards the existence of a continuing pain, having its origin in the suffering of direct violence, but being exacerbated by the impossibility of ending it, even through the accomplishment of their original objective, such as, for example, the punishment of the perpetrators of the crimes, or even, their forgiving them. Those “letting go” seem to be able to get over that pain, however, they might just have gone back to the “forgetting” stage, the possible oppressive consequences of which have just been pointed out.

\textsuperscript{23} Miroslav Volf warns about these perils too: “How then can salvation lie in memory of wrongdoing and suffering? Instead of simply protecting the self, it may wound the other. Instead of generating solidarity with victims, it may breed indifference and reinforce the cycles of violence. Instead of providing acknowledgement for wrongdoing suffered, it may reinforce false self-perception and wrongful demands on the part of the victims. Instead of healing wounds, it may simply repeat the injury. It will certainly forge an identity, but this may be an identity of a person imprisoned in his or her past and meant to repeat it in one way or the other. Notice the word MAY in previous two sentences (…) My point is that such memory is dangerously ambiguous.” (Volf, 2004)
2.1. Victims Seeking Accountability

The cases and written accounts of victims asking for accountability are countless. Here the testimonies of different “Madres de la Plaza de Mayo” are presented. The Argentinean democratic government was overthrown in 1976 through a Coup d’État carried by a Junta of the military. This Junta was directed by four key men: Videla, Viola, Galtieri and Bignone. One of the hidden policies of this military regime was to annihilate any kind of socialism and “Peronism” in the Argentinean society. As a result, between 8000 and 30,000 people were kidnapped and disappeared forever. Among these individuals there were socialists and very politically compromised people. There were also other individuals, not involved in the political struggle, whose apparent crime was to appear in other’s agendas, or to have demonstrated some kind of social commitment, such as helping in orphanages. In all the cases, the disappearances were conducted in ways that clearly violated international law, and the atrocities committed are considered to constitute crimes against humanity. Also, several pregnant women disappeared. It was later known that they were kept alive until they gave birth. Their children were given “in adoption”—their birth certificates were falsified—to other couples, favoring the regime. The Mothers of the de Mayo square are some of the mothers of the disappeared, who, from the very beginning, demanded their government to give them information about the destiny of their children. They demonstrate every Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo. They want information, and accountability.

Matilde Mellibovsky has collected the personal accounts of many of these mothers in a single book, *Circulo de Amor sobre la Muerte* (Circle of Love over Death) (Mellibovsky, 1990). Their accounts are touching and it becomes almost impossible not
to feel with them the need for information and for accountability. The atrocities that were carried out during these years call for accountability by themselves. The intention of this section thus, is not to portray the idea that these crimes should not be punished. Some descriptions of these violations are actually reproduced here as a sign of respect and as one more way to denounce them.

At the same time though, the reading of these accounts leads to the realization that there might exist divergent individual reasons and reactions within the mothers. This segment is dedicated to the exposure of some of these differences and the factors that led to them as a way to first, allow the victims to better understand their own suffering, and second, present it as a reaction to two different and distinct oppressions: the kidnapping, torturing and killing of their beloved ones on the one hand, and the pressures to forget present in the different policies carried by the Argentinean governments till date. That is, this exposition presents the idea that sometimes, the need for accountability might not only derive from the horrific dimensions of the actions having been perpetrated, but also by the denial of such a possibility, accompanied by a lack of sensitivity, and by a feeling of being ridiculed and not understood or listened to. In other cases the search for accountability does not seem to be a need but a natural outcome. That is, some do not expect the punishing of the kidnappers, torturers and killers of their sons and daughters to relieve their pain. The reason why they continue asking for justice is because they understand the importance of denouncing these acts and making their perpetrators accountable, so that similar things will not be repeated in the future. However, other victims seem to rely on accountability for their finding this liberation or “inner peace.”
Before entering into the analysis of seeking accountability as a reaction to oppression, it is important to render tribute to the victims of the former Argentinean State terror(ism) and to their mothers. This passage thus, should be taken as a sign of respect for Josefina Gandolfi de Salgado and her son José María. He was kidnapped at the age of twenty-two, on March 12th, 1997 and killed on June 2nd of that same year. Although irony should probably not be used when talking about these atrocities, it might be useful in this specific case to understand the extent of the horror lived by these families. Being ironical, then, one could say that Josefina can consider herself to be lucky if compared to other mothers. She knows what happened to her son, she has been able to bury him. She even was able to talk to him after his kidnapping:

I believe my life stopped at that precise moment, and I don’t know if it was because of sadism or as a sign of obedience to some dirty joke coming from higher orders, but my interlocutor gave the phone to my son again, who, with a different voice this time, told me: “Mum, help me please!” and he added, before they cut it: “If you knew how I am!”

Forgive me, my son, we could not help you. We did everything we could in order to locate you, from the moment you called, and that is how our disgrace started.” (Mellibovsky, 1990: 127)

Josefina found her son, once he was dead.

I never thought there could exist in this world beings so abject who could reduce another human being into the state in which they left my son. I cannot explain either how two desperate women like us managed to stay still, looking at that poor piece of trash, covered with newspapers, who had been sadistically destroyed in life. We had a hard time recognizing him. I think it was his brown hair, abundant and docile, what told us it was our beloved son. Both his eyes were missing, and his mouth was opened in a terrible gesture of pain, showing a destroyed denture (…) Only then and there did I notice the atrocity of the stage in which his arms were and his hands covered by dark circular spots, which I later got to know were the marks of electrical burnings. The hands were almost cut, as the hole that

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24 “Creo que mi vida se detuvo en ese instante, y no se si fue por sadismo u obedeciendo a alguna sucia treta del cuartel, que mi interlocutor le dio nuevamente el teléfono a mi hijo, que ya con otra voz, me dijo: “Mamá, ¡ayudame porfavor!” y añadio antes de que cortaran: “¡Si supieras cómo estoy!”

Perdón, hijo mío, no te pudimos ayudar. Hicimos lo imposible para tratar de localizarte, desde el momento en que nos llamaste, y así empezó nuestro calvario.”
surrounded them, allowed the bone to be seen. I imagine he was hand-tied during the whole imprisonment. I wanted to look at the rest of the body, but they did not allow me to. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 125)

Josefina, just like other mothers, wants those who perpetrated these terrible crimes, those who inflicted all this terrible suffering on her son and her family to be accountable for what they did. She explains how she went through depression, and that the only thing that helped her to recover a little was to join those who had lived similar experiences to hers: the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. She further explains how her husband, a lawyer, could not stand realizing that everything he had learned, the “weapons that laws had put in his hands as a lawyer, were useless when trying to get his son back” (Mellibovsky,1990: 131). She concludes:

I was the witness of a parody of a trial, in which sufficient proofs were not found to condemn the genocidaires. It does not matter. I will continue fighting, notwithstanding all the “puntos finales”, because there cannot be a full stop for a mother who wants to know the truth about how her twenty-two year old son’s death happened. I WANT JUSTICE. (Mellibosky,1990: 131)

She wants justice. However, it is commonly known that the line dividing vengeance and justice is very thin. For sure, the perpetrators of these crimes should be held accountable for their crimes. However, in order for these actions to become liberating both for the

25 “Nunca creí que hubiera en el mundo seres tan abyectos que pudieran reducir a un ser humano al estado en que dejaron a mi hijo. Tampoco me explico como dos mujeres desesperadas pudimos seguir depie mirando a ese pobre despojo, tapado con diarios, que había sido sadicamente destruido en vida. Nos costó reconocerlo. Creo que fue su cabello castaño, abundante y dócil, lo que nos dijo que era nuestro querido muchacho. Le faltaban ambos ojos, y tenía la boca abierta en un terrible gesto de dolor, mostrando una dentadura destrozada (...) Recién allí me di cuenta del estado atroz en que estaban sus brazos y sus manos cubiertas de manchas circulares pardas, que luego supe eran cicatrices de quemaduras de picana eléctrica. Las manos estaban casi seccionadas a la altura de la muñeca, pues el surco que las rodeaba, llegaba hasta el hueso. Supongo que estaría maniatado durante todo su cautiverio.

Quise mirar todo el resto del cuerpo, pero no me dejaron.”

26 “Fuí testigo de una parodia de juicio, donde no hubo suficientes pruebas para condenar a los genocidas. No importa, seguiré luchando, pese a todos los puntos finales, porque no puede haber punto final para una madre que quiere saber la verdad acerca de la muerte de su hijo de veintidós años. QUIERO JUSTICIA.”
mothers and for the Argentinean society at large, the search for accountability should not constitute a reaction to the pain, but a real understanding of the circumstances of each of these crimes. That is, the mothers would not feel less pain after the perpetrators have been punished and the establishment of criminal courts should not pretend to respond to this need.

The mothers’ reaction responds however, to the specific nature of the crimes committed, but also, to the way in which they were treated. They were not listened to, they were ridiculed, their natural need for information was taken as an obstacle for reconciliation. The mothers ask for accountability because they are reacting to this second oppression, the one appearing from the lack of non-oppressive methodologies trying to deal with the pain of the victims.27

All the mothers of the disappeared who gather every Thursday in the de Mayo square want to know what happened to their sons, daughters and grand-children. They want to know, also, who kidnapped their children, where they were taken, what kind of atrocities they had to go through, and who inflicted them. They also want to know when and how they died, and where they were buried. Matilde Mellibovsky clearly explains the reasons why, even if they seem or could seem to be obvious:

When death comes, the resulting victims know the story, with all the details: they can chronologically narrate and transmit what happened until the final development. Everything is known. And it is a need of the resulting victims to relate and listen again and again to all the details.

Concerning an enforced disappearance, everything remains surrounded by a web of “maybe,” indefinitions, doubts.

27 Miroslav Volf says: “If no one knows and remembers of the misdeed, and no one names it publicly, the misdeed remains invisible. The victim is not a victim and the perpetrator is not a perpetrator. Both alike have been misperceived because one’s violence and the other’s suffering have gone unrecognized. A double injustice has occurred. The first when the original deed was done and the second when it was made to disappear.” (Volf, 2004)
Each member of the family who receives the news elaborates his/her own story, but the disappeared destiny is condemned to be an eternal mystery. They are victims of terrible emotional alterations, because information was distorted with disinformation; truth with lies, ignorance, doubt and the hope that there is life: a continuous burying and unburying of the disappeared, going on for twelve years now. There is no authority of the democratic process that would assume the responsibility of calling the parents and communicate to them at what moment and for what reason their children were killed. Those who took the government, elected through the popular vote, become accomplices of the mystery, of the illegal. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 47) 

In other testimonies she presents, the reader can see the effects these disappearances had on some of the families. As it is normal, all the relatives of the disappeared were deeply shattered by the news. In the narrative of these personal accounts, though, one can also realize the fact that not all of the individuals felt the same way, and that their feelings changed over time. Here are some examples.

Marta Vázquez, whose daughter and son-in-law disappeared on May 14, 1976.

Now I look at him, I can look at it. And I feel great love, something very special. At the beginning, you know, when I was by myself and looked at it, I started crying like crazy, I could not bear it, I hugged the picture... It is true, I hugged it many times and I claimed and supplicated to it... Now, time has taught me that it is another one the manner to... to live and continue forward. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 114) 

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28 “Cuando sobreviene la muerte, los deudos conocen la historia, con todos los detalles y matices: pueden relatar y transmitir cronológicamente lo sucedido hasta el desenlace final. Se sabe todo. Y es una necesidad de los deudos relatar y escuchar una y otra vez los detalles.

Con respecto a una desaparación forzosa todo queda envuelto en una maraña de conjeturas, de indefiniciones, de dudas.

Cada miembro de la familia que recibe la noticia elabora su propia historia, pero el destino del desaparecido está condenado al eterno misterio. Los deudos son víctimas de terribles alteraciones emocionales, porque se distorsionó la información con desinformación, la verdad con la mentira, ignorancia, duda, la duda y la esperanza de que hay vida: un continuo entierro y desentierro del desaparecido, ya a través de más de doce años. No hay una autoridad del proceso democrático, que asuma la responsabilidad de llamar a los padres y comunicarles en qué momento y por qué motivo fueron asesinados sus hijos. La gente que asumió el gobierno elegida por el voto popular se hace cómplice del misterio, de lo ilegal.”

29 “Ahora lo miro, lo puedo mirar. Y siento un gran amor, algo muy especial. Los primeros tiempos, sabes? Cuando estaba sola y lo miraba, me ponía a llorar como una loca, no lo podía soportar, me abrazaba al cuadro... Es cierto me abrazaba montones de veces y le he clamado y suplicado ... Ahora, el tiempo me ha enseñado que es otra la manera de... de vivir y seguir adelante.”
Alicia Rivarola de Cárdenas, mother of Álvaro, kidnapped when he was 23 years old.

What happened to me before, when I wanted to talk about my son, it seemed as if words would not get out, the anxiety was so great, that I did not have words. Now I understand what was happening: desperation and anxiety were preventing me to express judgments and words about the operation carried at home, my son’s detention and its subsequent disappearance…

If I was able to overcome it, it is only because I integrated the Mothers, because I went to the square and started channelizing my anxiety in this way, in the fight. (Mellibovsky,1990: 206)

She also talks about her other son’s experiences:

My younger son was the victim of an emotional shock after the operation and kidnapping of the eldest, who was eight years older than him. As a result, he quitted his studies, he did not want to do anything at all, he used to enter high schools from one door and leaving from another… it took him five years to recover, thanks to a very good therapist. Once he recovered, (...) he became an actor and carries a normal life, but that wound is still there, the horrible image of the kidnapping is still there. (Mellibovsky,1990: 209)

Besides the normal feelings of despair these mothers express to have felt in a first moment, these three instances seem to convey a feeling of overcoming of the depression stage. This liberation also could be understood as being the result of an acceptance and understanding of the feelings. In other cases though, these emotions are not disappearing.

Matilde Mellibovsky herself explains her reactions and some of the reasons for it. She could not understand how other people could be so blind in front of such atrocities:

All my life became a continuous walking, searching and asking… And when I walked on the street by myself and saw the faces of all these people, so indifferent to my disgrace, they seemed so far away from what was happening to me that I

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30 “Lo que me ocurría antes, al querer tocar el tema de mi hijo, parecía que las palabras no me salían, era tan grande la angustia, que yo no tenía palabras. Ahora comprendo lo que me pasaba: la desesperación y la angustia me impedían emitir juicios y palabras sobre el operativo que hubo en casa, la detención de mi hijo y su posterior desaparición…
Si pude superarlo fue porque me inteigré a las Madres, porque fui a la Plaza y empecé a canalizar así toda esa angustia en la lucha.”

31 “Mi hijo menor fue víctima de un shock emocional a raíz del operativo y del secuestro del mayor, el tenía 8 años de diferencia con el hermano. A raíz de eso, dejó los estudios, no quería hacer nada, entraba en un instituto por una puerta y salía por la otra… tardó como cinco años en recuperarse, gracias a una terapeuta muy buena. Una vez recuperado (…) se recibió de actor y lleva una vida normal, pero siempre le ha quedado esa herida, le ha quedado esa horrible imagen del secuestro.”
wondered how could all these people live and be happy? Don’t they know that so many children have been kidnapped? I think I spoke to myself, no I am sure I spoke to myself, alone and loudly, while I walked. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 74)\(^{32}\)

She also recognizes her obsession with this issue prevented her from continuing with her life and with taking care of others who were still alive:

The relationship with the other sons was not easy. Obsessed with the continuous search of the disappeared one, we were unable to realize that we were abandoning those left next to us, and how much did they suffer! (Mellibovsky, 1990: 75)\(^{33}\)

She is obviously not talking only about her own case, and several accounts included in this collection make a point about this fact.

However, what seems more important about this last case is the recognition that part of the pain was coming from the feeling of not being listened to, understood, and that the victims were alone in their sorrow. This is actually a recurrent theme present in almost all of the accounts documented in her book.

We became desperate, imploring (…) Just a little bit of information, we were only looking for that. But the regime kept humiliating us, over anything else, it kept humiliating us. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 71)\(^{34}\)

How was grammar important when each testimony, each habeas corpus, each letter, were receiving the only response of silence? (Mellibovsky, 1990: 12)\(^{35}\)

What a bitterness, they do not even give us the right to shout!? Don’t they know they took him away…? They took the best out of a generation away… They did not allow us to know why they took them away either, nor to see the burying or to

\(^{32}\) “Toda mi vida se volvió un continuo caminar, buscar y preguntar… Y cuando caminaba sola por la calle y veía las caras de toda la gente, tan indiferentes a mi desgracia, me parecían tan lejanos de lo que me pasaba que yo me preguntaba cómo podía vivir toda esa gente y ser feliz? No saben que han secuestrado a tantos chicos? Creo que hablaba sola, no estoy segura de que hablaba sola mientras caminaba.”

