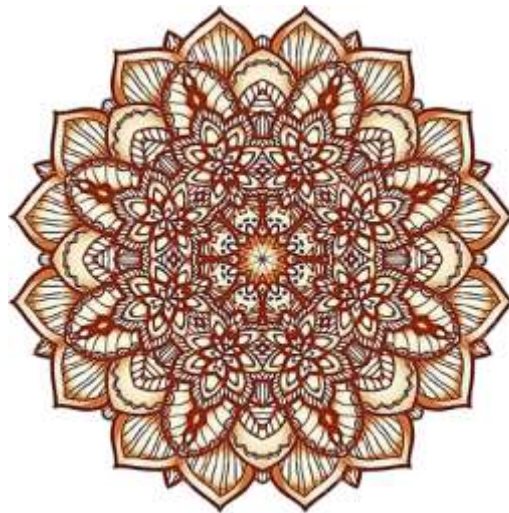


Master Thesis in the frame of the
**MA Program in Peace, Development, Security and International
Conflict Transformation**

at the
University of Innsbruck

The Power of Silence as a Medium for Transforming Conflicts



In order to obtain the degree *Master of Arts*

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Innsbruck, 2016



*To my father who with long silences taught me
a way to enjoy the importance of inner peace.*

*To my mother, Paola, Gaby and July, the women of my life
full of power and amazing energy necessaries for never give up.*

*To all my friends who with strong silences and words joined me in every step of my
Master and during my thesis writing.*

*To my advisers and especially to Norbert
for show me that I am able to be strong and write about my feelings and concerns.*

*Thank you everyone only for to be here and
guide me through the path of silence to find its power.*



Silences of accomplice glances, silences of hidden loves, silences of unimaginable defeats. Those silences that demonstrate so much but say nothing, those silences that seek to change the world with the force of acts and not words. Those silences ...

To the silent witnesses of a history of pain, to those who have carried on their shoulders the weight of death and pain to those who silently accompany social struggles, it is for them that I write and I show that silence can bring profound changes in the hearts and spirits of human beings. Today more than ever I try and I want to understand that conflicts are not transformed with words but with acts that are born from within each one and that are reflected in tangible actions in front of others. Today I breathe again and again in silence to understand that the disarmament of hearts is the way to find true peace.



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At the Beginning

The idea of silence comes to my mind in different ways and multiple settings. I can say that silence is a situation, a mental state, an image, a gesture; in fact it is many things that I cannot describe with words. Silence has a different connotation according to places and occasions, and even has a special sound in nature.

Precisely for those reasons silence is for me a thrilling topic of study, because it evokes inside me multiple emotions and questions. As a research, silence continuously opens doors for discovering authors and interpretations about its use and meaning, from different disciplines. Connecting all these elements with my personal story and my idea of peace is what brings me to this academic exploration.

This thesis is the product of two years of my life, when I had the opportunity to discover how peace can be seen from different angles and how it is a daily exercise that starts with my individual transformation and compromise, discovering in first place that it is necessary begin thinking that there is not just one peace, but rather many peaces. The personal and social training that I experienced in the Master in Arts of Peace, Development, Security and Conflict Transformation of the Innsbruck University showed me the idea of peaces in a worldview full of lights and shadows, but also gave me thousands of tools to understand and adapt them under different conditions and situations.

With the insights obtained in this footpath that I walked in Innsbruck and in other many mental and physical places, I present silence as an option for transforming conflicts and reaching a personal change in search of inner peace and even collective peace; in that sense, without a doubt, openness to new ideas is a necessary element to understand the idea of peaces.

To achieve this objective, I divide this trip through silence into three chapters. The first chapter is a reflection about myself and my relation with the topics of silence and peaces, I



focus my analysis on my cultural context and its relationship with silence, I do a primary review about the literature written about silence within peace studies, and finally I present the methodology that I use for proving the role of silence into conflict transformation.

The second chapter is a gateway to the studies of peace and silence, from the academic philosophy of the Master of Peace, which recognizes five approaches to peace. This chapter starts with a brief introduction about the perspective of conflict transformation to make way to the study of silence from the perspectives of energetic peace, moral peace, modern peace, and postmodern peace, to end with an approach about different authors who understand the silence within a transrational perspective.

With the theoretical inputs of the second chapter, the third and final chapter focuses on different methods where silence serves as a catalyst and transformer of conflicts. I therefore show my experiences with methods such as active listening, meditation, highlighting in this vipassana, mindfulness, and yoga techniques. As for the transformation of social conflicts and the practice of silence, I show the impact of silence within the dynamics of the Colombian conflict and the role of silence in the artistic expressions of dancing and theater.

Finally, with these initial words, I should say that I hope to contribute with my study and my job to the dissemination of peace studies and alternative ways into peacebuilding, especially in my country where the idea of peace seems something unreachable amidst the actual reality.



1. My Holistic Idea of Silence

This chapter presents my personal profile and initial thoughts on the topic of silence as a path for transforming conflicts. Writing about silence is challenging, as it requires discussing verbally the meaning of an alternative to verbal communication. In that sense, this thesis will be a compilation of words to embody what is wordless.

I see this thesis as a jigsaw puzzle composed of distinct pieces, with different shapes and colors whose final composition will depend on the perspectives of the artist (me) and the eye of the viewer (you). The first piece of this puzzle is an introduction of myself and my concept of silence; followed by an exploration of the idea of silence as a research topic and as a path for transforming conflicts – seen from multiple points of view, authors, and experiences around the world, which can illuminate a topic that is a mystery in many academic fields.

In order to convey the process developed for writing this chapter, I invite you to open your mind and heart to the question: What is the meaning of silence for you? Taking a moment to do so will facilitate engaging with the ideas discussed in this text.

This chapter has been divided in five sections: firstly, you will find my profile as the author where I present some elements of my personal story and my motivations for researching about silence. In the second section, I expose my cultural context, which I consider crucial to my understanding of silence. In the third section, you will find a review of the literature on silence as a topic of study and its relation with peace studies - this serves as an introduction to the fourth section dedicated to the methodology I will draw on to study silence. Finally, I synthesize these various threads into a concluding section.



1.1 Author's perspective

The first step in any journey begins with who and where we are. My story starts with my context, my family and my lived experiences – a story full of colors, places, sounds, flavors and people (I, you, he, she, we, and they), all of which have played a specific role and have shaped me into who I am today. Following my personal story and recollections from past experiences, I begin this journey through silence as I look for a perspective on silence as a research topic in the frame of peace studies.

1.1.1 I

Who am I?

I am Adriana, a woman born in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, a country distinguished around the world mainly by its history of violence and drug trafficking. In fact, that history is also a roadmap to my first memories, my childhood, adolescence and adulthood, as many violent and political events marked my life. (Those acts are not the only important things that I remember, though. My love of dancing and travelling are also a byproduct of being Colombian).

I grew up with my parents and my older sister Paola in what many would consider a really quiet childhood, with my sister in an all girls' school, with my father and mother around me. I studied in an all-female Catholic school. While my first years were distinguished by a certain loneliness, in many occasions my sister told me that I had to find some friends, but it was difficult for me, as I preferred to play alone; but I quickly discovered a sense of belonging as I joined the Girl Scouts, the basketball team, a religious group, and a large group of friends. I was able to enjoy being on my own and the company of others. I remember those first years being full of activities and people, but I also have a strong recollection of what have now become historical landmarks of the Colombian armed conflict: the guerrilla attack on the Supreme Court, the increase of kidnappings as acts of war, drug-related terrorism and



the many deaths of civilians, politicians, and militaries, which now run as flashbacks in my head. To be a child in Colombia between 1980 and 1990 was a challenge, because strong violence was a topic of every day.

Later came my teenager years, a time during which I discovered (or reasserted) my love for music and dancing. I went for the first time to the sea and I travelled to many places in Colombia - colors and brilliant memories come to my mind remembering those years. I started university when I was barely 16 and I decided to study Political Science. I hoped then, as I do now, that I could contribute through my work to improving the situation of my country.

The political situation in Colombia had not changed much at the time though: the war against drugs was ongoing as were the massacres, kidnappings, forced displacements and selective deaths which all Colombians knew of as part of our daily lives. As a result, I decided to focus my work on some of these damaging issues affecting the country, and I wrote my bachelor's thesis on kidnapping perpetrated by guerrillas in Colombia. Upon graduation and for many years after, I worked on topics related to kidnapping and conflict in Colombia, and so I began my adult life.

My first job out of college was as a research assistant for an academic group dedicated to reflecting on possible post-conflict scenarios for Colombia. At the time, that possibility seemed to be almost a fantasy, but thinking about peace was my first impulse. Thanks to this opportunity, I discovered the enormous possibilities and alternatives in which I could work to help transform the conflict, not only in Colombia but around the world.

After many years working with the dark side of the Colombian reality – such as armed conflict, demobilization and kidnapping – the idea that such violence and war were eternal in my country became a constant for me, so I decided to go abroad and change scenery. That was when I moved to London to discover a different culture and way of life. This experience



in the United Kingdom exposed me to the feeling of being different in a closed-off society, but it also offered me a distinct way to express myself and to understand that difference. When I returned to Colombia, new job opportunities were waiting for me. I started to work with a program called Peace Laboratories¹, a social project sponsored by the European Union in Colombia, which supported grassroots initiatives for economic development, promoting a culture of peace and strengthening democracy. In that job I learned that Colombians are not just prepared for fighting: we are also thinking about finding paths to transform the conflict and achieve peace and stability. While the road might have seemed long and uncertain, I was exposed to alternative paths to peace and the valuable work that different communities all over the country were doing towards this idea.

As I worked for the Peace Laboratories, I studied a postgraduate program on *Do No Harm* and Peacebuilding. In the course of this program I learned new approaches to peace and some of the assessments and mistakes in development and peacebuilding projects, promoted by international cooperation, in places like Colombia that has been a country object of this kind of initiatives. This brought to light the importance of the peace workers, which led me to pursue a Master in Peace.

With the experience gathered through my professional practice, I wanted to go deeper into my ideas around how to build peace. Now I am able to understand that finding peace does not depend solely on analyzing and studying the nature of the conflict; it also hinges upon how I can approach the concept of peace and change myself to transform the conflict – and not just conflicts around the world or in my country, but also the conflicts in my daily life and within myself. In this process, I have accepted the invitation to think about peace/s and apply the concepts that I have learned through my studies to my professional experiences and

¹ The Peace Laboratories are programs for development cooperation undertaken by the European Union in Colombian conflict zones. (Castañeda 2009)



throughout my life, so I can present alternatives that help transform conflicts and advance thinking about peace.

1.1.2 You, He, She

To talk about my story and the key people in my life is to talk about my family. As of today my family is made up of my mother, my father, my older sister and her two daughters; my family is a mix of subcultures and ethnicities.

He, my father, was born in the south of the country along with eight siblings; four women and four men. His mother was indigenous² Paez³ and his father was Afro-Colombian; as a result of that mix, my father is what some people call zambo⁴. His parents passed away before I was born. My father is a lawyer and an avid follower of political issues in Colombia and the rest of the world. He is 25 years older than my mother and a very quiet person (perhaps too quiet for my mom). He taught me the importance of fighting for my ideas and my love of reading. My father is an elder person with an open mind, full of life and messy moments, but his experience and prudence taught me how to think. It sounds ambitious, but really, his best lesson for me was how to have an analytical frame in my life.