\(^{33}\) “La relación con los otros hijos no fue fácil. Empecinadas en la continua búsqueda del desaparecido, no nos dábamos cuenta de que abandonábamos a los que quedaron a nuestro lado y ¿cómo sufrían!”

\(^{34}\) “Nos volvimos individuos desesperados, implorantes (…) Una pizca de información, sólo eso buscábamos. Pero el régimen nos humillaba, por sobre todas las cosas, nos humillaba.”

\(^{35}\) “De qué nos servía la sintaxis cuando cada testimonio, cada habeas corpus, cada carta, recibían la sola respuesta del silencio?”
have where to take a flower to… and now they do not even understand that we have the need to remember them, to explain how we remember them. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 21)36

Once in the square, a guy passed by with his car and shouted at us, making fun: “What are you looking for? They are all dead! We continued. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 22)37

How good they were at making almost the whole country believe their lies! How easy was it to make them see us, those who claimed to have our beloved back, as crazy people. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 125)38

In their narrations, the mothers clearly show that they are reacting to this humiliation, and how.

We had to remain silent: we denounced.
We had to be indulgent: we demanded.
We had to be submissive: we unmasked the reality.
We had to silence others: we shouted with all of our strength.
We had to bury in silence: we unburied.
But over anything else, we had to stay at home: we went out, walked, we got in unsuspected places. Some mothers got to the Government’s headquarters and US and European institutions; in other cases, we went through all the streets, neighborhoods and villages. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 71)39

It is amazing that such a tragedy did not paralyze us but, just the opposite, it gave us the impulse. It gave us the strength to walk the path we never thought we would. At the beginning, asking, begging, asking again so that they would give us some news about our sons. Did the earth swallow them? Later, directly confronting the dictatorship to claim for their lives. We did not care about the.

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36 “Qué amargura, no nos dejan ni siquiera el derecho de gritar!? Acaso no sabe que se lo llevaron…? Se llevaron lo mejor de una generación… Tampoco nos dejaron saber por qué se los llevaron, ni ver el entierro ni tener donde llevar una flor… y ahora ni siquiera entienden que tenemos necesidad de recordarlos, de contar cómo los recordamos.”

37 “Una vez en la Plaza, pasó un tipo con un auto y nos gritó, burlándose: “Qué buscan? Estan todos muertos!”

38 “Cómo engañaron a casi todo el país! Qué fácil fue hacernos pasar como locos a los que reclamábamos para que nos devolvieran a nuestros seres queridos!”

39 “Había que callar: denunciábamos.
Había que ser complaciente: demandábamos.
Había que ser obsescente: desenmascáramos.
Había que silenciar: gritábamos con toda nuestra fuerza.
Había que enterrar en silencio: desenterrábamos.
Por sobre todas las cosas había que quedarse muy quieto en casa: salíamos, caminábamos, nos metíamos en lugares insospechados. Algunas madres llegaron hasta la sede de Gobierno e instituciones de EEUU y Europa; otras, recorriamos las calles, los barrios, los pueblos.”
power difference, the love for our children took us to defy the whole repressive apparatus. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 96)

And I believe all these little encounters we had with the police and the security forces, instead of scaring us, mobilized us even more. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 118)

At this stage, one might start wondering whether the mothers’ reactions and continuing pain would have been the same if the government’s response had been different, if the families had had the information they were asking for. It is interesting to see how their sense of humiliation increases with the final upcoming of democratic governments. They had reposed a lot of hope that they will be finally listened to, under a democratic government. However, the “reconciling of the society” measures taken by their new governments were felt as a renewed and even crueler humiliation, which made their pain become even greater than before.

They kept torturing us for eight years, at least, with the illusion and we, naively attached ourselves to that hope… knowing, deep inside, they would never tell us anything, but if we had lost our hope, we would have lost everything… (Mellibovsky, 1990: 208)

Now that we already had a democratic government why didn’t they end our doubts and (…) the extra-official messages continued? Why did the mystery have to continue? Why did we, the relatives, have to continue our search by ourselves? (Mellibovsky, 1990: 176)

40 “Es asombroso que semejante tragedia no nos haya paralizado sino, al contrario, nos dió impulso. Nos dió la fuerza para recorrer un camino que nunca pensamos que ibamos a transitar. Al principio, pidiendo, rogando, reiterando pedidos para que nos dieran alguna noticia sobre nuestros hijos. Se los había tragado la tierra? Después, enfrentandonos directamente con la dictadura para reclamar por sus vidas. No nos preocupó la diferencia de fuerzas, el amor por los hijos nos llevaba a desafiar todo el aparato represivo.”

41 “Y creo que todas esas pequeñas escaramuzas que teníamos con la policía y con las fuerzas de seguridad, en vez de amilanarnos, nos mobilizaban más.”

42 “Nos estuvieron torturando durante ocho años, por lo menos, con esa ilusión y nosotros ingenuamente nos aferrábamos a una esperanza… sabiendo en el fuero íntimo que nunca nos iban a decir nada, pero si perdíamos la esperanza, perdíamos todo…”

43 “Por qué ahora que ya teníamos un gobierno democrático no pusieron fin a nuestras incertidumbres y siguieron los trascendidos y los mensajes extraoficiales? Por qué debía continuar el misterio? Por qué los familiares teníamos que seguir buscando por nuestra cuenta?”
The new democratic government, presided by Alfonsín, opened the way for investigations to be carried. First, it declared the Army Supreme Council was to judge its members for the actions carried during the repression initiated with the 1976 Coup d’État. It further created a special commission committed to the investigation of the destiny of the disappeared on December 15th, 1983. Mellibovsky explains that the purpose of this commission, the CONADEP, was to collect the denunciations and testimonies and to verify the existence of hundreds of detention centers. Moreover, a report on its findings was published, entitled: “NEVER AGAIN.” However, she argues, these measures were insufficient:

This Commission did not respond to our expectations (…) All data were not being collected in a complete manner. We could never elucidate the absolute truth.

From all the immense collection of documentation, it became clear that the violation of human rights conducted by the army had been systematic: always carried in the same manner, with similar kidnappings and identical torments in the whole territory of the Republic, as a planned thing. This put an end to the argument given by the army that “In all wars mistakes and excesses are committed,” denying their responsibility for the disappearances. (…)

This Commission revealed and spread the reality of the atrocities committed during the 70s, but it was not the adequate instrument to investigate the crimes with the necessary depth and to judge the methods employed to use terror against all the Argentinean people, as would have been that bicameral commission we demanded.

That is, it investigated a lot about the disappeared, but revealed very little about the perpetrators. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 181)44

44 “Esta Comisión no colmaba nuestras expectativas (…) No se acababa de recopilar datos. La verdad absoluta nunca llegaba a esclarecerse. De la enorme documentación recogida, quedó en claro que la violación de los derechos humanos realizada por las fuerzas armadas fue sistemática: de la misma manera siempre, con similares secuestros e idénticos torments en todo el territorio de la República, como una cosa planificada. Se echa así por tierra ese argumento que los militares esgrimían: "En toda Guerra siempre hay errores y excesos", negando su responsabilidad en las desapariciones. (…)

Esta Comisión reveló y difundió las atrocidades cometidas en la década del ’70, pero no era el instrumento adecuado para investigar los crímenes con toda la profundidad necesaria y enjuiciar el método empleado para ejercer el terror contra el pueblo argentino, como lo hubiera sido esa Comisión Bicameral que nosotros reclamábamos.

Es decir, investigó mucho sobre los desaparecidos, pero reveló muy poco sobre los desaparecedores.”
While the government of Alfonsín seemed to be making lot of efforts for rebuilding a new democratic society in Argentina, which would pay attention to human rights issues, these measures always seemed insufficient to a collective of mothers who had been suffering for years the humiliation of being treated as crazy by a large part of the society. Their need for accountability and to knowing the truth while completely understandable, could also be interpreted here as a reaction, rather than as a liberating response. Their demands seem to shift and increase as some of them are met. It seems as if, getting the response they were expecting for so long from the government suddenly feels insufficient, maybe because their suffering does not end. The federal trial ended with the condemnation and imprisonment of the members of the three first military Juntas. This did not heal their wounds:

(…) the Supreme Council never judged any of their members, indefinitely delaying the opening of the investigations. As a result, the government was obliged to send the denounces to the federal judicial system (…) The horror and cruelty were exposed, as the trials were carried orally and publicly. The trial was filmed but it was never shown to the Argentinean television audience (…) Because we [the mothers], besides the condemnation of the repressors, hoped to reconstruct the complete story of each of the mysteries that accompanied us during these years. Even though we finally got to know the method that had been applied was similar in all the cases, we needed to know, in a concrete manner, what had been done to each of our children. But only some of the mothers got to know the whole truth. The macabre methodology that had been used had been conceived so that we would never find the truth. (Mellibovsky, 1990: 182)\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45} “(…) el Consejo Supremo no llegó a juzgar a ninguno de sus pares, dilatando indefinidamente el tratamiento de las causas. Es así que el Gobierno se ve obligado a retirar las causas del Consejo Supremo y remitirlas a la justicia federal (…) El horror y la crueldad quedaron expuestos en una vidriera muy amplia, puesto que se realizó bajo la forma de un juicio oral y público. El juicio fue filmado aunque nunca se lo mostró a los televídentes argentinos (…) Porque nosotras, además de la condena de los represores, esperábamos reconstruir la trama completa de cada uno de los misterios que nos acompañaron todos esos años. A pesar de que finalmente supimos que el método aplicado en todos los casos fue similar, necesitábamos saber concretamente qué les habían hecho a cada uno de nuestros chicos. Sin embargo, sólo algunas Madres conocieron su realidad. La metodología macabra utilizada estaba concebida para impedir que llegáramos a la verdad.”
These feelings were understandingly emphasized again with the promulgation of three laws that permanently closed the investigation and remembering of the atrocities. The “Ley de Punto Final” (Full Stop Law) gave sixty days as the limit to present denunciations against any individual for its possible involvement in the crimes against humanity. It established that after that time, any penal action would proscribe.

Moreover, the “Ley de Obediencia Debida” (Law of the Duty of Obedience) presumed that army officials, and other security, police and penitentiary forces that participated in these actions were not punishable for their acts as they were obeying to higher orders. The law considered that these people acted under coercion, under the subordination of higher authorities, obeying orders without having the capacity or possibility for inspection or resistance against them, or their legitimacy (Mellibovsky, 1990: 183). The answer given by the mothers could have been prophesized:

> With the promulgation of this Law, they were again imposing on us the co-habitation with these men who had tortured (…) our sons. In the Square, we, the Mothers, continued claiming: “No to the punto final, no to impunity. Trial and punishment to all the guilty ones!” (Mellibovsky, 1990: 183)³⁶

Only this year (2004), the Kirchner government decided to give part of the ESMA building, where so many tortures were carried on, for the construction of a Museum of Memory. Also, high representatives of the Army expressed a public apology for the crimes committed during that time, finally recognizing the existence of these crimes and the army’s responsibility for them.³⁷ However, and here again, the leader of

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³⁶ “Con la promulgación de esta Ley nos volvían a imponer que convivieramos con esos hombres que habían torturado y vejado a nuestros hijos. En la Plaza, las Madres seguimos reclamando: “No al punto final, no a la impunidad. Juicio y castigo a todos los culpables!”

³⁷ “At the military academy here, the commander of the Argentine Army has removed portraits of two generals who presided over the last dictatorship. At the notorious Naval Mechanics School, the site of many that era’s worst abuses, not only have photos of the victims put up, but the entire complex is to be turned into a Museum of Memory honoring their ordeal.
one of the groups constituted by the mothers, Hebe de Bonafini, expressed her
disagreement: “We are not in agreement with this museum project (…) Museums mark
the end of a story, and we haven’t reached that point in Argentina yet (…) It’s much too
soon to be setting up a museum, because the historical events in question are too recent”
(Rohter, 2004). Her disapproval could be considered as a stubbornness not allowing her,
and others, to reconcile with their own feelings. However, in this case, it might show
something even more interesting: the fact that, even if the perpetrators had been
persecuted, that is, even if the Argentinean government had chosen to confront conflict
and allow the victims to remember by establishing criminal courts persecuting the crimes,
these measures could have run the risk of becoming the end of the story. That is, while
probably necessary in the path towards reconciliation, these measures would not have
been sufficient, in the same way that this museum isn’t either. The confrontation of the
conflict is not translating into its transformation. The new Argentinean government
seems to remember in order to forget.

The conflict that preceded these horrible violations of human rights seemed to be
a socio-political struggle between the “Peronists” and those more in the right wing. This
conflict seems to continue to be present within the Argentinean society:

Mr. Kirshner, a Peronist, seemed to be suggesting that the focus will be on
the military dictatorship that dominated the country from 1976 to 1983.
But non-Peronists argue that such a timeline would only distort historical
realities. The policy of State terrorism associated with the so-called dirty war
actually began earlier, many historians argue, under the government of María
Estela de Perón, through a paramilitary group responsible for many early
disappearances and killings (…) Some conservatives have expressed reservations
about the museum’s focus, but Mabel Gutiérrez, a leader of the Group of
Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained, said: “We are going to try to be as
impartial as possible in telling the story, but if those on the other side don’t like it, let them make their own museum. They have the money of the reactionaries of the right.” (Rohter, 2004)

The Argentinean case, and, in particular the testimonios of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, show the results of trying to impose a policy of tabula rasa as the one having been used in the Spanish case, as a model. This is why, human rights advocates consider that the main points in establishing criminal courts in post-violent-conflict societies are:

(a) punishment of such crimes deters future crimes and (b) borrowing from psychology, neither victims nor perpetrators will be able to live with the other until the crimes are acknowledged and some punishment, compensation, or sign of remorse is given. (Licklider, 2001: 711)

Furthermore, they argue

The issue of accountability versus impunity is not only relevant to the resolution of conflict within a war-torn country; it also may have grave consequences for future, seemingly unrelated conflicts in other parts of the world. In explaining his confidence that he could proceed with his diabolical campaign of genocide without fear of retribution by the international community Adolf Hitler infamously scoffed, “Who remembers the Armenians?”—referring to the victims of a genocide twenty-five years earlier for which no one had been brought to account. (Kritz, 2001: 810)

As important and necessary as the accountability of such crimes is, though, those advocating for the establishment of these institutions in all post-violent-conflict settings, fail to recognize the fact that each society has suffered different violences and circumstances, and different individuals, with different cultures, compose each society. That is, their lack of flexibility might be a sign that those proposing this alternative are reacting, just like the mothers. They might not conceive any other response to violence but the remembering and persecution of the crimes. However, other possibilities exist. Moreover, the establishment of such courts in certain settings can be more of a burden, and a tool for continuous remembrance of the hatred and pain, than a reconciliation tool.
In certain cases, society at large has committed atrocities. In these cases, such as in Rwanda, criminal courts face important practical problems:

Major human rights violations may involve thousands of people; someone estimated that every Hutu family in Rwanda had at least one member directly involved in the massacres. Postsettlement states do not have the resources to give fair trials to so many people, so decisions about who will be punished are necessarily arbitrary and unfair. The international tribunals have found it difficult to function effectively, both because of the intrinsic difficulty of the task and because of lack of resources. Truth commissions find their reports disregarded or attacked. In the storm of problems confronted by a new government, how important is transitional justice? (Licklider, 2001: 712)

Besides the practicability of their establishment though, these cases show the existence of important conflicting issues behind the committing of crimes, which these institutions fail to address.

In the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the victims needed to remember and to know the truth. And this right was denied. As a result, the Mothers, and others, were the victims of a double oppression, or rather, of three different oppressions. First, their relatives had disappeared; second, their demands for information were answered with silence and they were ridiculed; third, their reactions are not helping them in their fight against their pain, but just the opposite. Some of the mothers seem to rely on the punishment of the perpetrators as the only way in which they would feel liberated from their pain.

At the same time though, this case is also helpful in understanding a recurrent theme of this chapter and one of the theses of the thesis: these reactions are necessary for reconciliation. They represent one more step in the path towards it. The danger lies, then, in getting stuck in this reaction and not being able to move towards a further liberation through a process of awareness-raising that would allow the victims to recover
a healing memory, while at the societal level, the conflicts will be transformed and not only confronted. The work of criminal courts, thus, while necessary, is not sufficient. Criminal courts are called to become more flexible and get a broader vision of their role in post-violent-conflict societies. Maybe then they will stop constituting a limit to other approaches directed towards reconciliation, to become one of their tools. More important is to remind its proponents of the existence of different reactions among the victims and of the need to address these in a non-oppressive manner. This means, for instance, the non-imposing of any pre-established solution, especially, when this solution could be, in itself, the result of a reaction to oppression.