She, my mother, comes from a family in the heart of the country. Their parents are mestizos⁵, my grandfather passed away before I was born, my grandmother is still alive. My

² *Antes del complejo y dramático encuentro de los mundos occidental y amerindio, el ámbito espacial que hoy llamamos Colombia está poblado por muy diferentes comunidades indígenas. Ellas son herederas de procesos históricos diversos y portadoras de realidades socioeconómicas y culturales particulares y, en algunos casos, contradictorias.* (Suárez Pinzón 2005, 6)/Before the complex and dramatic encounter of Western and Amerindian worlds, the sector now called Colombia was populated by very different indigenous communities. They are heirs and bearers of various socioeconomic and historical processes of particular cultural realities and, in some cases, contradictory. (Author's translation).

³ Paez etnia is one of the most important indigenous families in Colombia and its principal place of settling is the department of Cauca, located in the south of the country. According to the National Department of Statistics in Colombia (DANE), Paeces represent 16% of the indigenous population in Colombia. (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas - DANE 2005)

⁴ Zambo is the name of the ethnicity that came from a mix between an indigenous person and an Afro-Colombian person.

⁵ *Con el desarrollo de las relaciones de interculturalidad [y la mezcla racial entre europeos, indígenas y descendientes de africanos], el apelativo de mestizo aparece y se manifiesta diferentemente en el contexto discursivo y práctico. La sociedad muestra nuevos tipos de individuos que requieren una apelación en función de la diferenciación entre lo blanco y el Otro.* (Suárez Pinzón 2005, 4)/ With the development of intercultural relations [and the blending of European, indigenous and African descendants], the name mestizo appears and



mother has six siblings, three women and three men. Her grandfather, her father and also one of her brothers were killed in different events before I was born, and another one passed away when she was two years old. She went to university as an adult as I was growing up to become a systems engineer. Now retired, she is lover of reading, talkative and an excellent teacher. Her lessons for me are immeasurable but for sure she is the model of a working woman, tireless and persevering.

Although my parents come from different regions of Colombia, they have something in common: both of them arrived to the capital because of the violence in their villages, they escaped at different times from their hometowns, and were faced with the conditions imposed by the capital city to displaced people arriving and the lack of rootedness; still today, they miss their hometowns. As the Mexican writer, Gloria Anzaldúa, mentions: “Each of us must know our Indian lineage, our afro-mestizaje, our history of resistance” (Anzaldúa 1987, 101). This is precisely the case of my family with indigenous, white, and afro ancestors, shaped by a history of confrontation against cultural stereotypes and economic conditions. Many years ago, my parents had to change their lives to live in the main city, which gave my sister and I better options for schooling and work. I can honestly say that the intermingling of violence and politics in my family’s history lead me to study Political Science, which is how I became exposed to multiple perspectives to analyze Colombian and international reality.

My mother is the hero of my life, she never gives up. Regardless of the circumstances, she always has energy and love to start over.

1.1.3 We

We, my sister and I, join the couple of my mother and my father. We are a special family, as are millions of families around the world.

manifests differently in the discursive and practical context. The society shows new types of individuals requiring an appeal based on the differentiation between the white and the other (Author’s translation).



My sister and I are the sum of two opposites, the logic of a systems engineer and the argumentation of a lawyer, the passion for life and the idea of looking for alternatives every day. The result is a mix of inspirations. My sister is a journalist, also a book lover, spontaneous, full of creativity and imagination to do everything that she wants. She taught me the value of learning and experiencing new things every moment.

We are a closed system. We are a strong female squad, so the idea of ‘We’ is based on female power. My sister gave birth to two girls, my mother had two daughters and her mother delivered three daughters too – in terms of simple arithmetic we are more women than men, so we have a strong command in the process of making decisions. In Colombia, women’s voices have not been the protagonists in constructing narratives and a common history, but that changed over the time, and my family is a reflection of this change.

1.1.4 They

To think about the meaning of ‘they’ has two faces. On one hand, they, in my mind, can be the armed actors and victims which marked so many episodes in my personal history: guerrilla combatants, paramilitaries, drug lords, politicians, kidnappers. On the other hand, they can simply be ‘the others’, all the people that have been present in my life; friends, teachers, colleagues, bosses. All of them have had a strong influence in my past, my present, and the decisions that shape my future.

They, as armed actors and victims, have shown me the capacity of human beings to damage others without inhibitions, regrets, or even compassion, as well as the capacity to forgive and be resilient. Again and again, when I thought that we had hit rock bottom, worse things happened in my country, but every time we got up. This is how I grew up, with the certainty that we will have to get back up many times.

They, the others with that expectant look as if they were watching a horror movie passing before their eyes every day. They and I got used to the deaths, and the pain became



part of our lives. We (because I am part) assumed that reality would never change, so we have created a parallel world where we can live and progress; a world far, far away, like in fairytales. In my society there is a lot of unspoken pain that restricts us and inhibits us from connecting.

I will now focus my attention on describing my cultural frame of reference before moving forward to the idea of silence as a medium for transforming conflicts.

1.2 A cultural framework for understanding my own idea of silence

Silence, or even better, silences, emerged as a research topic after my first semester in Innsbruck, when I experienced the Native Spirit⁶; at that time, I discovered the importance of listening to nature and my inner voice. In my long reflections inside of a special space called the ‘medicine wheel’⁷, where silence was a key aspect, I spent a lot of time thinking about myself, my fears and my dreams.

Through that process, I understood that my motivations to write about silence are multiple: some of them come from my personal experience, and others from my cultural and political context. In order to explain these incentives, I will first present some ideas that shape a concept of silence for my research purposes, and then I will link this concept with some of my experiences and impressions.

When I started to investigate about silence I found multiple definitions. The first one that caught my attention was the definition presented by José Luis Ramírez, Spanish

⁶ Native Spirit, a school reawakened from the time of the Stone Age, is located on the river Inn and is dedicated to the knowledge of the root memory of the cultures. This wilderness school has a different type of education in mind. It teaches the native, indigenous, aboriginal systems and skills. Beyond race, culture and religion this school educates us to learn directly from mother earth, to bring ourselves into a relationship with her. (Native Spirit 2015)

⁷ In Native American spirituality, the Medicine Wheel represents harmony and connections and is considered a major symbol of peaceful interaction among all living beings on Earth. [...] The term medicine wheel was first applied to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, the most southern and one of the largest in existence. That site consists of a central circle of piled rock surrounded by a circle of stone; "Rays" of stones travel out from the central core of rock and its surrounding circle. The structure looks like the wheel of a bicycle. (Royal Alberta Museum 2013)



philosopher and philologist, author of the speech: *El significado del silencio y el silencio del significado*⁸. In that speech, he spoke about his personal experience with silence saying:

*Mi adaptación a una sociedad política y culturalmente diferente me hizo advertir la presencia de silencios donde cabía esperar palabras y también, aunque con menos frecuencia, de palabras donde se esperaban silencios. Esto me hizo consciente de que el uso y el sentido del silencio ofrecían matices diferenciales muy reveladores. La comprensión de la realidad del silencio, para la que había sido, si no ciego, sordo en mi propia cultura, mostró ser muy valiosa para entender la cultura nórdica en que me estaba adentrando. Y aun cuando el silencio se manifestaba en la ausencia de palabras, se me hizo evidente que su comprensión no se lograba adecuadamente reduciendo el silencio a la condición de hecho lingüístico, sino entendiendo tanto el silencio como la palabra hablada como el cemento que une a individuo y sociedad.*⁹ (Ramírez 1989, 2)

This definition inspired by the philosopher's life experience, allows me to reflect on some elements that I found interesting for understanding the concept of silence. On one hand, understanding silence as a cultural expression beyond the absence of words and, on the other, silence as a fundamental element for understanding the relationship between individuals and their social environment.

In fact, as Ramírez mentioned, a similar situation happens to me when I travel. While I feel I need too many words and descriptions to understand something, in some places I have lived, such as Austria and England, a simple 'yes', 'no' or a deep silence seems to be more than enough for most to express themselves. In contrast, in the Colombian culture (even Latin-American culture), every situation needs an explanation and every word seems necessary. Even sounds such as Ajá (it means yes), hmmm (it means I am thinking) and ah ah (it means no), have a range of connotations depending on when and where they are used. But silence.... Silence is not an acceptable answer under the rules of coexistence in this society.

⁸ "The meaning of silence and the silence of meaning" (Author's translation)

⁹ My adaptation to a politically and culturally different society made me realize the presence of silences where words could be expected and, less frequently, of words where silences were expected. This made me aware that the use and meaning of silence spreads offered very revealing nuances. Understanding the reality of silence, for which he had been, if not blind, deaf in my own culture, proved to be invaluable for understanding the Nordic culture in which I was entering. And even when silence was manifested in the absence of words, it became clear that their understanding is not adequately managed by reducing the silence condition linguistic issue, but understanding both silence and the spoken word as the cement that binds individual and society. (Author's translation)



Silence is often interpreted as indifference to social justice, as a form of oppression, because when you talk and express your opinions aloud you are participating.

With the idea that Culture is a set of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society (UNESCO 1982, 1), I should say that Colombian culture is a mestiza culture, being a product of the combination of Indigenous, African, and Spanish heritage. The concept of mestizo/a, as I understand it, comes from the idea developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, who defined Mestiza, as: “[...] a product of cross – breeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn - a female seed-bearing organ – the mestiza is tenacious, tightly, wrapped in the husks of her culture.” (Anzaldúa 1987, 103). Colombian culture is also the product of a miscegenation process, where the Colonial Catholic component was mixed with Indigenous and Africans approaches to understanding the origins of the world. As a result, Colombian culture is nowadays a complex web of relations and different cosmovisions.

From my perspective, being part of a mestiza culture has allowed me to understand the world through diversity and the tensions and interrelations between distinct influences and paradigms. As Anzaldúa explained, “From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making- a new mestiza consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*¹⁰. [...]. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity.” (Anzaldúa 1987, 101). This ‘alien consciousness’ allows me to see and to understand the world with an open mind, aware of the diversity and multiplicity of perspectives.

In this culture, as I mentioned, silence is not a valid answer. Silence many times means absence. In my house, when my father spends days in silence, just saying a few words, my mother is likely to go mad at any moment. She continuously complains about his attitude, she

¹⁰ A woman’s consciousness (Author’s translation)



says: “Actually I do not know what he is thinking, because he never says anything”. (Sotelo, Personal Interview, 22 March 2015). This reaction might be due to her interpretation of silence as a way to lose a connection with someone. At the same time, it is another reason to write about silence and to show to my mother that silence is not always a rude way to deal with someone. Silence can be simply a different way of expression and even a symbol of inner peace; a symbol of inner peace is also a way to show respect to the other person’s story or expression as in the attitude of active listening or even a way to avoid an invasion to the other person’s space.

When I talk about experiences, it is also important to point out that silence is understandable through experiences. As Ramírez says: “*Podemos expresar una misma experiencia de realidad de muchas maneras diferentes y con palabras diversas, pero siempre quedará un resto de silencio, un algo sentido, inexpresable o inexpresado, quizá connotado pero no denotado.*”¹¹ (Ramírez 1989, 7).

Following this idea, silence can be a way of establishing relationships. It can be that indescribable part of reality that we try to explain or to interpret with words, but that we cannot reach with a precise definition, and many times it shows empty spaces between experience and communication. In my personal experience, when I try to describe my journeys and my feelings, I always leave something unexplained, something that I cannot express with words.

This part of my experiences continues in silence, but that does not mean that I can forget those experiences. In regards to my life experiences, it is important to say that with my involvement in the Master of Peace, I have discovered the power of silence; meditating, breathing, listening, writing, in a real process of active listening with other people and with myself.