2.2. Victims Who Forgive and/or “Let Go”

Remembering might have its dangers. However, those who remember and use that memory in a positive way could actually achieve certain liberation from the original pain. Miroslav Volf talks, in his exploration of memory and reconciliation, of the ways in which painful memory could be transformed into a healing one:

As the trauma literature consistently notes, for wounded psyches to be healed, persons must not only remember traumatic experience, in one way or another, they must also integrate the retrieved memories into a broader pattern of their lives stories, either by making sense of the traumatic experiences, or by tagging them as a cert element in their lives (…) As I remember the humiliation and pain of my military police interrogation, I can tell myself, for instance, that the suffering has made me a better person, saying that it has drawn me closer to God or made me more empathetic to suffering of others. Or I can come to believe that it has contributed in a small way to exposing the injustice of the regime that sought to control its citizens by oppressive means. In any case, healing will be accomplished, not by remembering, but by seeing memories and experiences they hold, in a new light. Put differently, memory of suffering is a pre-condition for healing, not its means. The means of healing is the interpretative work done with memory. (Volf, 2004: unpublished)
Many of the personal accounts that follow, could represent the achievement of this healing memory. The victims here exposing their experiences reveal an in-depth understanding of the circumstances and conditions that led to the appearance of the violence they had suffered. They understand. They even show, in some cases, to have reached an understanding of the circumstances lived by their perpetrators. This understanding, together with the interpretative work proposed by Volf, seems to allow them to reach the desired goal of “returning to normal,” or at least, to be able to “move on.” These victims then, could be considered to be the exemplification of those having gone through a process of conscientização, through which they have become aware, both of the reasons that led to their victimization, as of the oppressiveness of their reactions against that pain.

However, their accounts show two other characteristics of the process they went through. First, their awareness has not been reached in a non-oppressive manner. That is, these individuals were pushed in one way or another to move from their hatred to forgiveness, in the two first cases, and from pain to “letting go,” in the two other cases. These processes were again, imposed, not allowing the victims to follow their own pace. As a result, it seems interesting to wonder: have they really forgiven? Have they really been able to “let go”? They might have just gone back to the forgetting stage. Second, their “liberation” seems to be accompanied again by the feeling that the story has ended. The perpetrator might be in jail, or dead, or simply there might be nothing else to do against the perpetrator but to write a testimony exposing what happened. The authors of these testimonies again are not to blame. Still it is interesting to note that their believing of having reached the end of a process might just be an illusion, which in turn helps the
process of reconciliation being paralyzed. True healing, forgiveness, and transformation of the conflicts have not been achieved. These might be clear signs that the victims will probably continue to have “flashbacks,” just as those who forget. They might just be experiencing another phase in their reaction.

Marietta Jaeger went on vacation with her husband and five children. Their camping in Montana was supposed to be “once-in-a-life-time grand family vacation” (Enright and North, 1998: 9). However, something unexpected, something that should have never had happened occurred. Marietta’s youngest child, Susie, a seven-year-old girl, was kidnapped. She disappeared. She just wasn’t there any longer in the morning. As opposed to most of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, though, Marietta did get to know what happened to Susie. After a week of her kidnapping, a man called asking for a ransom in exchange for Susie’s life. After more than a year from that moment, Marietta was to discover that this call was made precisely after the kidnapper had killed her child.

This is, understandably, how Marietta felt:

I watched the toll this terrible time was taking on my family and I began to seethe with rage at this man who had done this to us. As an adult, I rarely expressed anger verbally, but while I prepared for bed that night, very consciously and deliberately and with much premeditation, I said out loud to my husband, “Even if the kidnapper were to bring Susie back, alive and well, this very moment, I could still kill him for what he has done to my family.” I believed I could have done so with my bare hands and a big smile on my face, if only I knew who he was. (Enright and North, 1998: 10)

While this is a human and understandable reaction, which often just needs to be expressed in order to disappear, Marietta became herself very aware of the fact that such a response will only give her more pain:

Almost as soon as the words were uttered, however human a response their sentiment was, I knew that to give myself to that ugly mindset would violate the principles and value system I held. Also, I’d learned enough about psychological
well-being to know that hatred was not healthy. I knew myself well-enough to recognize that, if I allowed that rage to engage my mind, it would obsess me and drain away all the psychic energy I needed to care for my family, cope with my own heartache, and, I hoped, help Susie process her own ordeal when she was returned. (Enright and North, 1998: 10)

Marietta’s account, thus, differs completely from most of the testimonies written by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, in that Marietta is determined in not letting this dramatic incident draw her into a pain and a hatred that would be oppressive, as she understands it, against her, but also against the rest of her family. Susie’s kidnapper was finally found and taken to jail. Marietta also and obviously asked for accountability. However, her seeking of justice seems to differ from the one expressed by the mothers or by other victims. Marietta has not been denied that possibility.

I knew the death penalty could be an option, and I was unabashedly convinced that this person should get “the chair.” Susie was an innocent, defenseless little girl; I had every right to avenge whatever had happened to her (...). Finally, because I’d been well taught always to reach for the highest moral ground, I surrendered. I made a decision to forgive this person. (Enright and North, 1998: 11)

Her case thus, seems to be the representation of what is being argued in this paper.

Marietta went through different stages and reactions, but she was able to become aware of the fact that those were reactions, and further, that they were oppressive to her. As a result, she makes the effort to try to understand. In her case, this understanding comes from her faith. She says to have found the necessary strength to forgive in her faith in God and in the belief, expressed by her religion, that each human being is a son of God and deserves respect. Her faith then, made her become more aware of the possibility that the perpetrator, too, might be reacting. Moreover, she seems to be also very aware of the fact that she would never forget what happened, and thus tries to see some positive consequence in the dramatic event, just as Volf proposes:
I’ve heard people say that forgiveness is for wimps. Well, I say then that they must never have tried it. Forgiveness is hard work (…) It does not mean we forget, we condone, or we absolve responsibility. It does mean that we let go of the hate, that we try to separate the loss and the cost from the recompense or punishment we deem is due (…) I had really come to believe that real justice is not punishment but restoration, not necessarily to how things used to be, but to how they really should be (…) Though I would have never have chosen it so, the first person to receive a gift of life from the death of my daughter … was me. (Enright and North, 1998: 14)

Marietta response to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is thus:

In the twenty years since losing my daughter, I have been working with victims and their families, and my experience has been consistently confirmed. Victim families have every right initially to the normal, valid, human response of rage, but those persons who retain a vindictive mind-set ultimately give the offender another victim. Embittered, tormented, enslaved by the past, their quality of life is diminished. (Enright and North, 1998: 14)

She concludes: “However justified, our unforgiveness undoes us.” (Enright and North, 1998: 14)

However, one could say, what Marietta Jaeger experienced has nothing to do with forgiveness. She did become aware of the reasons why her daughter was kidnapped and killed; she also became aware of her own reactions and of their negative effects. Even more, she is very conscious of the fact that she will never forget, and rather has been able to shape her memories and make this tragedy have some positive outcome: her renewed faith in God, her working with other victims, are just some examples. But, has she really forgiven him? What does it mean to forgive?

Marietta’s account constitutes the first chapter of the book Exploring Forgiveness. This collection, edited by Enright and North, explores the meaning of forgiveness from a multidisciplinary perspective. Philosophers, psychologists, lawyers, and others seem to agree on the fact that forgiveness happens when, just like Marrietta experienced,
First, complete honesty in the recognition that harm has been inflicted by one party on another; second a willingness to forgo prolonging the hostility through acts of revenge; the development and understanding and empathy between the parties (…) (Enright and North, 1998: 7)

But also,

(…) and finally, the offer of renewed community in the future. (Enright and North, 1998: 7)

That is, in her account, Marietta does not show, at any point in time, the establishment of an understanding relationship between the offender and the victim, nor the possibility of establishing any kind of future ties with the perpetrator. This is not to say that she should have. It only means that, while she probably reached certain inner-reconciliation with the events, she probably should not consider this process to constitute forgiveness. This is, in fact, an important differentiation to make.

The authors of this same volume brilliantly describe the fact that the victims experience different stages or reactions in front of their suffering. However, they understand these stages to be part of a process which goal should be forgiveness. Establishing forgiveness as a goal, though, carries many dangers. It could even be considered as a new oppression imposed on the victims. It could be that those proposing forgiveness as the solution have experienced themselves the goodness of such a process and therefore believe it to be the panacea all should follow. It might also be that, influenced by their religious beliefs, they would be convinced of its necessity. However, forgiveness does not seem to be always possible, and this impossibility, as has just been seen, does not prevent reconciliation to happen. In this sense, two articles of that same book express both the inadequacy of believing in forgiveness as the panacea or goal, and the fact that this concept comes from a Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition. According to
Enright and North, Beverly Flanigan looks in her article, “Forgivers and the Unforgivable,” at

(…) those situations in which forgiveness seems most difficult and cautions us against the overoptimistic belief that full forgiveness is always possible. Instead, she suggests that the degree of forgiveness possible is proportional to the degree of harm inflicted. (Enright and North, 1998: 6)

On the other hand, Joseph Elder’s article on “Expanding Our Options: The Challenge of Forgiveness” establishes the fact that not all religions and cultural traditions include the concept of forgiveness, and thus wonders: “If this is true (…) then how can communities with widely differing views on forgiveness get together for mutual healing and reconciliation?” (Enright and North, 1998: 7). This is, indeed, the central question that remains unanswered. It might be that forgiveness is just one possible way in the path to reconciliation, and not its sine qua non.

Simon Wiesenthal’s The Sunflower though, gives a new insight on the subject of forgiveness (Wiesenthal, 1976). In his case, the simultaneity of wanting to forgive and not being able to, goes in hand with the belief that his religion requires him to forgive, when in fact, it would be giving him an excuse, or a new reason to choose not to. His account is even more interesting because of the fact that the account of a perpetrator –the one asking him for forgiveness—is also included.

Simon’s account is shaped in the form of a story, full of philosophical insights. While this testimonio is still written in the first person singular, it is hard for the reader to feel this is in fact, a true story. The reader doubts, not because the story is not believable, but probably and sadly, because it has nothing of “personal.” That is, what is recalled in these pages could be the story of many. Simon Wiesenthal was a Jewish “prisoner” in a Nazi concentration camp. The suffering he and others experienced there though is not
described to a large extent. Instead, the author chooses to portray the thoughts and conversations carried with other prisoners. He also makes the reader become very critical with all those who were blind to their tragedy. This one hundred pages account thus, concentrates on the confession of a Nazi soldier. He is a young, Catholic soldier, who is dying. He needs to express his repentance for the horrible crimes him and others like him have committed, and thus tells his story to Simon.

“My name is Karl … I joined the SS as a volunteer (…) I must tell you something dreadful … Something inhuman. It happened a year ago … (…) I have to talk to someone about it, perhaps that would help (…) My mother brought me up as a Catholic, I was actually a server in the church and a special favorite of our priest who hoped I would one day study theology. But it turned out differently; I joined the Hitler Youth, and that of course was the end of the Church for me (…) And then—then came the terrible thing … But first I must tell you a little more about myself (…) There was no place for humanitarian nonsense. The Fuhrer needed real men. That made a great impression on us at the time (…) He spoke of the final victory of the Fuhrer’s mission … On smoking out subhumans … We were given piles of literature about the Jews and the Bolsheviks, we devoured the ‘Sturmer,’ and many cut caricatures from it and pinned them above our beds (…) The fighting was inhuman. Many of us could hardly stand it. When our major saw this he shouted at us (…) In my young life I had never seen many Jews (…) I often gave them something to eat (…)

Otherwise all I knew about the Jews was what came out of the loudspeaker or what was given to us to read. We were told they were the cause of all our misfortunes (…) An order was given (…) and we marched toward the huddled mass of Jews. There were a hundred, including many children who stared at us with anxious eyes (…) Then we began to drive the Jews into the house (…) The house was not very large (…) I would have never believed it possible to crowd them all into it. But after a few minutes there was no Jew left on the street (…) When we were told that everything was ready, we went back a few yards, and then received the command to remove safety pins from hand grenades and throw them through the windows of the house. Detonations followed one after another … My God! (…) Behind the windows of the second floor, I saw a man with a small child in his arms. His clothes were alight. By his side stood a woman, doubtless the mother of the child. With his free hand the man covered the child’s eyes … then he jumped into the street. Seconds later the mother followed. Then from the other windows fell burning bodies … We shot … Oh God!”

(Wiesenthal, 1976: 29-43)
Karl further told Simon that he had longed to talk to a Jew to ask him for forgiveness, and that he could not die in peace otherwise. Simon, confused, finally decided to leave the room without a word. However, this experience troubled him for a long time. Wasn’t he supposed to forgive a repentant man? His contradictory feelings not only are natural, they also tell us a lot about the difficulties found in trying to forgive and in the pain that feeling forced to do so can carry. Should an imposed forgiveness –be it because of religious, moral or other standards—be considered a true forgiveness, even when it does not bring the forgiver the desired inner peace? Simultaneously though, Simon felt the need to forgive, but could not. In his inner exploration or possible path towards a possible true forgiveness though, others came to tell him that he was not allowed to forgive this man. Simon was told he could not forgive him, because the deeds that were being confessed had not been directly inflicted on him. As a result, Simon Wiesenthal asks its readers, in the form of his concluding remarks:

The crux of the matter is, of course, the question of forgiveness. Forgetting is something that time alone takes care of, but forgiveness is an act of volition, and only the sufferer is qualified to make the decision. You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally change places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, “What would I have done?” (Wiesenthal, 1976: 98)

What Simon Wiesenthal is asking us to do, though, seems an impossible task. Not all his readers have known the suffering he had to experience. In the same way, it is difficult to “mentally change places with” Karl and “ask yourself the crucial question.” However, one might wonder whether Simon has been able to forgive himself for not having been able to forgive. His account is not about his suffering in the camp, but about his confusion on the matter. The liberating process of writing about the painful experiences is here used to justify and re-live the pain of having been asked to forgive,
and then told not to, without having had the chance to make an inner decision.

Wiesenthal’s effort to put these doubts into written words might be helpful in two different ways. First, it might have allowed him to become more aware of the circumstances that surrounded his decision, and of the doubts he experienced. Second, it might be helpful to all those—victims and perpetrators—who lived those same circumstances. They might be able to understand it better.

Understanding seems to be, in fact, the main component leading the victims to be able to “let go.” Whether they want accountability, forgiveness, or just inner peace, their calm seems to come from a profound understanding of the causes and consequences of their suffering as well as with an ability to transform these memories into something positive. In the two cases that have just been exposed, though, seeing forgiveness as a goal has proven to have some negative effects. Some of those who believe to have been able to achieve it try to impose it on others. Those who are not able to achieve it might blame themselves for it. In the next two cases, the victims also reach an in-depth understanding of their situation and are able to “move on” by “letting go.” However, the question of whether their pain has really vanished or whether their “letting go” is not a renewed form of forgetting, remains.

*La Prisonnière* is the title of the published personal account written by Malika Oufkir with the help of the journalist and writer Michèle Fitoussi. (Oufkir and Fitoussi, 1999) In this 330 pages long account the authors obviously make an effort to communicate with the reader by introducing the story of Malika Oufkir, who was raised as a Princess in Morocco. The account is almost written as a novel, maybe influenced by the advice given by Michèle Fitoussi. However, the story is still explained in the first
person singular, which really helps the reader to identify and imagine Malika going through everything that is explained. The King of Morocco seemed to have a special attachment with her family and made it so that she would be raised together with his own daughter. Malika was separated from her parents and raised in palaces, treated as a real princess. However, her father, a supposedly loyal general, participated in a plot intended to kill the King. As a result, he was condemned to death penalty. Furthermore, Malika, together with her mother, sisters, brothers and faithful friends who decided to accompany them, were imprisoned first, then “buried” alive in minute cells which they had to share with all kinds of insects, with almost no food available. They all stayed “imprisoned” for twenty years. Malika was a teenager when she suddenly changed her luxurious life at the palace for the little space in the desert. Her five brothers and sisters were all younger. The youngest was only three when he lost his freedom. He grew up, until the age of twenty-three, in a cage, only in contact with the exterior world through the stories explained by his family. They finally escaped and were officially “released” by the King although still kept under strict vigilance, this time in a house with all the commodities. Malika wanted freedom, and for her that meant, leaving her country.