¹¹ “We can express the same experience of reality in many different ways and different words, but there will always be a residue of silence, something felt, inexpressible or unexpressed, perhaps notorious but not denoted” (Author’s translation)



I want to understand my concept of silence and share my key ideas, in order to outline the focus of my thesis. Previously, I defined silence as “a cultural expression beyond the absence of words, as well as a fundamental element to understand the relationship between individuals and their social environment, that describes empty spaces between experience and communication.”

I add to this definition the idea of silence as a conscious decision that requires a high level of concentration, and as a medium to find one’s essence and gain self-awareness –a mechanism that can transmit positive and negative messages into a specific context. Through interviews, I discovered that silence has a strong power to transform ideas and even societies. Even though being silent is an individual decision, it can have a profound impact on society, and have a healing power.

The concept of silence is also connected to the act of listening and personal cleansing. If I observe silence, I can listen to others and my inner self because silence allows one to listen to external and inner voices. Being silent can also be scary because on many occasions when we listen to our inner voice, we hear the echo of our fears and other things that we do not want to accept. However, silence can also lead to new learnings and discoveries. Silence requires concentration, inspiration, and connection with myself, others, and even with nature. As Gabrielle Roth, dancer and artist from the United States, mentioned, “the power of silence and the messages that it communicates depend on me, shift the paradigm it is up to me, my presence and my commitment.” (Roth 1998, 25)

To conclude, culture and the representation or meaning of silence are deeply intertwined. Throughout this section I have discussed how my perception of culture and specifically the Colombian culture have molded my concept of silence and affect how I have pursued this research topic. In the following sections I will now explore how this concept has been studied from different perspectives.



1.3 Researching and reading about silence

I want to talk about what this thesis is for. This thesis is about the idea of silence as a path for looking alternatives to transform conflicts, whether they are personal or collective. This research is also about exploring new perspectives on silence(s) and the connection with different experiences and expressions. This exploration helps to open the spectrum of approaches to the transformation of conflict, and get closer to peace. Silence helps create a path that connects our thoughts with our spirit and body, thus making accessible a more holistic idea of peace and conflict. I explain the roots of these reflections in the next paragraphs.

1.3.1 Silences

To analyze the idea of silence implies thinking in plural. There is no *one* silence in my reality and my context, and there are many silences that I discovered through my literature review. In exploring the connection between cultural context and the meaning of silence, I first discovered an approach to silence coming from the realm of music and dance. Gabrielle Roth wrote about it, saying:

[...] It was embarrassing to see how threatened we were by silence. Westerners seem to be afraid of stillness and silence. We come into our homes, take off our walkmans or throw down our portable phones, and switch on the TV even if we have no intention of watching it. It's as if we were programmed to fill every empty space with noise and activity. We seem to be afraid that if we leave a gap something inside of us might bubble up and take us off guard. Maybe we're really afraid of the silence of the grave, death is, after all, the ultimate stillness. (Roth 1998, 178)

Roth's approach delves into how silence links body and mind, and the importance of finding this connection consciously. It also showcases how, depending on the cultural setting, the idea of being silent can be threatening because of its connection to death or, 'the ultimate stillness'.



In John Paul Lederach's book 'When Blood and Bones Cry Out', he quotes Jacques Attali: "For twenty-five centuries, western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for the hearing. It is not legible, but audible." (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 76). A good example of this audible world is shown through the practice of TaKeTiNa¹², which I learned through my studies at the University of Innsbruck. In TaKeTiNa the pause means a gap, an empty space that can be opened for potential to emerge. In this process:

[...] musical learning is always part of a human learning process. Everything that hinders us in life is reflected as a musical-rhythmical problem and can thus be transformed through rhythmical-musical work. Thinking and feeling, intuitive presentiments and cognitive action, external movement and inner calm begin cooperating with one another; one's thinking quiets and room for visions and change opens. (TaKeTiNa Association Europe 2009).

Along this line, Carmen Pardo Salgado, Spanish teacher of History of Music, has said that "*El silencio se escribe, se ofrece a la escucha. En la escritura musical el silencio es figura y cada nota figurada posee su recíproca figura silenciosa, la figura de pausa. Una figura que mide el silencio.*"¹³ (Pardo Salgado 2003). In music, silence is not the absence of sound, but part of the melody. Silence has a value and is the result of a conscious decision. As the Spanish writer and musician, José Luis Palacios Garoz, has said, listening requires silencing the internal dialogue in order to perceive true harmony. (Palacios-Garoz 1999, 102)

Another way where silence is expressed in art is through theatre. In theatre the gaps, the silence, the in-between words, express so much of the life of the characters. Silence is maybe the best way to express what is really going on beyond the masks, the struggles, and the inner

¹² TaKeTiNa is a unique musical group process for activating musical and human potential through rhythm. The TaKeTiNa process gives every person access to his or her rhythmic endowment. It conveys rhythm as one most naturally learns and understands it. Instead of learning rhythmic patterns, the learner is guided directly to experience the elementary musical elements that are anchored in the consciousness of every human. This connects participants with their own deep, original rhythmic knowledge. The extra-musical effects of the TaKeTiNa process range from the transformation of behavioral patterns that hinder oneself all the way to the awakening of intuition, creativity and the ability to communicate.

¹³ Silence is written, it is offered for listening. In musical writing, silence is a figure and every represented note has its reciprocal silent figure; the figure of the pause. A figure that measures the silence (Author's translation).



conflicts of the characters: without silence, maybe theatre would become lifeless. I could probe the power of silence in theatre with my experience in the class of Theatre for Living, during which Canadian dramaturgic David Diamond taught us different techniques and steps for understanding silence into theatre.