One of the most striking things about this personal account might be the way in which the authors are able to capture the reader’s attention. S/he is constantly surprised at the non-dramatic way of explaining what actually is a dramatic experience. Malika shows through this writing how human beings are able to adapt to the worst circumstances. In particular, she spends a lot of time in explaining many of the stories and jokes her and her family tried to survive with during their incarceration. Her explanation of the escape is probably the part in which the reader suffers the most, in the
hope—unconsciously not realizing that this book has been written from the outside of the cell—that it would be a successful one.

Overall, Malika is able to re-live her feelings and thoughts in an incredibly clear manner and her account seems to be dedicated to the reader more than to herself. She proves to have an in depth understanding of the politics, interests and feelings that led towards that action. She also seems to perfectly understand her present situation and has been able to deal with her past. She is now happily married. As she herself expresses, it is not that she has forgotten the past in order to continue living, she has rather reconciled with it.

However, Malika does not ask for punishment or accountability for those responsible for the pain of her entire family, nor does she claim to have forgiven them. This somewhat surprising factor of her life could be explained in two different manners. On one hand, her testimony, which was written in a strict confidentiality and in hiding, could be considered to be her denunciation of the crime. It would be, not only her means to liberate herself from part of the pain by organizing her experiences on paper, but also her call for justice. In this sense, it could be considered that Malika has reached an inner-reconciliation and peace by liberating herself from the imprisonment but also from its possible consequences: living the remaining years of her life in a constant depression. In this sense, she would be implying in her book that the story is not finished and that a transformation of her society and of those governing it is necessary, while assuming the fact that her life inevitably is different than it should have been. Malika won’t forget.

On the other hand it is also important to look at the hypothesis that Malika, and if not her, others, might have the temptation of just writing their account for themselves, not
making it public nor published, while having been able to reach that conscious stage. That is, does the liberation of a healing memory achieved through awareness imply passivity against the oppression felt? When it does, it might be showing a new need to forget and to avoid conflict. The reading of the following story conveyed that need.

The testimony of Hernán Valdés, *Tejas Verdes, Diario de un Campo de Concentración en Chile* (Valdés, 1996) is both similar and different to Malika’s. Hernán Valdés is a writer, with no political affiliation but more inclined to the left than to the right, who was kidnapped by the Chilean army after Pinochet’s Coup d’État to the Allende’s government. He disappeared and was taken to a concentration camp—Tejas Verdes—after having been tortured. In this case, the writing also includes the expression of feelings and thoughts. However, the detail to which Valdés explains his sufferings show an intention to communicate the pain to the reader. In particular he puts a special emphasis in describing and giving countless adjectives to everything related to the digestion process. He talks about his difficulties to “take a shit,” about the conditions of the “toilets,” the stinky odors, the insects. These descriptions take pages and pages. This seems to be his way to convey to the reader the painful and disgusting existence in the camp, which otherwise could be understood just as a lack of freedom in bad circumstances. He also describes pretty clearly the process of torture, although he seems to use many images in order to explain some of the most painful moments, such as the one in which his penis and mouth receive simultaneously an electric shock.

What becomes more interesting in his account is precisely that sense that the author is not writing for himself, but for his audience. It is almost as if Valdés wanted to forget but felt the rational responsibility to tell the world what happened in the
concentration camp. In fact, Valdés does not explain much about his personal life. Most of the book is dedicated to his experiences within the camp. The narration starts with the day when he was arrested –“Tuesday, February 12th 1974” is the title—and ends with the moment when he was released:

- Disappear, quickly.
I start walking, without looking in what direction the Spanish went, without turning around to observe the truck, which immediately left, I walk faster and faster, without looking back, without seeing anybody, dizzy by this space in front of me—it is an unknown street—, very fast, making efforts not to run and at the same time to not to turn my head backwards. (Valdés, 1996: 154)

The reader thus only gets to know about his current life and feelings through a preliminary note, included only in a renewed edition, and through the prologue, written by his friend Manuel Antonio Garretón. It is only in this prologue, written years later, that Valdés clearly establishes his disagreement with the ways in which the conflict has been and continues to be avoided.

As a Spanish author recently visiting Chile wrote, “to talk about these kind of things is not considered well.” Even, he says, in cultivated and progressive circles. Seeing the situation from here, it is understandable: we have never liked to look at the past, if it has not yet been heroized by the fashionable historians. We are an optimistic society, eternally young, who only looks forward. Chilean society, as for other matters, is pretty occupied with its present and future, with its tactical and strategic alliances, its businesses, its re-conquered “normality.” Reconciliation is a reality, at least for those economically reconciled, and the past, testimonies such as this one, play the role of spoilers. (Valdés, 1996: 4)

48 “—Desaparezcan, rápido.
Echo a andar, sin mirar por dónde ha ido el español, sin volverme para observar el camión, que ha partido en seguida, ando cada vez más rápidamente, sin mirar hacia atrás, sin ver a nadie, mareado por este espacio que hay hacia adelante—es una calle desconocida—, a toda prisa, reteniéndome para no correr y a la vez para no volver la cabeza hacia atrás.”

49 “Porque, como escribía un autor español recientemente de visita, hoy día, en Chile, hablar de “esas cosas, es considerado de mal gusto.” Incluso, afirmaba él, en circulos cultos y progresistas. Vista la situación desde aquí, se entiende: nunca nos ha gustado mirar el pasado, si todavía no ha sido heroizadopor los historiadores de turno. Somos un pueblo optimista, eternamente joven, que sólo mira hacia adelante. La sociedad chilena, por lo demás, está bastante ocupada con su presente y su futuro, con sus alianzas tácticas o estratégicas, con sus negocios, con su reconquistada “normalidad.” La reconciliación es una realidad, por lo menos para los reconciliados económicamente, y el pasado, testimonios como éste, hacen el papel de un aguafiestas.”
It is again in this prologue that he shows a deep understanding of the circumstances and further writes for remembering the past so that it can be forgotten:

The expression of the absolute evil existed in this country, it was created by human beings and not by natural forces, nor as a response to any kind of need, and the country as it is, besides many people in their own flesh, lived the experience of death. Only by assuming this truth, can we live again with sense and without fantasies, not in order to become slaves of the past, but precisely in order to coexist with it and be more human. (Valdés, 1996: 6)  

Both Malika and Hernán’s accounts could thus be considered to be the success stories of a process of healing memory. Only the transformation of the conflict that made them suffer is still to be witnessed and their remembering and expressing their views can be considered to be one more stage toward that path, expressed, this time, in non-oppressive ways.

These four accounts seem to show the possibility that the work of truth and reconciliation commissions, a third kind of institution often proposed for post-violent-conflict peacebuilding, is very necessary. Whether they are influenced by a principle of forgiveness or just by an intention to raise awareness about the past while allowing victims and perpetrators to tell their stories, these commissions’ work might be excellent for the victims to be able to become more aware of the circumstances surrounding their pain.

Though presented with varying degrees of emphasis, a truth commission may have any or all of the following five basic aims: to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to specific needs of victims; to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past. (Hayner, 2001: 24)

50 “La expresión del mal absoluto existió en este país, fue creado por seres humanos y no por fuerzas naturales ni como respuesta a ninguna necesidad, y el país en cuanto tal, además de muchas personas en carne propia, vivieron la experiencia de la muerte. Sólo asumiendo esa verdad, podemos volver a vivir con sentido y sin fantasías, no para esclavizarnos al pasado, sino precisamente para coexistir con él y ser más humanos.”
However, their practical application has showed a wide variety of cases, which recall the different reactions that have just been presented.

Those having experienced the possible positive outcomes of forgiveness, such as Marietta Jaegger, would probably advocate for the creation of institutions promoting this process. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is usually portrayed to be the example to follow. It conceded amnesty to those perpetrators willing to confess their deeds and was a good tool for the raising of awareness of the South African historical past, directed by the principle of forgiveness by looking at the past in order to reconcile with it and be able to look at the future. In other cases, though, the work of these commissions has not been as successful. Not all these bodies guarantee amnesties and not all of them seek forgiveness. Two main problems seem to appear. First, the institution of these bodies does not seem to differ much from the work of criminal courts. They encounter the same problems earlier explained, while failing to bring reconciliation. The conflict between those wanting to forget and those wanting to remember is present again. Second, those advocating for the instauration of criminal courts have also become very suspicious of these commissions. Both in the cases of former-Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone, the intended simultaneous establishment of these two institutions encountered problems of overlapping.  

In any case, the work of these commissions can be a very interesting tool for societies and its victims to be able to better understand the causes and consequences of the violent conflicts they have experienced while giving the opportunity to the victims,

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51 Kritz explains that: “For more than two years in postwar Bosnia, many people argued that a truth and reconciliation commission should be created to complement the work of the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, to provide a forum for thousands of victims, to develop recommendations for systemic reforms, and to undertake other tasks. The effort was stymied by those who insisted that no such body should be established until the tribunal had concluded its work.” (Kritz, 2001: 814)
not only to be recognized as such, but also to be able to recall their stories in a cathartic manner. In some cases, this process also allows perpetrators to follow a similar process. However, these commissions have not proven to be very good at succeeding to address the issues of the conflict nor at transforming it—encountering the same problem raised through the presentation of Malika’s and Valdés’s accounts, or the possibility that remembering is just a tool to forget again—, while imposing somehow an obligation to remember in the countries in which they work.\(^\text{52}\) Criminal courts can be accused of the same. Moreover, both strategies need to encounter a manner to work together, while including in their mandates some flexibility to take into account the needs of each society and their victims in these difficult moments.

Furthermore, this analysis has also showed the fact that these processes need to be experienced in non-oppressive ways, at the pace of each individual. Whether these commissions are able to collaborate with criminal courts or not, they still lack the means to attempt to include the addressing of the issues leading toward the original conflict and therefore they lack the means to transform it. This is not to say they should. What this chapter tries to convey is the idea that while the work of these institutions, if done correctly, can constitute an important contribution to reconciliation, they are just that, a step. Their work needs to be better coordinated with other strategies, including the intention of transforming conflict while including non-oppressive techniques and understanding reconciliation as a process needing time and flexibility for the expression and healing of wounds.

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\(^{52}\) Priscilla Hayner talks about her encounter with these opposing needs to forget and to remember, while exposing the crude reality that remembering is not enough, a transformation of the conflict is also necessary. In her work with truth and reconciliation commissions, she had the chance to hear many victims: “I don’t like to remember these things. What good would it do to go to the truth commission? I would lose a day of work, and nothing would change.” (Hayner, 2001: 2)
3. Conclusions to the Chapter

The most extreme expression of peace as a reaction is characterized, as exemplified by the presentation of two groups of peace students, by a need to forget and to avoid conflict. According to psychologists, this reaction is harmful to the individual experiencing it. At the societal level, it has proven to bear some successes when the forgetting is temporary, and the remembering is achieved calmly, through stages, in the process of reconciliation. Its application in other settings, or rather, its application as a model or a solution with an end, instead of as a step in a broader process, has also proven to be oppressive to all those who need to remember.

Among the victims of violent human rights abuses, there are also individuals who need to remember and to confront the conflict that led to that violence. This is another possible reaction to violence experienced by peace seekers. Some of the peace students were also stating “injustices need to be spoken out.” However, this reaction would probably be encountered more often among “LLM students” (human rights activists) than in peace studies programs. Their proposals—human rights violations accountability, truth seeking—are crucial in working for reconciliation. However, when these efforts become exclusive and are imposed as a panacea, they can be oppressive to those they try to help.

53 Pauline H. Baker distinguishes in her article “Conflict Resolution versus Democratic Governance: Divergent Paths to Peace?” peace activists from human rights activists by naming them “conflict managers” and “democratizers.” According to her summarizing table, conflict managers’ characteristics are: inclusive approach, goal is reconciliation, pragmatic focus, emphasis on the process, particular norms and cultures of societies in conflict, assume moral equivalence, conflict resolution is negotiable, outside actors should be political neutral. On the other hand, “democratizers” seek: exclusive approach, goal is justice, principled focus, emphasis on the outcome, universal norms endorsed by the international community, insist on moral accountability, justice is not negotiable, outside actors cannot be morally neutral. After making this distinction though, she also accepts the fact that often, these two categories are mixed. (Baker, 2001: 759)

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These division between peace and justice seekers is different to the one explored in the first chapter. The former chapter looked at the reactions experienced by the victims of “structural violence,” and recognized the ways in which they feed each other. Oppression fighters react violently or non-violently. Here, the conflict appears between those fighting oppression non-violently, and, in particular, among those reacting against the oppressiveness of direct violence by forgetting or remembering.

A victim of violence can experience all these reactions in different stages. One might want to forget first, then be able or even need to remember. This memory could be painful in a first stage, drawing the individual to a renewed need to forget, or to “return to normal.” This need to return to normal might also lead a given individual to try to heal the wounds by putting into practice what others consider to be the healing panacea: remembering, forgiving, letting go, and even becoming aware of all the circumstances causing and deferring from the traumatic experience. What is clear is that these are just tools for healing. What is important is the way in which these tools are used. If they derive into a constant work for healing and transformation, with no expectation of achieving a solution, an end to the story, or the possibility of forgetting again, the victim of violence might be in the right track, acting in a liberating manner.\(^5\)\(^4\) When these variables are missing, s/he is probably experiencing one more stage of the reaction to oppression, or a reaction to oppression. Sometimes, these reactions appear to be

\(^5\)\(^4\) A good example of this acting in a liberating manner can be found in the novel (which could be considered to be a biographical testimony) *Tanguy*, written by Michel del Castillo (del Castillo, 1957). The main character of the story, Tanguy, experiences innumerable traumatic experiences, from being taken to a Nazi concentration camp as a child, to becoming an orphan. What is most striking about his story is the way in which the author portrays the absence of past, present and future. All these experiences are part of a process from which Tanguy grows and slowly becomes more and more able to understand and “accept” the pain that is inflicted on him by individuals he sees to be reacting to their own stories. The whole novel gives the reader this liberating impression, founded in the disappearance of past and present, and in the transformation of the inner conflicts these experiences entailed for Tanguy.
necessary: forgetting before progressively opening the door for healing, hating before being able to forgive, forgive before being able to express anger... however, the healing and reconciliation processes are paralyzed when these reactions are not constantly transformed into liberating actions.

In the same way, peacebuilding tools such as the use of *tabula rasa* policies, the establishment of criminal courts or truth commissions are to be understood as what they are: tools to be used differently in different settings, and not as cure-all strategies. They need to be seen as tools in the broader process of reconciliation through healing memory and conflict transformation. As long as their proponents are themselves reacting to oppression though, these tools will probably continue to be imposed in oppressive manners, and to exclude each other while failing at making the reconciliation process be possible.
The field of peace studies has been focusing on the ways in which to avoid violence. Recently, this interest has also entailed an increased exploration of the idea that many of those using violence do so as a means of liberation from oppression. Oppression and not violence is what peace studies ought to fight against. In particular, it should understand its mechanisms. The existence of oppression leads to the appearance of reactions to oppression, which are oppressive themselves. Event non-violent measures aimed at ending the oppressiveness of violent reactions can be moved by reactionary motives, or else, can be established in oppressive manners. The vicious circle of oppression reinforces itself, rather than disappearing. The main question to ask, then, is: How to overcome oppression and the reactions to it?

This chapter presents the idea that this vicious circle can only be broken, or transformed into a virtuous circle by using non-oppression. As a result, it presents the work previously established by authors such as Freire, Rogers and Lederach as complementing each other. Freire tried to establish a liberating pedagogy, Rogers worked for a liberating therapy and Lederach understood the importance of transforming conflicts instead of trying to resolve them, as a liberating tool for societies hit by violent reactions. Their theories are here interrelated so as to recognize these liberating processes as direct consequences of the use of non-oppression. Liberation cannot be
without humanization. Liberation cannot be without healing memory. Liberation cannot be without transformation of the conflicts. Humanization, healing memory and transformation of the conflicts occur, only, through non-oppression. This is the reason why a second section of this chapter discusses the limits existing between oppression and non-oppression.

1. Overcoming Oppression and Its Reactions

Several authors have expressed an interest in researching methodologies capable of liberating human beings from their oppressions: oppressive systems, inner conflicts, or oppressive war. Studying their theories allows looking at the commonalities and reinforcing mechanisms between them. Non-oppression is the principle driving them all, and its characteristics are best understood through the explanation of the origins of each of its variables: inductive and participative raising of awareness.

1.1. Freire’s Humanization

This thesis has been constantly driven by Paulo Freire’s theory of oppression, and in particular, by his revolutionary concept of conscientização. According to Myra Bergman Ramos, who translated into English his 1970’s edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this term refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970: 19). However, as has already been explained, this term embodies a much more complex process.

First, it is true; the process of conscientização departs from the pre-established goal of making those who are oppressed become aware of this reality. It is assumed that
such an awakening would lead towards acting against that situation. But what becomes
more important in that process is not the mere understanding of the existence of
oppression, but rather the raising of such awareness in humanizing manners as a
necessary condition for the liberating actions against that oppression to be possible.
According to Freire, overcoming oppression responds to becoming aware of it in a
manner that would call for action of a humanizing character. This thesis argues that this
action can only be encountered through non-oppression and, in Freire’s view, this non-
oppression results from the absence of vertical processes in which the leaders know the
answer or the truth that the oppressed need to become aware of, and the presence of
processes that allow the oppressed to become aware of their own reality by themselves, in
relationship with each other. These processes may take different forms; they are all
based, however, in the participation of those struggling for their liberation:

It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process
with an increasing critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the
transformation. If they are drawn into the process as ambiguous beings, partly
themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them (…) it is my contention
that they will merely imagine they have reached power (…) If the oppressed do
not become aware of this ambiguity during the course of the revolutionary
process, they may participate in that process with a spirit more revanchist than
revolutionary. They may aspire to revolution as a means of domination, rather
than as a road to liberation. (Freire, 1970: 122)

The participation of the oppressed in this raising of awareness is therefore crucial
for the overcoming of oppression.

In his Pedagogy of the Oppressed Freire establishes the three main and
interrelated principles of this liberating methodology: working with the oppressed, rather
than for them, in a dialogical manner leading to the appearance of praxis rather than pure
reflection or activism. He argues that liberation is not something one receives from
above, nor something one can achieve by oneself, but rather, a relationship or a mutual
process. He therefore warns those who want to liberate others, even if their intention could be considered to be honorable.

The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientização.

The revolutionary leaders must realize that their conviction of the necessity for struggle (an indispensable dimension of revolutionary wisdom) was not given to them by anyone else—if it is authentic (…) Only the leaders’ own involvement in reality, within an historical situation, led them to criticize this situation and to wish to change it.

Likewise, the oppressed (who do not commit themselves to the struggle unless they are convinced, and who, if they do not make such commitment, withhold the indispensable conditions for this struggle) must reach this conviction as Subjects, not as objects. They also must intervene critically in the situation which surrounds them and whose mark they bear (…) [The conviction of the necessity for struggle] is necessary [for the oppressed] (…) unless one intends to carry out the transformation for the oppressed rather than with them. It is my belief that only the latter form of transformation is valid. (Freire, 1970: 54)

He provides a better explanation of this idea by giving the example of the teacher-student relationship. According to him, this relationship has traditionally been structured around what he calls a “banking system.” That is, the teacher is the holder of information and the student becomes only a recipient the teacher needs to fill. Freire, in expressing his constant trust on the oppressed says:

They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. If men are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in men and their creative power. To achieve this, he must be a partner of the students in his relations with them. (Freire, 1970: 61)
And the way to work with them is by establishing a dialogue. His dialogue though, is somehow different to what one can naturally understand by that word. Dialogue in Freire’s terms is much more than a conversation. Dialogues are composed by words, and these words –Freire argues—represent the necessary means for a liberating praxis.

This praxis he is talking about is a conjunction or simultaneity of action and reflection. As he says, sacrifice of action is equal to verbalism while sacrifice of reflection is equal to activism, and none of these two can be liberating by themselves.

I shall start by reaffirming that men, as beings of the praxis, differ from animals, which are beings of pure activity. Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast, men emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor. (Freire, 1970: 119)

The oppressed, in order to become liberated need to be able to encounter that praxis through dialogue. The goal of humanizing strategies is to find that praxis, very much based in reflection, while not discarding action. What cannot be is the action without reflection.

Let me emphasize that my defense of the praxis implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a particular form of action is impossible or infeasibility or inappropriateness at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action. (Freire, 1970: 123)

Paulo Freire thus reminds of the necessity of a participatory way of raising awareness with the oppressed as the only possible way in which those would be able to recover their lost humanity. Through the reading of his book, the reader slowly gets convinced of the fact that the smallest allowance of vertical transmission of information can have devastating circumstances. The absence of participation of those receiving the
information, and/or the absence of willingness on the part of the one transmitting it, to enter a dialogue with the “recipients” in the manner of critical thinking and appearance of reflection, reproducing the banking system he identifies in pedagogical terms, could deprive these individuals of the primary characteristic distinguishing them from animals: their praxis, combination of reflection and action. This result is the exact opposite of conscientização, and therefore allows for the increasing existence of unaware oppressed, who would be reacting to their oppressions, either unconsciously, or semi-unconsciously, directed by the norms established by others: they would be acting without reflection.

The different variables here established by Freire, constitute the main components of non-oppression. This concept, however, must also be related to other kind of liberations. Freire was mainly talking about the oppressed by “structural violence.” The next section looks at liberation from inner conflicts.

1.2. Rogers’ Inner Liberation

Freire’s methodologies have been applied in pedagogical systems all around the world. Other authors’ works are also based in similar principles and have come about with research methodologies, usually called “participant-observer” techniques. This thesis has used, in particular, the work of Orlando Fals-Borda and Georges Allo, and similar techniques are used by sociologists, anthropologists, etc.55 As explained in the

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55 These methodologies have already been explained in the foreword to the thesis, in the section dedicated to “methodologies.” The reason for breaking the explanation of the different methodologies used in two different sections needs further explanation. First, it seemed important to make the reader aware from the very beginning about the fact that the thesis has tried to implement and become critical about the different methodologies inspiring its subject. Some of the content previously described was the direct result of these. Second, some of the principles established in these methodologies seem to constitute, simultaneously, and interestingly, both the basis for the finding of the different theses having been argued; and the only response currently available to the finding of ways in which to overcome the negative consequences of the reactions having been identified. The reader should understand here, thus, the simultaneity in which theory and practice developed during the research.
foreword, the research for this thesis has also been very much influenced by these concepts. However, Freire’s thoughts were also present— at the moment in which he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*— in other disciplines. While the non-oppressiveness of the techniques or at least, most of its consequences, were not explicitly exposed by other authors, the reading of their approaches on the light of Freire’s work allows to establish a parallelism between the two. Here, the practical application of this theory in the field of psychology helps in better understanding the different concepts just described. This exposition is also useful in showing how, already at the individual level, the avoidance of conflict and a resistance to becoming aware can be harmful both for the individual and for those with whom s/he relates. The solution—which becomes a process and not a static goal—found by the clients themselves, seems to be the acceptance of conflict and the willingness to re-organize its variables, or else, transform them. Only, this praxis emphasizes again the importance of doing so in what is here considered to be a non-oppressive manner.

Carl Rogers copyrighted in 1951—although the first edition was not to appear until 1965—his understanding of what psychological therapy truly is and should be. In *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*, Rogers presents a new, “non-directional” and “client-centered” approach to therapy, which is here considered to be non-oppressive as well. According to him, the field of psychology needs to break with the trend in which there exists a specialist, holder of the information and understanding of psychological processes, and a patient, who is ill and needs somebody else’s understanding of his life to “cure” him, by following complex therapeutic processes which the patient is not aware of, based in the ability of the
psychologists to establish a “diagnosis.” This can be seen, again, as what Freire considers to be a vertical relationship, in which the leader is supposed to liberate the oppressed. In order to explain his theory and practice, Rogers begins his book by asking his readers some fundamental questions, the answer to which define the philosophy behind his approach:

The primary point of importance here is the attitude held by the counselor toward the worth and the significance of the individual. How do we look upon others? Do we see each person as having worth and dignity in his own right? If we do hold this point of view at the verbal level, to what extent is it operationally evident at the behavioral level? Do we tend to treat individuals as persons of worth, or do we subtly devaluate them by our attitudes and behavior? Is our philosophy one in which respect for the individual is uppermost? Do we respect his capacity and his right to self-direction, or do we basically believe that his life will be best guided by us? To what extent do we have a need and a desire to dominate others? Are we willing for the individual to select his own values, or are our actions guided by the conviction (usually unspoken) that he would be happiest if he permitted us to select for him his values and standards and goals? (Rogers, 1965: 20)

Rogers insists in the importance of letting each individual get to understand his/her own circumstances without receiving any kind of direction from the counselor. Besides a profound respect towards the individual and her/his ability to become aware and responsible for the reasons and consequences of the actions undertaken as well as for being able to heal any wounds and get to better understand his/her feelings, this approach is also based in another main principle. The second principle behind it is the fact that the observer might or might not be right about the conclusions he or she would be able to extract from the information received by the “patient.” That is, Rogers implicitly questions the possibility for neutrality to exist. The counselor is not perfect, he or she is not “God” if you wish, and might have issues of his/her own, that might influence in the understanding and elaboration of a diagnosis (in the same way that proponents of accountability or forgiveness, for instance, might be extrojecting their own needs on
others). Moreover, even if this neutrality could be attained somehow by experience, there are other factors that would inevitably make it impossible for the counselor to get a complete picture of the experiences, feelings and thoughts lived by the individual seeking help. Obviously, counselors have not lived the life of their patients. Even if they try to sincerely explain all that has happened to them, two or more aspects will obviously prevent the psychologist from being able to see the patient’s reality: language, and the way in which reality gets distorted when trying to reduce complexity into simplicity on the one hand; and, for instance, the fact that there might be aspects the patient wants to forget, or has forgotten, or to which he or she does not give any importance, which will therefore remain silent. The job of the therapist, Rogers argues, is not to try to get that information and to be able to build a diagnosis—which s/he would probably still do in any case, maybe being accurate and maybe having to change it as the sessions continue—, but rather, to make the counselee be able to become aware of his or her own reality, in a healing manner, or, as Freire would say, in a liberating way.

One might say that psychotherapy, or whatever orientation, is complete or almost complete when the diagnosis of the dynamics is experienced and accepted by the client. In client-centered therapy one could say that the purpose of the therapist is to provide the conditions in which the client is able to make, to experience, and to accept the diagnosis of the psychogenic aspects of his maladjustment. (Rogers, 1965: 221)

Moreover, this approach, he argues, reduces the risk of the creation of dependency on the therapist or in therapy:

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56 “It is of great interest to the therapist in this case that his responses in this interview seemed to the client to be of somewhat different order, that they penetrated far behind what she said, that they went beyond her, even though in the direction she was going. The counselor’s perception of the situation is quite different. In his opinion, his responses were of the same order as those in earlier interviews, simply reflecting the attitudes expressed. From his vantage point, the difference appeared to be that the client was now really exploring in territory that was unknown to herself, and that her tentative statements were of the type that other clients have described as “I hardly knew what I was saying.” (Rogers, 1965: 111)
When the client is evaluated and comes to realize clearly in his own experience that this evaluation is more accurate than any he has made himself, then self-confidence crumbles, and a dependent relationship is built up. When the therapist is experienced as “knowing more about me than I know myself,” then there appears to the client to be nothing to do but to hand over the reins of his life into these more competent hands. This is likely to be accompanied by comfortable feelings of relief and liking, but also at times by hatred for the person who has thus become so all-important (...) once this has happened it is a slow process to get the patient to the point where he again feels confident in the control of his own life. (Rogers, 1965: 216)

At this point, one could disagree with Rogers by saying that, as a matter of fact, these patients are experiencing conflict, and are seeking for that help or advice. There should not be anything wrong in the fact that someone, trained for that purpose, would

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57 It seems important to provide an example of how exactly this non-direction is applied. It is almost as if the therapist was simply a listener, able to paraphrase the words expressed by the clients. Here an example in which the therapist fails to follow that principle and later is able to reverse the situation again is showed, so as to understand both the perils and benefits of both possibilities:

“Therapist: Things seem to be going pretty badly at home. Henry: Yes, oh yes! (He weeps again. He goes on to relate other incidents. Then, he becomes very insistent upon knowing how therapy can help. Earlier in the hour, the therapist had said that she was there to talk things over with him.)

Henry: What good will it do to tell you about it; I don’t understand.

Therapist: Sometimes people feel better about things after talking them over. (The therapist falls into the trap of answering an emotional question as if it were a mere request for information. It leads to difficulties.)

Henry: Yes, but what good does it do to feel better about things if they still go on?

Therapist: Sometimes boys and girls understand the way they really feel about things, and it helps them to know what they really want to do about their situations. (The therapist is still trying to “sell” the therapy session to the child)

Henry: Yes, but after I tell you about it, what if it’s still going on?

Therapist: I know you feel pretty hopeless, Henry. I can’t change your parents. All I can do is to help you think through your own problems. (Pause.) It’s hard for you to see it now, I know, but sometimes it helps.

Henry: Well… (Goes on to relate several more incidents.) I still don’t understand. What good will it do to talk about it if they still keep on the same way?

Therapist: You mean, what can you do if they don’t change?

Henry: Yes.

Therapist: I don’t really know. But I hope there is something we can work together, here, when you come to see me.

Henry: Suppose it lasts 10 or 15 years and they keep on?

Therapist: You just wonder how long you can bear it? (This should have been the response earlier in the session.)

Henry: Yes, oh yes. (He weeps several minutes.)

Therapist: It all looks pretty black.

Henry: (Nods.) Sometimes I dream that my mother dies and that then somebody will understand me. I don’t understand why I should dream that.

Therapist: You just wonder, “Will anybody ever understand me?” (Rogers, 1965: 248)
directly state the issues he or she is actually going through and is not able to see as long
as this process is directed towards helping the individual solve these problems. However,
what is implied both in Freire and Rogers’ theories is that in practice, this vertical
approach does harm.

This harm could be seen as the least oppressive of all the different forms and
levels of oppression that have been presented till now, but it would seem that its
acceptance could actually issue in the appearance of more grave oppressions. That is, an
individual who is not able to independently take care of his or her own conflicts and who
seeks somebody else to explain what the correct path to take is, would probably
reproduce that vertical process with others. In the chapter dedicated to “Group-Centered
Psychotherapy,” Nicholas Hobbs shows how those individuals who are not being able to
take great benefit from the therapy or who have received direction from their counselor,
are more prone to reproduce this authority towards others:

It seems reasonable to say that more of their attention was focused upon other
persons and less upon themselves and their own feelings. They were more likely
to use such statements as “What did you do then?” or “You wouldn’t say that if
you were married,” or “Perhaps you do that because of antagonism to your
mother.” (Rogers, 1965: 304)

This phenomenon is probably better explained by the client himself:

A most noticeable change, so far as I can determine, has been in the manner in
which I have been trying to form and conduct relationships with other persons –
friends, relatives, business associates, strangers. For example, I no longer seek to
persuade my wife, as much as I used to at any rate, to do things “my way,”
regardless of their inconsequential nature (…) I am getting more accustomed to
the idea of letting her be a person in her own way, making decisions and taking
responsibility for them, and expressing herself spontaneously in her own
inimitable way. I am likewise making progress in letting my friends lead their
own lives, trying to think with them about their problems rather than thinking for
them and handing out solutions for the problems which always seem to come up
when we talk together. And with people about whom I know little –clerks,
streetcar conductors, casual acquaintances—I feel myself better able to try to see
things as they appear to them, though it can hardly be termed adopting their “frame of reference” as there is little communication in these instances. It does help to understand how they become irritable and offensive as well as pleasant and likeable, and it makes it easier for me to react to them in a manner calculated to make our relationship a satisfactory one. (Rogers, 1965: 422)

A society composed of individuals constantly asking for others to solve their problems and reproducing this verticality by telling others what to do, would thus be more prone to authoritarianism and oppression than a society in which individuals are willing to become free and responsible for their own actions and who, by better understanding and experiencing their own self, are also more able to accept others and their freedoms.\textsuperscript{58}

Moreover, a fuller understanding of self, including the conflicts inherent in it, seem to convey a better understanding of others in a healthy manner: understanding others does not mean telling them what they ought to do, it rather means being able to establish better relationships, and, in case of conflict, being able to better see the other part motives or reactions.