A second current from which it is possible to examine silence comes from the idea of inner peace and the practice of meditation. My first investigation into this expression of silence pointed me towards the direction of meditation and the vows of silence followed by spiritual devotees, as in Catholic, Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

In these contexts, silence is part of the pursuit for inner peace, calm and self-knowledge. For example, from a Buddhist perspective, inner peace represents tranquility of mind and a quality of being centered. In this case, inner peace practitioners “develop self-analysis techniques so that they may reach an understanding of their role and identity in life and relationship with others. This training is intended to develop positive characteristics in people and to help them become more resilient in their psychological wellbeing.” (Snyder and Shane 2002, 5). Also, Hindu traditions such as yoga stress that inner peace is obtained through:

the acceptance that the trans-qualitative Divine Peace-Being, who is facing in all directions is one’s interior space, grants all mental comfort, meditation and such yoga practices, conquest of senses, intense desire for the pacification of the poisons of wordly involvements and thus for spiritual liberation, and observation of those who are at peace because of these means. When interior peace is obtained through these means, one develops the capability to calm one’s own mind, the waves of the mind subside, the senses gradually calm down and no longer burn with uncontrolled and unchanneled desires and the glance and the very presence conveys peace. (Veda Bharati 2014, 195)

Silence also has a particular role in shamanic traditions. One of the authors that explored the idea of silence as mystical was the anthropologist and writer Carlos Castaneda in his book *‘El silencio interno’*¹⁴. From his perspective, silence is a medium to find ourselves – it can be a way to discover our essence and what is inside of us. Silence can also be a path to dealing with one’s own problems without intermediaries, without excuses, without the

¹⁴ The Inner Silence (Author’s translation)



necessity to find an explanation for everything. Silence is the way to seeing things in their real dimension, without categories or classification.

Silence can also be explored through the literature on communication. Through the Master on Peace Studies, I had the opportunity to study this approach in the class Language(s) and Peace(s), where I presented a paper titled ‘Silence as a way of Communication’. Through that research I discovered the importance of body language and symbols as key structures that human beings have created to communicate: gestures, movements, proximity, facial expressions, colors and images – they can all show me that it is not necessary to use words to convey positive and negative messages. When silence is the primary means for transmitting a message, the body is the key to explaining the expression beyond the word element. As the German historian Hans Belting mentions: “Bodies are strongly shaped by their cultural history and thus never cease to be exposed to mediation via their visual environment” (Belting 2005, 311). The body serves as a means of expressing feelings and emotions that do not require words to be understood and can let the silence speak for itself.

I am interested in silence as a way to transmit messages, and I can see this manifestation of silence in various social movements. Some historic cases involving silent marches in Colombia¹⁵, Uruguay¹⁶ and Israel¹⁷ have used silence as a means of expression and as a way of protest. For analyzing specific cases, the sociologist Ronald Aminzade and other authors, explored the issue of emotions in social movements. In their book ‘Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics’, they use the expression ‘loud silences’, noting the following:

[...] For a start –in focusing on movement actions- it too often excludes the crucial interaction between actors and their antagonists. And in focusing on opportunities the existing canon too easily ignores both the threat to the unions and the leadership strategies of unionists who either take advantage of opportunities or risk missing the boat.

¹⁵ On February 7th of 1948, in Colombia marched 100.000 persons with the political leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (murdered two months later) against the political violence impulse by political parties.

¹⁶ In Uruguay is celebrated a march of silence is celebrated every 20th of May (since 20 years ago) in Uruguay, looking for the truth about disappeared people during the military dictatorship in Uruguay.

¹⁷ In Israel a social movement as Women in Black, protest openly by political violence in Palestine and Israel. In this protest women wear black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets.



Moreover, in its preoccupation with resources, the traditional canon too often ignores the key factor that brings frightened and uncertain people into street –their emotions. (...) Agency, emotion, and interaction have for too long been muted in social movement theory. (Aminzade and Goldstone 2001, 4)

This perspective shows me that silence can contribute to the expression of individual as well as collective ideas. Social movements become a sum of silences aiming to be heard. There are, in fact, some cultures, as the academic Francisco Raga Gimeno has pointed out, where the use of silence helps to avoid conflicts, such as with the Apache nation in the United States (Raya 1999, 92), where silence helps members solve their differences and provides a path for social healing.

The ideas about silence presented in this chapter by Castaneda, Roth, Baharati, Salgado, Snyder, Beltung, Aminzade and Lederach among others, require a more detailed analysis because their complexity and scope are proof of how deep the study of silence can be in the academic field. However, this first step helps us situate silence at the intersection of different perspectives and to present distinct points of view that frame my research topic.

1.3.2 The link between silence and peace into elicitive approach

As I mentioned before, silence is a topic studied from different academic approaches. I want to research silence as a medium for conflict transformation, following my personal motivation and my professional interest. Looking for ideas to understand the process of conflict transformation, I found the ideas of Wolfgang Dietrich and John Paul Lederach.

John Paul Lederach, in one of his books called ‘Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace’, defines a new concept for me, the ‘moral imagination’, saying is the “capacity to recognize turning points and possibilities in order to venture down unknown paths and create, (...) also it is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive processes that are rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence and yet transcend these destructive patterns.” (J. Lederach 2005, 12).



These capacities mentioned by Lederach serve as inspiration to develop my research. If I can imagine the transformative power of silence, I can help promote new alternatives and perspectives within a specific context and use my own capacities to instigate the transformation of conflict.

Now, Lederach's ideas are complementary with the ideas of Wolfgang Dietrich and with my goal of researching silence as a medium for transforming conflict. Inspired by Lederach, Dietrich has developed the concept of *elictive*¹⁸, which "suggests that the energy of the conflict provides the method and the direction of conflict transformation" (Dietrich 2013, 10). In complement, it is important to remark that the *elictive* approach in conflict transformation "requires that we work from 'the spiritual layer' with a capacity to remain silent and love unconditionally" (Ibid, xii). That love and silence are capacities that we can develop with self-awareness, openness and selective authenticity, how Dietrich mentions and that I want to discover with my research.