In his fourth chapter, “The Process of Therapy,” Rogers develops in great depth the ways in which the clients are able to become their own self.\textsuperscript{59}

(...) client-centered therapy, with the intense focusing upon self which it involves, has as its end result, not more self-consciousness but less. One might say that

\textsuperscript{58} Another psychologist, Maslow, considers that “So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actulization (defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of mission (or call, fate, destiny, or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, the person’s own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person).” (Maslow, 1982: 25) According to him, these are the people that will be more open to become aware of their own self and who would share the same characteristics exposed by Rogers, plus, in particular, a “more democratic character structure.” (Maslow, 1982: 26)

\textsuperscript{59} The main characteristics of the “success” stories are that, the clients tend to: “To perceive his abilities and characteristics with more objectivity and with greater comfort (...) To perceive all aspects of self and self-in-relationship with less emotion and more objectivity; (...) To perceive himself as more independent and more able to cope with life problems; (...) To perceive himself as more able to be spontaneous and genuine; (...) To perceive himself as the evaluator of experience, rather than regarding himself as existing in a world where the values are inherent in and attached to the objects of his perception; (...) To perceive himself as more integrated, less divided. (Rogers, 1965: 137)
there is less self-consciousness and more self. Another way of putting it is that the self-functions smoothly in experience, rather than being an object of introspection. Or as one client states in a follow-up interview one year after the conclusion of therapy: “I am not self-conscious like I used to be… I don’t concentrate on being myself. I just am.” (Rogers, 1965: 129)

This sense of self also appears in what this psychologist calls “characteristic movement in the valuing process.” What this means, simply, is that, while at the beginning of therapy the client lives by the values imposed or introjected from others, by the end s/he is more able to find her/his own:

I should never be angry at anyone (because my parents and church regard anger as wrong)[,] (Rogers, 1965: 149)

becomes

I should be angry at a person when I deeply feel angry because this leaves less residual effect than bottling up the feeling, and actually makes for a better and more realistic relationship. (Rogers, 1965: 151)

In this sentence, also, the client comes to realize the importance of expressing conflict and the possible positive consequences of doing so. In this case, the individual talks about having “more realistic relationships.” One could argue this is just her/his value system. However, it will later be explained how non-directional therapy seems to lead toward the finding of these same values in those clients benefiting from the therapy. These values are, somehow, the same principles building the conflict transformation theory.

These outcomes from the therapy though, only appear because of the very nature of this therapy, based in a profound respect on the client and on her/his right and freedom to live by her/his own values. In practice, this means that the therapist does not get

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60 Therapy is then the way for the individual to be able to accept his own self, by reorganizing his thoughts and feelings, which might have got in conflict: “We may look upon this self-structure as being an organization of hypotheses for meeting life—an organization which has been relatively effective in
surprised nor criticizes the behavior or thoughts of her/his client, but rather, shows acceptance.

It appears that in the client’s experience, particularly if the problems have been deep-seated, the only stable portion of experience is the unfailling hour of acceptance by the therapist. In this sense client-centered therapy is experienced as supporting, as an island of constancy in a sea of chaotic difficulty, though it is not “supportive” or approving, in the superficial sense. It is this constancy and safety which permits the client to experience therapy (…) (Rogers, 1965: 71)

The process of client-centered therapy becomes then a virtuous circle in which the client comes to realize and apply to himself and to others the same principles s/he is exposed to and which are allowing her/him to slowly but successfully become aware of the self and reorganize and transform her/his own conflicts. In fact, as noted earlier, the clients become the best ones in using these techniques. Hobbs notes its positive consequences, particularly when used among groups:

Group therapy offers another opportunity, absent in individual therapy, which may be quite important in the therapeutic process. In the group the individual may be a giver of help while receiving help. (Rogers, 1965: 293)

This is so, precisely because the “successful” client has been able to internalize the process by experiencing it:

There is a marked increase in behavior characterized as permissive and accepting and an accompanying decrease in behavior characterized as interpretive, evaluative, and critical, from the first to the last part of therapy. It may be that the member-therapists learn from the leader, absorbing his attitudes and sensing the reasonableness and helpfulness of what he does. (Rogers, 1965: 311)
As opposed to this positive outcome, reappears Freire’s idea that the oppressed often become oppressors. That is, it could be that the opposite process also did reproduce itself, and that those who are constantly told what they ought to do will little by little be unable to trust their instincts, feelings and thoughts concerning their own lives while constantly giving advice to others, as this is exactly the way they wished others acted toward them.

This kind of therapy thus, would seem to depart from an *a priori* understanding of what true liberation or cure or psychological health is:

This very commitment is, of course, itself an expression of a value which is inevitably communicated to the client in the intimate course of working together. This value, which affirms the individual’s right to choose his own values, is believed to be therapeutically helpful. The suggestion of an array of other values by the therapist is believed to be therapeutically harmful, possibly because, if they are presented by the therapist, they will inevitably carry an authority of the therapist and constitute a denial of the self of the client at the moment (Rogers, 1965: 292)

However, the beauty of Rogers’ theory is precisely that its principles are based on the findings derived from interviews with the clients. That is, Rogers does not establish from the beginning the value-driven goal of his therapy to be that individuals should get to know their own self and be able to accept themselves and others as well as to become more independent and progressively more able to reorganize their selves without the need of a therapist. These processes, as well as others he describes, are just the direct and inevitable result coming from his profound trust in the client. Apparently, Rogers follows the same exact process described by Freire. Their theories complement each other and are based in a complex but simple reality: non-oppression.

In Rogers’ praxis, this non-oppression translates in completely letting the client decide and choose by her or himself, in manners that would sometimes be even shocking,
such as the moment in which the client is about to leave the session, stating a willingness to commit suicide.\textsuperscript{61} In these extreme cases though, Rogers himself wonders about the choices faced by the therapist. It would seem that this kind of therapy would only be helpful for certain kind of pathologies, but Rogers denies this hypothesis by including a whole section arguing, with the exposure of specific cases, how this approach has been helpful to all kind of clients. He also includes a section discussing its limits, some aspects of which are better developed by Levant and Shlien, in their \textit{Client-centered Therapy and the Person-centered Approach: New Directions in Theory, Research, and Practice}, which explores the new developments observed through the application of this theory (Levant and Shlien, 1984).

Overall, Rogers’ respect towards his clients and his willingness to establish a dialogue in a participant-observant manner with them results in their finding of positive development and growth. Steadily, they are able to understand the existence of conflicts within them. Interestingly, the first condition for their being able to re-organize their own self is the progressive acknowledgement and acceptance of the existence of these conflicts. Furthermore, this acceptance seems to appear, only, because of the constant respect and acceptance showed by the counselor. The clients experience what Rogers

\textsuperscript{61}“S: (…) I guess maybe I haven’t the guts—or the strength—to kill myself—and if someone would relieve me of the responsibility—or I would be in an accident—I—I—just don’t want to live. C: At the present time things look so black to you that you can’t see much point in living – (…) S: You’re not going to suggest that I come in oftener? You’re not alarmed and think I ought to come in—every day—until I get out of this? C: I believe you are able to make your own decision. I’ll see you whenever you want to come S: (Note of awe in her voice.) I don’t believe you are alarmed about—I see—I may be afraid of myself—but you aren’t afraid for me—(She stands up—a strange look on her face.) C: You say you may be afraid of yourself—and are wondering why I don’t seem to be afraid for you? S: (Another short laugh.) You have more confidence in me than I have. (She cleans up the finger-paint mess and starts out of the room.) I’ll see you next week—(that short laugh) maybe. (Her attitude seemed tense, depressed, bitter, completely beaten. She walked slowly away.)” (Rogers, 1965: 47)
calls “psychological tension” only as long as these conflicts are unresolved precisely because of the denial of their existence. The first step for healing, or for liberation, is the appearance of this acknowledgement and acceptance. The raising of this awareness through a non-oppressive method directed by the single principle of letting the client experience his or her own path and become responsible of and free in his or her decisions, shows to be, simultaneously, the condition sine qua non for the appearance of this awareness, and the manner in which this new knowledge can be positively directed and used for the transformation of the conflicts, or re-organization of the self. Following this non-oppressiveness leads the clients to become more tolerant, more democratic, less authoritative, and to cease seeing their environment in black and white terms, to begin experiencing the wide varieties of grays. They are also more and more able to deal with the appearance of new conflicts—intra and inter-personal—more effectively and faster while reproducing the non-oppressiveness they have experienced in their relationships with others, therefore multiplying the liberating effect.

It is true that this non-oppressiveness seems to be difficult to apply at the societal level, when trying to deal with conflicts and especially, with violent conflicts. However, its practical application at the individual level seems to lead to the understanding that for these “oppressed” to feel “liberated”, an acceptance, expression and transformation of conflict is necessary. Does that mean these are to be the goals of any peacebuilding strategy, or establishing these goals would be a renewed oppression? This question is further discussed after the presentation of the conflict transformation theory of peacebuilding.
1.3. Lederach’s Societal Transformation

The term “conflict transformation” is relatively new within the field of peace studies, as John Paul Lederach first introduced it in the 1980s. According to Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, conflict transformation is

(…) a term which for some analysts is a significant step beyond conflict resolution, but with in our view is a development of it. It has particular salience in asymmetric conflicts, where the aim is to transform unjust social relationships. It is also used in the understanding of peace processes, where transformation denotes a sequence of necessary transitional steps. It implies a deep transformation in the parties and their relationships and in the situation that created the conflict (…) we see conflict transformation as the deepest level of change in the conflict resolution process. (Miall et al., 1999: 21)

In this section, however, it is argued that conflict transformation goes far beyond a mere conflict resolution as defined by these authors. They consider “conflict resolution” to differ from “conflict settlement” and “conflict management” in the sense that the former addresses the deep-rooted sources of the conflict and resolves them. “This implies that behaviour is no longer violent, attitudes are no longer hostile, and the structure of the conflict has been changed.” (Miall et al., 1999: 21) Indeed, conflict transformation also attempts to find these outcomes. However, what really distinguishes the two is the philosophy behind conflict transformation as well as the means it uses in order to achieve sustainable peace.

The term “conflict resolution” involves many different strategies and techniques. For instance, the resolution of a conflict can be attempted through different “tracks.” Track I is identified with high-level negotiations as the ones carried by top leaders or representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations, regional organizations or governments (diplomats or others). Generally, their encounters and their findings of solutions or ways in which to resolve conflict are very much based in
negotiations, arbitration or mediation. Track II involves “middle level leaders” of international non-governmental organizations, churches, academics, private businesses. Its tools are often good offices, conciliation, pure mediation, problem-solving. Track III is found at the grassroots level and seems to result in the creation of peace constituencies within the conflict, the building of social cohesion, and the finding of common ground. Finally, a “multitrack conflict resolution” approach has also been developed, in which these three approaches and their actors are put into contact. The attempt is to make their actions complementary and to approach their actors through, again, different mediation and negotiation techniques (Miall et al. 1999: 20).

While each of these tracks can have very positive results, their limits are found, again, in their exclusion of participatory and non-oppressive models searching the appearance of renewed relationships and reconciliation through the transformation of the negative effects of the issues at stake. The strategies used for trying to implement a conflict resolution often result in conflict settlement or management. This occurs, perhaps, because of the alteration of what can be regarded as a non-oppressive methodology into the tool of a given interest. That is, these four different tracks often use third party neutral techniques such as conciliation and mediation in their attempts to negotiate different agreements. But they use them in a way that eliminates its more important characteristic: the same non-oppression defined earlier. The goal becomes the maximization of the interests of all the parties (they all win) in a context of absence of conflict or violence, and not always a real addressing of the issues at stake.

True Third Party Neutral techniques though seem to be very much influenced by the same principles of non-oppressiveness earlier found in the work of Freire and Rogers.
among others. The Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution clearly states in its booklet for conducting workshops, that the role of the third-party neutral (TPN) is not to provide the solutions but to allow the participants to find them. As a result, the role of the TPN can be summarized in five main characteristics: “[s/he] directs the process while encouraging the parties; [s/he] listens, listens, listens; is not a judge or advisor; owns the process, not the outcome; keeps the process positively centered” (McQuinn, 2003: 21).

Just as in the process described by Rogers, this means that the TPN, as the counselor:

- Recognizes that assisting others with conflict resolution is very sensitive and serious, especially when they are opening up emotional areas of anger, fear, conflict and frustration (…) By attentive listening, a Neutral can allow the underlying and/or deep-rooted conflicts to surface. Listening by the neutral also encourages the parties to listen to each other. Listening also means welcoming. The Neutral sets the tone for the process and becomes a model for the way the participants communicate with each other (…) Sometimes the parties will look to the Neutral to decide who is right and who is wrong, or to provide the solution to the problem. The Neutral must avoid this trap (…) the Neutral should refrain from offering solutions or “fixes”, especially when (at least to the Neutral) it is obvious what they might be. It is up to the parties to provide their own solution. (McQuinn, 2003: 21)

- The different conflict resolution strategies tend to change this non-oppressiveness into a simple negotiation, in which the “neutral” often has its own interests in the issues being discussed, or has a pre-established idea of how the conflict should be solved, and/or looks for the reaching of an agreement that would at least, restore negative peace. But even when these techniques are used in non-oppressive manners, they seem to be more useful when the actors involved in the conflict are not numerous. Transforming conflict in conflict prone societies calls for more complex strategies.

Conflict transformation as defined by Lederach, is based precisely in the constant application of non-oppressive principles and in the inclusion of complexity in the picture. Its non-oppression is seen precisely in the fact that the virtuous circle of oppression is
found in its application. That is, Rogers has showed how treating individuals in a non-oppressive manner leads towards finding a way of living inspired by the conflict transformation principles: acceptance of conflict, deep understanding of the self and of others allowing for the building of renewed relationships, re-organization. In the same way, the implementation of conflict transformation directed to the finding of a sustainable peace, finds itself needing to involve the “oppressed” in the process. Conflict transformation is only possible when the strategies used for its implementation follow the liberating principles expressed by Freire and Rogers.

Lederach’s approach thus, goes far beyond the definition proposed by Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse. Its various, complex and interrelated components can be better understood through his various publications. In particular, his book *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Lederach, 1997) shows how a real transformation of the conflicts that leads towards the finding of reconciliation – essential component of a sustainable peace—is only found by the common search and implementation of reconciliatory processes *with* the participants to the conflict. In this sense, one of the central questions Lederach reflects upon when confronted to any conflict is who are the actors. As opposed to the efforts made by the different tracks earlier explained, conflict transformation understands that the different actors and groups of a society and of a conflict live in relationship with each other. It is of crucial importance to understand the nature of these relationships and find the “critical yeast” or connection between them. Building peace is not finding an agreement, but building relationships.

Specifically, I have proposed that middle-range actors within the population are uniquely situated to have the greatest potential for constructing an infrastructure
for peace. They have the capacity to impact processes and people at both the top and the grassroots levels (…) Reconciliation is understood as a process of relationship building. Thus, reconciliation is not limited to the period of postsettlement restoration. Rather, reconciliation is seen as providing a focus and a locus appropriate to every stage of peacebuilding and instrumental in reframing the conflict and the energies driving the conflict. (Lederach, 1997: 151)

In *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Lederach, 1995), he had previously and already developed this idea by explaining the ways in which training for peace needs to follow five central principles, obviously drawn from Freire’s theory:

1. People in setting are a key resource, not recipients.
2. Indigenous knowledge is a pipeline to discovery, meaning, and appropriate action.
3. Participation of local people in the process is central.
4. Building from available local resources fosters self-sufficiency and sustainability.
5. Empowerment involves a process that fosters awareness-of-self in context and validates discovery, naming, and creation through reflection and action. (Lederach, 1995: 31)

In fact, Lederach establishes from the beginning the influence Freire has on his work. The way in which he does it summarizes the two first points of this chapter, by better putting into words the relationship between the individual and the societal levels:

Here I believe is a fundamental paradox in the pursuit of peace. Peacemaking embraces the challenge of personal transformation of pursuing awareness, growth, and commitment to change at a personal level. In protracted, violent conflicts, this transformation involves grief and trauma work, as well as dealing with deep feelings of fear, anger, and bitterness that accompany accumulated personal and family loss. Peacemaking equally involves the task and priority of systemic transformation, of increasing justice and equality in our

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62 “In the peacemaking endeavor, there seems to be a certain tension around how to pursue social change, which too often is posed as an either/or contradiction: Is social change fundamentally a process of personal or systemic transformation?

Paulo Freire, whose seminal work on pedagogy will inform numerous aspects of this book, suggests we understand social change as including both. I have found it useful to step back and look at the big picture related to Freire’s pedagogical framework. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) he uses literacy, learning to read and write, which seems to be a uniquely individual and personal agenda, as a tool for exploring and promoting social change. He refers to this as conscientization, awareness of self in context, a concept that simultaneously promotes personal and social transformation.” (Lederach, 1996: 19)
world. It is the construction of global community involving the tasks of changing oppressive systems, sharing resources fairly, and promoting nonviolent resolution of conflict between peoples.

In sum, the Freire folly suggests that transformative peacemaking upholds and pursues both personal and systemic change. (Lederach, 1995: 20)

This is precisely what he proposes conflict transformation to be:

Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships. (Lederach, 2003: 14)

The combination of personal and societal transformation is found in the non-oppressive building of relationships. This is, in fact, the reason why Lederach preferred to talk about “transformation” rather than about “resolution.” In his latest work, The Little Book of Conflict Transformation (Lederach, 2003), he exposes, in a summarized manner the main principles of his approach, some of which have already been found in Rogers. These could be summarized as follows:

[1] Conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change
[2] Conflict transformation is a way of looking as well as seeing. The lenses of conflict transformation show the immediate situation; underlying patterns and context; a conceptual framework. Frameworks address content, context, structure of relationships.
[4] Transformation’s guiding question is this: How do we end something not desired and build something we do desire? Which is different to the resolution approach in which the main question is “How do we end something not desired?”

63 “I began using the term conflict transformation in the 1980s, after intensive experience in Central America caused me to re-examine the language of the field (…) For them [my Latin colleagues], resolution carried with it a danger of co-optation, an attempt to get rid of conflict when people where raising important and legitimate issues (…) “Conflicts happen for a reason,” they would say. “Is this resolution idea just another way to cover up the changes that are really needed?” (Lederach, 2003: 3)
Transformation addresses both the episode and the epicenter of conflict. (Lederach, 2003)

These principles differ and can better be understood as opposed to the characteristics of conflict resolution. It has already been seen that transformation means building something new from the existing conflict—rather than achieving and agreement or solution—and with those in conflict, through the building of relationships, instead of focusing solely in the content of the conflict. This might be because of the different understandings of conflict present in the two different approaches. Conflict resolution “envisions the need to de-escalate conflict processes”, while the transformative approach is based in envisioning conflict “as an ecology that is relationally dynamic with ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change).” As a result, the objective for the first is to decrease the pain of the moment, while “the horizon for change is mid- to long-range and is intentionally crisis-responsive rather than crisis-driven” in the second (Lederach, 2003: 33). Overall, conflict transformation,

(…) envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity for response to symptoms and engagement of systems within which relationships are embedded. (Lederach, 2003: 33)

In general, it can be argued that Lederach’s approach is the living representation of the non-oppressiveness described both by Freire and Rogers, as applied to the field of peace studies. It does not treat conflict as an alien invasion into a healthy body but rather as a natural factor of evolution which, if treated well, can be an important energy for growth and change. While trying to re-organize the self of a society in conflict, Lederach does not propose to apply pre-established models or panaceas (which could be prepared by “leaders”, holders of the necessary information to solve the conflict, in their intent to
“liberate” the “oppressed”). He finds the processes leading to positive peace and reconciliation precisely in the actors of the conflict and in the ways in which they relate with each other. The participants of that society are the ones who hold the key for reconciliation, and in each society, this key will take different forms. What Lederach seems to be doing and proposing, is to help the actors of these societies find their own way to peace by making them more able to find their own praxis, or combination of action and reflection, in relationship with others.

In this sense, it could be argued that peacebuilding is or should be compared with non-directional therapy, more than with the medical science, as Galtung proposed. That is, the role of the peacebuilder is not to identify an illness and its remedy in order to cure it—and this process does not need the participation of the patient—, but rather to accept the existence of a certain de-organization in the self of a society, which has finally come to become apparent, or expressed. The appearance of the conflict becomes then the first step for liberation, change or cure, as the denial step has disappeared, and a certain \textit{conscientização} on the issues has appeared. What is needed at that stage is helping the actors of the conflict go through the healing process, by establishing relationships within them just as the client of a non-directional therapy will not benefit from the therapy until s/he has been able not only to reach a compromise within her/himself or in the issues that affect her/him, but rather, to integrate them in the self, in a growing manner. The building of these relationships is then, simultaneously, the best guarantee that the appearance of new conflicts would be able to be treated constructively.
This comparison can be regarded as utopian. However, Lederach’s conflict transformation is being applied with success. This is not to say, though, that he has found a new panacea, as this has never been his goal:

In conclusion, building peace requires a comprehensive approach to contemporary conflict. We need a conceptual framework that helps us envision the overall picture and moves us toward specific action and activity. Our challenge is to find strategic and practical approaches that help establish an infrastructure for sustainable transformation and that take seriously the immediate and deep-rooted needs of divided societies. We are not impaired by a lack of resources, if we choose to invest wisely and practically in peace. We are limited only by how far we are willing to cast our vision. We must not despair at the depth and breadth of the challenge, but rather rise to meet it. Reconciliation is possible. The house of peace can be built. (Lederach, 1997: 152)

In thinking of the reconciliation strategies exposed in chapter two in the light of this approach, it could be argued, again, that the Spanish transition to democracy was, or is somehow, a non-explicit example of this transformation. As has earlier been discussed, no institutionalization of the reconciliation process was carried about and no criminal courts or truth commissions were established. It were the citizens themselves who established their own truth commissions or similar processes in their communities, while the newspapers and other media progressively, and taking into account the needs of the society at large, exposed the history of the conflict and analyzed it. Each actor had its role in a process of reconciliation of a society that is still taking place.

Again, the conflict transformation network does not suggest this case to be a model or a universal remedy that needs to be followed or implemented by other societies. What it suggests, instead, is that whatever the efforts taken towards reconciliation, they need not avoid or confront conflict, but to transform it. It also suggests that, in doing so, it cannot propose solutions for the victims (such as forgetting or remembering) but rather needs to establish relations and raise awareness within and with them.
Overall, the study of these three authors allows to understand what non-oppression is. As stated before, it is based, mainly, in an inductive and participatory approach for the raising of awareness. Interestingly, what the use of this non-oppression leads to is the appearance of a healing memory (transformation of inner conflicts) and of a transformation of the conflicts (individuals are also able to build renewed relationships at the societal level, while transforming it). Non-oppression, thus, has been able to break the vicious circle of reactions to oppression, characterized, precisely by a wounding memory (forgetting or remembering) and the continuing existence of destructive conflict (avoidance, confrontation of the conflicts).

2. The Non-Oppression Dilemmas

Non-oppression as previously defined seems to be based in the idea that some are liberated wo/men while others are oppressed. Those wanting to liberate the oppressed should do it in a non-oppressive manner. However, the application of this non-oppressiveness is sometimes difficult. Here, some of the dilemmas encountered while trying to find the meaning of non-oppression as well as during its application for the research and writing of this thesis are exposed. Awareness appears to be the ultimate principle of non-oppression.

In his book *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, Peter L. Berger dedicates a whole chapter to the criticism of Freire’s methodology (Berger, 1974: 111-132). Berger shows a great deal of admiration for Freire and in particular for his pedagogical successes. His criticism thus is not so directed towards the methodology *per se* as to the assumption or argument that it is non-oppressive. According to Berger, what Freire is looking for is an impossible task, as such simultaneity of observation and participation, and of action and
reflection is not possible to be encountered. This author understands Freire’s attempt to make the oppressed become aware of their oppressions as the manifestation of the same vertical process Freire criticizes and attempts to eradicate.

A good way to begin a critique of the concept is to concretize it sociologically: *Whose* consciousness is supposed to be raised, and *who* is supposed to do the raising? The answer is clear wherever the term is used in political rhetoric: It is the consciousness of “the masses” that must be raised, and it is the “vanguard” that will do the job (…) Coupled with this epistemological arrogance is a recurrent irritation with “those people” who stubbornly refuse the salvation that is so benevolently offered to them: “How can they be so blind?” (Berger, 1974: 113-114)

The earlier presentation of Freire’s theory, as well as its implications in practice for other fields, show that this critique may in fact not be true of Freire’s work. As Denis Goulet writes in his article on “Pyramids of Sacrifice, the High Price of Social Change” as a response to Berger, whose work he otherwise praises:

(…) Berger’s portrait of Freire and the assumptions he imputes to champions of “consciousness-raising” are diametrically opposed to Freire’s spirit and work. That certain groups may invoke Freire’s name, the term *conscientização* (consciousness-raising) or his method to inflict the kind of elitist belittlement described by Berger may be true (…) [But] Freire himself repeatedly states that only self-effacing coordinators can properly collaborate with “the people” in a culture circle. His notion of *conscientização*, far from assuming that the leader’s consciousness is higher than that of the masses, states on the contrary that the masses, because of their condition of inhuman exploitation, have internalized the oppressive stereotypes of themselves which rulers perpetuate in society. Therefore, *conscientização* is a process to help them rediscover the deeply buried sense of their own dignity, their own right to “cognitive respect.” (Goulet, 1975: 236)

It is true, Freire and Berger are looking for the same, and probably Berger is misunderstanding the former. However, this discussion raises an important dilemma. That is, if the whole process of *conscientização* is based in the finding and experiencing by the oppressed of their own reality while the transmission of this information from a leader or “savior” to them is considered to be oppressive because of the reasons earlier
explained, one could wonder whether all kind of theory directed to make others aware of
certain realities is oppressive as well. Freire dedicated his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,
“to the oppressed and to those who suffer with them and fight at their side” (Freire, 1970:
dedication). The insights expressed in his work have definitely appeared through his
involvement with the oppressed, but the writing of these in a book, or else, their reading
by an oppressed could be considered to be a vertical transmission of awareness. Here,
the problem found by scholar-practitioners arises. While their non-oppressive
investigation may actually emphasize the appearance of hypotheses and further study of
those *with* the group of study in a manner that might allow them to become aware of their
own reality and to provoke change, the dilemma appears when the findings of these
studies are to be shared. If those reading these findings are in fact, a group of people
sharing the same characteristics than the first one, but not having participated in the
formulation of these findings, are they being “oppressed” or “liberated” in a vertical
manner?

Another example would be the one of Rogers’ book. While the fact that the
clients end up finding the importance of accepting conflict and living life as a process
while becoming more and more respectful to others are insights that have been reached
by the clients themselves, haven’t these realities become a goal or an *a priori* for those
applying this “non-directional” therapy, which now has a direction? It could be argued
that as long as the client is not aware of the seeking of this direction and is left to find it
by him or herself, the non-oppression is still present. However, the question arises:
doesn’t then the process described by Freire disappear to give place to what Berger has
described? That is, the leader is aware of the direction to take for liberation, but pretends no to, so as to allow the victim to find this path on her/his own.

It seems as if, for the counselor not to be one of these leaders trying to liberate the poor masses, the counselor should in fact make the client aware from the beginning of the philosophy behind this therapy and of the results that are expected. However, one would say, this would or could decrease the chances that the client would be able to experience that process and come to these outcomes on his/her own, diminishing the chances for finding the self. He might be initially biased by this transferred acknowledgement. On the other hand, it could also be that the holding of this knowledge from the beginning would accelerate the process. One possibility would be that the client would not pay attention to this explanation as it does not seem to relate –yet—to his or her own experiencing of reality. A second possibility would be that, precisely because this is the path in which s/he encounters her/himself at the moment, this specification would help in the appearance of awareness. For it to be non-oppressive then, it could be argued that other non-oppressive techniques can be used in the exposition of these results, such as the explanation of the fact that those are the results found by many of those going through this kind of process, but that each individual is different and that what counts, especially, is the respecting of his/her own freedom.

Here, the utility of “stories” is again seen.\textsuperscript{64} An individual might be more willing to become aware of a reality when s/he does not feel pressured to accept it for his/her own self, but instead is able to first accept it as the reality of others. In fact, Rogers’ book, rather than just presenting the findings or even cite the ways in which they appear, reproduces a large amount of the interviews that were conducted and from which his

\textsuperscript{64} This idea has been further developed in the foreword to the thesis.
theory has been drawn. His book, thus, is full of personal stories, and the reader may as well identify with some or several of those telling them, becoming aware of his/her reality in a non-oppressive manner: not through the experiencing of therapy, but by the combination of his theory and practice as seen through other’s eyes.

This paper has tried to follow that same idea. In the foreword, it was stated that the ideas here expressed were to be written in the form of a personal testimony. In a way, although written through the accounts of others, it still is. That is, the reader should not consider –and for sure will not—what is here argued as “the truth.” However, it is true that this paper is trying to raise awareness of different processes found through the simultaneous experience of observant-participant techniques and of theory by establishing the variables found through the same stories that are reproduced. The reader is made aware of the meaning of these stories for the author, who tries to derive some kind of theory from them while reproducing, through the stories of others, the reactions, feelings and thoughts some of her readers might also have experienced.

However, there is a particular group of readers who might actually feel oppressed by what is written. Those are the authors of the accounts being reproduced and interpreted, but also, and more important here, the peace students whose reactions are exposed.

The participant-observer study conducted within this group departed from a difficult situation: the hypothesis was found among one group of students. The feedback was asked to a second group, not having shared the same stories, but just sharing what seemed to this author to be the same characteristics. This author exposed the findings of the observation-participation through the telling of a story; but she probably failed at
presenting the thesis as something only characteristic of the first group of students, assuming and believing that her theory was true for this group as well. As a result, most of the reactions to the thesis were negative or rejecting. Here two different possibilities should be explored. On the one hand, it could be that these students were confronted to a reality they had not had the time to discover by themselves, and therefore its presentation could have been felt as oppressive. In this case, it can be argued that the oppressiveness was not felt because of the presentation of the thesis, but because of its presentation as a reality applying directly to them. If this is true, a third group of students reading these insights as something happening to others, who share similar characteristics to them, could be more open to explore this possibility within their selves. On the other hand, it could also be that the author would be wrong in her hypothesis and thus the students would be right at being critical with the idea. In any case, this author wants to apologize for the possible intrusion felt by the second group. At this point, Berger’s quote may be useful in leading towards the next dilemma:

Put simply, no one is “more conscious” than anyone else; different individuals are conscious of different things. Therefore there is no such phenomenon as conscientização, unless one is reviving someone who’s just been hit over the head. All of us are moving around on the same level, trying to make sense of the universe and doing our best to cope with the necessities of living. No one is in a position to “raise” anyone else; some of us try to convince others that our modus operandi makes more sense than theirs. Such efforts may or may not be laudable, but they are, in principle, transactions between equals. (Berger, 1974: 118)

What Berger is arguing thus, is that the trust and respect on the student, the client, the conflicting party that Freire, Rogers and Lederach propose should in fact not be necessary. That is, the greatest expression of respect towards another human being, in Berger’s eyes, is the assumption that this being is at an equal level, being able to distinguish an opinion from the truth, an advice from an order, etcetera. In this sense, for
instance, this author has finally decided to include the section on peace students because of the profound belief that such a description is not doing any harm to them, precisely because they are “conscious” enough to decide whether that hypothesis applies to them or not, and free to believe that it is just an incorrect thesis.