With the literature review presented I examine how an idea of silence has been addressed in peace studies as a topic of study. However these studies are not focused exclusively on silence as a medium for finding peace; for that reason I consider this research as an innovation and also as a challenge that can be complemented with different approaches following the *elictive* perspective within conflict transformation studies. As John Paul Lederach taught me, I have to practice my creativity in order to find a conflict transformation:

The moral imagination believes and acts on the basis that the unexpected is possible it operates with the view that the creative act is always within human potential, but creativity requires moving beyond the parameters of what is visible what currently exists, or what is as given. The moral imagination does not just think outside the box; it is willing to take the risk to live outside the box. (J. Lederach 2005, 62)

¹⁸ According to Wolfgang Dietrich "The adjective *elictive* does not appear in any standard dictionaries of the English language, John Paul Lederach derives it from the verb to 'elicit' meaning to bring forth or to provoke. (Dietrich 2013, 10)



My creativity goes beyond a box with my moral imagination and I want to discover silence as a concept within the discipline of peace studies. I am interested in researching and describing concrete practices of silences to determine how these practices could contribute to conflict transformation. With this purpose in mind, in the next sections I review authors that shed light on silence from theoretical and practical points of view, taking into account the classification of different perspectives on peace within peace studies, according to the idea of ‘transrational peace philosophy’ developed by Wolfgang Dietrich in a wide body of literature and practiced at the University of Innsbruck’s UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies.

The idea of ‘transrational peace’ and ‘five peace families’ is the result of extensive research on interpretations of peace throughout history and culture, led by Wolfgang Dietrich (Dietrich 2012). According to this approach, there are four groups of peace throughout history: energetic, moral, modern and postmodern peaces. Each one is based on a “key value: energetic peace is all about harmony, the moral interpretation emphasizes justice, the modern understanding of peace calls for security, and the postmodern approach deals with the question of truth(s).” (Dietrich 2014, 48).

None of these values mentioned are isolated in social life, thus appears the necessity to understand peace in a holistic manner and to find equilibrium among these four values through a wider concept that addresses these four perspectives on peace. This perspective is called “trans-rational, because it appreciates and applies the rationality of modern science while it transgresses its limits and holistically embraces all aspects of human nature for its interpretation of peace. It is rational and so much more, for example emotional, mental and spiritual.” (Dietrich 2014, 48-49). Following the transrational perspective, I present the concept of silence using the four peace families identified above, and I introduce the idea of silence as a transrational concept.



1.3.2.1 Silence from energetic approaches

In order to understand the idea of silence from the perspective of energetic peaces, it is necessary to keep in mind a fundamental element: harmony – how silence can contribute to the harmony within and among human beings is the main question for this perspective.

According to Wolfgang Dietrich's classification, "energetic peaces are holistic. [In this case] peace is understood as a unification of opposites. [...] Energetic representations of peace are abundant and so we find them in manifold shapes in classical interpretations of culture, religion and philosophy." (Unesco Chair for Peace Studies 2014, 18). In relation to this idea, I identified some authors that explain silence from the perspective of energetic peace and help illuminate the relationship between silence and harmony.

The first author within this frame is Carlos Castaneda (quoted above) with his book 'The Power of Silence, where he discusses the idea of silent knowledge through inner silence. His notion of silence as "*Un estado libre de pensamientos y verbalizaciones silenciosas al que los chamanes llaman diálogo interno*"¹⁹ was derived from ancient traditions (Castaneda 1996, 3). The Power of Silence describes the author's experience with Shamans and presents silence as an ideal mind state that I can recognize as inner peace.

This book is a good approach to understanding silence as a pursuit of internal harmony and as an exploration of indigenous heritage that supports my search for a 'mestiza consciousness'. This first approach also shows me that silence can be a path towards a spiritual goal that implies a higher level of concentration and a deep individual and conscious commitment.

Another author that has explored silence within indigenous traditions is Keith Basso, a cultural and linguistic anthropologist noted for his study of the Western Apaches, specifically those from the community of Cibecue, Arizona. Basso studied the importance of silence in

¹⁹ A state free of thoughts and silent verbalizations which shamans call internal dialogue (Author's translation).



Western Apache culture and showed how this practice was fundamental to essential for conflict resolution and community life. (Basso 1972).

The third author relevant to energetic perspectives is Gaspar Hernandez, a Spanish journalist who wrote a book called '*El Silencio*'²⁰. In this novel, the author describes the healing power of meditation and visualizations for a sick person with cancer, and explains the meaning of silence and inner dialogue within a healing process. (Hernandez 2009). Beyond the literary value of this novel, the perspective presented by the author exhibits an applied way for understanding silence that I consider interesting for my research.

All of these authors help me conclude that, in energetic peaces, silence can provide a link between mind, spirit and body, and can also be a path for finding harmony in my inner being and with others.

1.3.2.2 Silence from moral approaches

For moral conceptions of peace, the idea of justice is central. The challenge here is to understand how silence can contribute to finding justice in my context or, in some cases, how the idea of justice can be opposite to the idea of silence in my culture – as I mentioned in the first section of this chapter. For moral concepts of peace:

[...] the material world and everything in it is perceived as interconnected whole, but the realm of the divinities is separated. [...] Such moral conviction can be found in the great cultures around the Mediterranean, in Christianity as well as in Judaism and Islam. [...] We can draw a further thematic tendency for moral peaces: the question of Justice. (Unesco Chair for Peace Studies 2014, 19).