Notwithstanding this, the positive outcomes that can be reached through the application of these non-oppressive techniques and through this understanding of what respect toward the other is, should not be disregarded. It could be that their application is of most importance, precisely, in cases in which those being exposed to them are oppressed, experiencing inner-conflict or confusion, or being in conflict with others. In these circumstances, the use of non-oppressive techniques becomes crucial precisely for the recovery of that equality. That is, what is argued by Freire and reminded by Goulet is the fact that there might be individuals who have been so alienated that they have lost this ability to be equal and who would be more prone to accept oppression in a non-critical manner. These individuals would understand the ideas expressed by the professor as the truth, the advice given by a friend as the path to take, the expression of hatred or other feeling by the other party of the conflict as a personal attack. For these individuals to be able to recover their “equality”, a process of non-oppression, which returns them the responsibility, and a sense of self, needs to be restored. In fact, the reason why they have become “non-equal” is precisely their having been exposed to too much “oppression”:

The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (Freire, 1970: 60)

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The idea that it does not harm to them was actually expressed by Professor Goulet to this author when she expressed her fear of having become one of those “leaders” Berger and Freire talk about, who try to “liberate” those who are less aware than they are.
In this sense, the psychologist Eric Fromm talks about *The Fear of Freedom* humans tend to experience (Fromm, 1942). In his work, Fromm argues that the horror of Nazism can be explained as a result of this phenomenon. Not much effort seems to be necessary so as to make individuals follow what leaders say, what society establishes. It seems easier to let others decide and have the responsibility. This is, again, an idea reproduced by another psychologist, Abraham H. Maslow, who dedicates a chapter (“The Need to Know and the Fear of Knowing”) to this issue in his *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Maslow, 1982: 60-71). In Maslow’s view, the undemocratic and unhealthy individual is the one experiencing what he calls a fear of knowledge:

(…) this close relation between knowing and doing can help us to interpret one cause of the fear of knowing as deeply a fear of doing, a fear of the consequences that flow from knowing, a fear from its dangerous responsibilities. (Maslow, 1982: 66)

In Rogers publication, we can find several examples of this phenomenon:

*B*: Trouble is, you should give us something definite to talk on. This way we will get all mixed up. Nobody wants no –nobody knows what to talk about. Give us a definite point.
*Leader*: It’s kind of uncomfortable to just be free to talk about anything you want to. You’d almost want me to tell you what to talk about.
*G*: Well, just give us a point to talk about. Just place somethin’ in front of us (Rogers, 1965: 339)

and of the beauty of its transformation:

The counselor was trying to make me think everything out for myself. At times his silence would anger me, but at the same time I felt he must have a purpose. Because of his silence of not answering or giving opinions, I had to delve in my own mind deeper and deeper. In other words, the answers were *my own completely* & for this reason have stuck with me (…) At first I tried to figure out what he wanted me to say or do. I was trying to outguess him or rather to diagnose my case as I thought he would. That didn’t pan out. I did all the talking. (Rogers, 1965: 72)
In this thesis, these fears of freedom, fears of knowledge and inequality are seen as an oppressive reaction to oppression. The vicious circle of oppression becomes clear. Because human beings seem to have a tendency to fear their own liberation, the use of methodologies that prevent their participation in the issues at stake contribute to the implementation of a slow process of alienation. Even if the intention is not to oppress, the continuous practice of vertical processes result in the creation of what Fromm, Maslow and Rogers call unhealthy individuals, characterized by their undemocratic character. The oppressed, as Freire argues, often become oppressors themselves, without being conscious about it. This thesis further argues that the only manner to break this viciousness is to use the vaccine and medicine of non-oppression.

The alienated and unconscious oppressed, because of their alienation, are unable to seek freedom. Paradoxically though, there is one instance in which they seem to become critical of the words of the leader. This phenomenon happens, sometimes, when the leader tries to liberate them through oppressive methodologies. That is, when the unequal are told “you are unequal, you need to recover your freedom,” a natural reaction to it seems to be rejection. It is precisely at this moment in which the need and utility of non-oppression is made more clear. Non-oppression allows the oppressed to discover by themselves the feeling of liberation in a situation in which they are free to choose whether to become free or to continue to be alienated.

Non-oppression, it could be argued, only needs to be applied with the unequal. However, the existence of the vicious circle of oppression contradicts this idea. When the subject in a non-oppressive relationship is unequal, non-oppression gives her/him the chance to become liberated. When the subject wasn’t alienated originally (an exceptional
condition), non-oppression not only does not harm and allows the virtuous circle of non-oppression to continue, but rather, non-oppression is the natural way of relating to others. That is, a non-oppressive relationship among liberated wo/men or equals can be recognized by the fact that they would communicate in non-oppressive manners.

At this point, the idea that awareness is the ultimate principle of non-oppression becomes clearer. A lecture given by a professor, in a vertical manner, can be oppressive or not. When the professor reminds his/her students of their role to think in critical terms about the information they are receiving, the professor is making the students become aware of, or remember their freedom. It returns this freedom to them by opening the door for their participation. A professor who lectures but expects his/her students to write a thoughtful, critical piece in a paper is using non-oppression. A professor that lectures and expects his/her students to merely memorize and repeat, believe, what s/he has said, is being oppressive and contributing, as Freire’s banking system clearly establishes, to the vicious circle of oppression. The peacebuilder who does not have the time or the funds to follow a participant process and needs to propose a solution, needs to do so by also establishing the reasons why of this need as well as discussing this strategy with the actors involved in the conflict.

The need for a further use of non-oppressive techniques and methodologies is clear. They prevent the appearance of oppressors while liberating the oppressed. In some cases though, their applicability seems to encounter some dilemmas in which a need to find an “oppressive” way out is necessary. In these cases, the negative effect of the decision not to carry non-oppression to the end, would be lessened either when those being exposed to these factors have certain sense of an integrated self, and self-
confidence (precisely developed because of the use of non-oppression) and are therefore able to understand critically the information they receive; or when the reasons behind the need to follow a different approach is made clear. That is, when the limits of non-oppression are found, the raising of awareness of these limits is necessary.

3. Conclusions to the Chapter

Raising awareness in order to liberate the oppressed is a weapon with two opposite possible outcomes. First, those wanting to make others aware of a given reality might be wrong in their understanding. As has been seen in the second chapter, it might be that, actually, what they consider to be the panacea for liberation, would in fact be an oppressive reaction. Because one considers forgiveness to be the only solution for the healing of wounds, for example, that should not mean necessarily that others should take that same path.

As a result, this section has shown the importance of sharing ideas in non-oppressive manners. Those being pressured to remember, forget, forgive, should be able to step back and understand what their own needs are, therefore taking the different advices as alternatives to consider. However, it is also useful to understand, that in certain circumstances, the individuals receiving these pressures have become especially vulnerable, calling for non-oppressive help, more than ever. In the context of post-violent-conflict settings, in particular, the institutionalization of these different understandings of what needs to be done for reconciliation can be more oppressive than in the individual cases, as the society as a whole is involved.

This chapter has not proposed a solution, or a way in which the different strategies could cooperate and include this non-oppressiveness. However, it has
emphasized the importance of building peace and transforming conflict through the building of relationships within the given society, as well as the importance of letting those involved in this process decide the needs of the particular society. In helping the actors of the different conflicts find their ways to peace, peacebuilders also need to have a broader understanding of the healing processes, so as to share them with the victims in non-oppressive manners.

This chapter might have also made the reader more aware of the ways in which non-violent reactions to oppression can be oppressive and contribute to the appearance of further oppressiveness. Raising awareness needs to be done with the people, and not for them.

Overall, the liberation theories in the areas of pedagogy, psychology and even conflict have proven to be connected and to complement each other in interesting manners. They define the different components of non-oppression. Their application in the fight against systemic oppression, inner and societal conflict also gives a clearer sense of the variables non-oppression is able to transform: non-acceptance of conflict, inner processes determined by other’s opinions, and the reproduction of this verticality. Non-oppression is liberating, and it liberates through the addressing and acceptance of the existence of conflict and its transformation, which is only possible because of the recovery of equality of the different selves, reached through participation and awareness. Non-oppression, in sum, is able to both prevent the appearance of oppressive reactions to oppression, and to transform them into liberating actions once they have appeared.

The use of non-oppressive methodologies does not harm those not being oppressed. It allows them to continue being “equal”, as Berger would say. To those who
were not longer equal, precisely because of their exposure to oppression, in any of its different forms, non-oppression opens the door for their working on their own liberation and finding of their “equality.”

In the cases in which the inductive and participant components of non-oppression were difficult to put into practice, or in situations in which it would become important to assume that the individuals receiving the information are “equals,” awareness about these conditions needs to be raised. Awareness is thus, the ultimate principle of non-oppression.
CONCLUSION

This thesis starts with the title “Reconciliation: Seeking Peace and Justice through Non-Oppression.” At this stage, however, the reader might think the thesis has not proposed a strategy for reconciliation that could be applied in different settings. This thesis, after pointing out some of the conditions limiting the continuation of the process of reconciliation, has presented non-oppression as a tool, able to work against these limits.

Reconciliation is necessary when a separation has occurred. This separation has taken place, precisely, because the variables making reconciliation possible (non-oppression), and which need to be applied constantly, have been misused and transformed into their opposite (oppression). The first reactions to these oppressive variables appear, for example, when peace seekers try to find ways in which to address the conflict in a constructive manner, in order to transform it, trying to avoid the appearance of the destructive energy also present in the appearance of conflicts. This is a complicated and long process that is often jeopardized by the existence of “greeds and grievances,” but also by other’s reactions to oppression. Others, trying to liberate themselves from oppression and not understanding the importance of fighting oppression through non-oppression, make it difficult for the transformation process to occur. In some cases even, those reacting, and finding their efforts useless in their purpose, might
experience a different phase in their reaction and begin to fight oppression violently, in what becomes an even more oppressive form of fighting oppression.

As a result, or as a reaction to this fight, peace seekers witnessing or experiencing themselves the oppressiveness of violence also become reactive. Their reaction is characterized by an increased need to avoid conflict, to calm things down, to avoid violence, and “return to normal.” They search what Galtung has called “negative peace.” The appearance of this reaction—which today does not need to appear as the result of the existence of violence in one specific conflict but is already inherent in individual’s psyche because of a long history of destructive wars, and therefore can be the first reaction provoking the appearance of further violence—makes those not wanting to forget, those needing to address conflict, react in a confrontational manner, often a violent one.

Imagine a reactionary peace seeker dialoguing with a reactionary freedom fighter. They both want peace and justice and the end of oppression. Their reactions oppose each other while feeding each other. The peace seeker would be asking the freedom fighter to stop using violence, but her/his reaction would also lead her/him to ask the freedom fighter to calm down, to forget, to tell him/her that what s/he is fighting for is, after all, not worth the deaths. The freedom fighter, feeling his/her oppression is not being listened to, understood, would answer aggressively, confrontationally, saying injustices need to be spoken out.

The initial separation has developed into the appearance of further scission. Those seeking positive peace are divided, contributing to the escalation of the conflict. While this situation prevails, other factors preventing the transformation of the conflict
will appear: the appearance of an economy of war, increased alienation and oppression leading to more alienation and oppression, distrust, trauma, are only some examples.

Furthermore, within those peace seekers reacting to the oppressiveness of violence, different reactions would appear, especially once violence has ceased. The same dynamics appear in this case. On one hand there would be those scared of addressing conflict once again, fearing the reappearance of violent and destructive war. On the other hand, others would want to remember the violence that has resulted from it. These are also divided. Some want the perpetrators to be accountable for their deeds. Others want to find out the truth of what happened. Because they are reacting to the oppressiveness of violence, they fail to reconcile among themselves, and further, are unable to address the issues that were initially at stake. These peace seekers address only the violence that resulted from the conflict, but not the conflict in itself.

The first limit to reconciliation is thus the appearance of oppressive reactions to oppression. In particular, the appearance of these reactions among those trying to liberate themselves and wanting the achievement of a positive peace, results in the achievement of the opposite goal: negative peace and non-transformation of the conflict. Addressing conflict becomes a war between non-violent proponents and violent fighters.

The second variable preventing the process of reconciliation to continue its path is the failure to understand these strategies as reactions to oppression, which leads to the imposition of a lesser oppression, which is still contributing to the vicious circle of oppression: the imposition of models based in the different reactions. That is, the different efforts conceived for the reconciliation of societies are shared in vertical and non-participatory manners, in the form of solutions which have today even been
institutionalized: a post-violent-conflict society will be told it needs to look at the past through the establishment of criminal courts or truth and reconciliation commissions. These institutions are often demanded by the civil society itself, and their work has overall advanced the recognition of human rights in the world. However, they need to be regarded as tools to be used within a broader strategy for reconciliation, and not as panaceas. The broader strategy needs to be able to address the different conflicts present in this new devastated society and to understand and share in non-oppressive manners the processes inherent in oppression and non-oppression, in healing memory and transformation of the conflicts.

This is, in fact, the third and most important limitation reconciliation processes encounter: the lack of understanding of oppression as a continuum, as a vicious circle that can be transformed into a virtuous circle, only, through the use of non-oppression.

Non-oppression is characterized, mainly, by the raising of awareness in participatory manners. This process allows individuals and societies at large to recover their freedom and their capacity to relate in democratic, healthy and non-oppressive manners. Non-oppression results in transformation of conflicts and healing memory, and interestingly, transformation of conflicts and healing memory can only appear through non-oppression.

The human instinct to protect the weak, to tell the confused what they ought to do, to take on the responsibility to cure a mental patient, to teach the student, to come up with a solution for a conflict, need to be transformed into the understanding that these processes only contribute to the continuation of the alienation. Non-oppressive guidance
is different to oppressive direction in that those being guided are not “recipients” but participatory subjects in a relationship, in a dialogue.

Reconciliation then, can be seen as a process, which starts at the moment in which separation occurs, followed by a myriad of necessary phases, stages or reactions. When those reacting to a feeling of oppression resulting from the separation fail to transform or change, the process of reconciliation is stymied. Reconciliation calls for strategies and methodologies capable of healing the wounds, identifying and dealing with the issues inherent in the separation, and helping to move from a hurting phase to a liberating one; it should also help those experiencing the positive change become more and more able to live and transmit their awareness in a non-oppressive manner. Peace and justice unite when they are sought in non-oppressive manners.

The field of peace studies needs to fight all reactions to oppression and to further research on the meaning of oppression and non-oppression. A first step for building peace could be the establishment of an organization observing the state of oppression in the world today, according to the different kinds of oppression having been identified. From the one to one way of communicating, to the most cruel use of violence, a yearly report on the state of oppression and non-oppression could be very useful in making us begin to think in these terms and to wonder about the oppressiveness of our actions. Non-oppression should be seen as a human right. Human Rights Watch, for instance, publishes a report each year on the state of human rights in the world and of its violations, contributing the advancement of these rights in the world. However, it only includes one kind of oppression: the oppressiveness of violence and of the violation of human rights. The same should be done focusing on oppression and non-oppression in
all its forms. For that purpose, a “Universal Declaration of Non-Oppression” should also be developed.
AFTERWORD

In the foreword to the thesis, I was telling you, my reader, that I found the need to write this thesis in an academic manner, not using the first person singular, and expressing my understanding of reconciliation and oppression and of the ways in which they relate. I have already explained what I believe are non-oppressive methodologies such as the writing of testimonies, the use of stories to convey ideas, the use of the first person singular avoiding accusations. These methodologies are very useful in the seeking of non-oppression and liberation but in the end, what is more important is that you are aware of the fact that you are not to take my ideas as the truth but are rather critical of them. I hope my presenting them in an argumentative manner would not make you feel as a recipient. You only can know whether my telling you about this possibility has made you become more aware of the need to become a subject in the dialogue and acquire one more step for your freedom, equality, and non-oppressiveness, than if I had not made that statement from the beginning.

This afterword wants to convey that dialoguing idea. In the foreword I started a conversation with you. I then presented you my own monologue, and I am now asking you to tell me what you think about it. I am asking for your feedback, which I would love to receive by e-mail at mgarciah@yahoo.com.

In particular, and following the participant-observant methodology described by Allo, which I believe has many non-oppressive components, I wish I had had the time to
contact all the authors of the testimonies I have used for the writing of this thesis and be
able to include their feedback in the text or as an annex. They know better than anyone
whether my analysis of their reactions bears any truth or not.

I also hope that the presentation of the testimonies would have helped my reader
to experience the feelings and reactions their authors try to convey. Again, non-
oppressive awareness-raising conveys participation, experiencing of the variables being
exposed. I strongly believe I would not have understood Rogers if he had just presented
his theory without including the examples of tens of clients experiencing his non-
directional therapy. In the same manner, I believe it is more possible that you would
experience these ideas and become more critical with your own reactions if I tell them to
you through the exposure of other’s experiences than if I just tell you the components of
each reaction. Again, only you know whether this process occurred or not.

In my case, the research and writing of this thesis has been very beneficial to me.
Although I am sure I am not completely liberated, as I don’t believe this to be possible; I
have experienced and felt the beauty of liberation in several areas. I am now convinced
that I will react more than a million times during my lifetime and that my goal is not only
to act when I am sure that such an action is a liberating one and not an oppressive
reaction. My goal is rather to allow these variables to co-habit within me while
consciously trying to make my natural reactions be less and less harmful to others and to
me. I am starting to understand some of the aspects of the tool guaranteeing the existence
of that process: non-oppression. It is difficult though. I am used to communicate in
oppressive manners and I often found myself reacting. What is important is that I am
also able to realize that I have done so and to apologize, when necessary.
I also find myself avoiding conflict at times, or confronting it at others. I think this is a natural instinct. It is, after all, not easy to address conflict and succeeding at transforming it is an even more difficult task. What I have experienced in my personal life, which is something many theorists also convey in their studies, is the idea that sometimes the conflict needs to be “ripe.” That is, it might not be good to try to address a conflict in a given situation. What is important is to try to create the conditions that would make it possible to address the conflict with less danger of explosion into war, for example. More than anything, what is important, I believe, is not to get stuck in that phase or in any other. Addressing conflict is a permanent process with different phases.

I hope you will e-mail me your feedback so that we can establish a conversation on these issues and further advance in their understanding.
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