Following the idea of moral peace and bringing in my idea of a mestiza consciousness that is the product of a mix of indigenous and Spanish heritages, I am curious about the practice of vows of silence in Christianity, the predominant religion in my culture and my country. As I looked for bibliography associated to this practice in religion, I found an

²⁰ 'The Silence' (Author's translation)



interesting analysis based on the last days of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, nun, poet, and promoter of women's rights in Mexico. The Anthropologist Mercedes Prieto studied the meaning of silence for Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and she mentioned:

*[el] silencio (como opuesto a escribir) pasó a ser un instrumento para romper, como individuo, los límites de género de su tiempo. El silencio de Sor Juana no es sólo una estrategia política frente su imposibilidad de expresar y articular un discurso en torno a los temas abiertos a debates, sino de marcar una agenda aún vigente hoy día.*²¹ (Prieto 2004, 136)

In this case, silence becomes a political strategy and a way to reveal the control and social dominance of her time; a mechanism for voicing injustice inside a restrictive society predominantly ruled by men. This approach is helpful for understanding how some social movements use silence as a way of expressing their disagreement with political or social situations, such as the Women in Black movement²² or 'La Marcha del Silencio'²³ in Uruguay. It can also help understand how silence is seen within religion and how it is related to the idea of justice in a society.

1.3.2.3 Silence from modern approaches

Within modern approaches, the idea of peace is linked with the problem of security. In fact, following the definition of modern peaces where "rationality is a founding principle of peace [and where] the universe functions like a machine according to eternal laws of cause and effect that, via the natural sciences, at least in principle can be deciphered." (Unesco Chair for

²¹ Silence (as opposed to writing) became an instrument for breaking, as individual, the gender boundaries of her time. Sor Juana's silence is not only a political strategy against her inability to express and articulate a discourse on topics open to debate, but to set an agenda still valid nowadays. (Author's translation)

²² "Women in Black Movement is a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. As women experiencing these things in different ways in different regions of the world, we support each other's movements. An important focus is challenging the militarist policies of our own governments. We are not an organization, but a means of communicating and a formula for action. [...] Women in Black (WiB) actions are generally women only. Our actions often take the form of women wearing black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets. (Women in Black n.d.)

²³ The march of silence is celebrated every 20th of May (since 20 years ago) in Uruguay, looking for the truth about disappeared people during the military dictatorship in Uruguay.



Peace Studies 2014, 20), silence can be seen as a way to control the population, and can be synonymous with following orders and maintaining the status quo.

With this orientation, I found a rigorous study that seeks to measure the impact of silence in communication and social behavior. This analysis called ‘Spiral of Silence’ was developed by Elisabeth Noëlle-Neumann, a political scientist from Germany, who, through her theory, tests how the perception of public opinion influences individual behavior.

Noëlle-Neumann explains the tendency of people to remain silent when they feel that their views are in opposition to the majority view on a subject. The theory, supported by a statistical model, postulates that people remain silent for two reasons: (a) Fear of isolation when the group realizes that the individual has a divergent opinion from the status quo, (b) Fear of reprisal or more extreme isolation, in the sense that voicing said opinion might lead to a negative consequence beyond that of mere isolation (loss of a job, status and so on) (Noëlle Neumann 1995). This study is useful for understanding the role of silence in communication and how individuals can use silence as a shield against social rejection and a way to be safe or avoid risks.

1.3.2.4 Silence from postmodern approaches

The idea of peace in the postmodern approach is highly related to the idea of truth; a truth that I can find in my inner self. It is difficult to think of silence as a way to find truth, but the idea of truth has multiple meanings and interpretations. In fact, in postmodern understandings

[...] celebrate the exuberant multiplicity of lived existence without looking for resolving tensions between contradictions but twisting the dogmatism of modernity’s reason, turning its analytical tools on itself. [...] plurality appears as the key term to postmodern philosophy. [...] Against the idea of a true modern and rational founding principle, postmodern peaces seek to find the truth in every human encounter. (Unesco Chair for Peace Studies 2014, 21)

Considering that the definition of the postmodern approach emphasizes the recognition of the inherent multiplicity to the idea of peace in order to find truth, the same must be



recognized for the multiplicity of silence. Going back to José Luis Ramírez, in his speech '*El significado del silencio y el silencio del significado*'²⁴ he explains how silence can mean many things in different contexts and different cultures, and how the meaning of silence can bring us closer to the real meaning of being. (Ramírez 1989) This perspective presents silence as a medium for finding my essence and understanding the complexity of language and alternative communication paths.

1.3.3 Transrational Silences

To understand silence in a transrational way does not mean creating a new concept, but recognizing silence as a holistic concept with multiple dimensions and perspectives. Following the transrational and elicitive philosophy for understanding a concept such as silence implies discovering how silence can be analyzed amongst plurality and spirituality.

The notion of “transrational peaces take[s] the four thematic emphases of the peace families and combine[s] the knowledge and relevance of each of them.” (Unesco Chair for Peace Studies 2014, 22). In order to understand silence with a transrational view, again my starting point is the author John Paul Lederach, who explains that transrationality is the “capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world, yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” (J. P. Lederach 2008, 57). This ability invites me to understand the act of listening and the importance of listening to my inner voice, which helps me understand how to locate silence within the scenario of peacebuilding or conflict transformation.

Claudio Naranjo, Chilean psychiatrist, who combines different techniques of Eastern and Western philosophy, psychology and psychiatry to understand the behavior of human beings, complements this vision. In his book '*The Way of Silence and the Talking Cure on*

²⁴ “The meaning of silence and the silence of meaning”, Author’s translation



Meditation and Psychotherapy', he presents a panorama of classical forms of meditation from a theoretical and inter-disciplinary perspective, finding the common ground between meditation and therapy (Naranjo 2006). Naranjo manages to trace a path linking various disciplines where silence and practice help heal psychologically, physically, and spiritually. This is a deeper approach that contributes to my framework the silent technique and its application in the processing of personal conflicts.

Also within the discipline of peace studies, related to the idea of the importance of silence, I found the technique of Active Listening, promoted by Carl Rogers and Richard E. Farson. In their words:

Active listening does not necessarily mean long sessions spent listening to grievances, personal or otherwise. It is simply a way of approaching those problems which arise out of the usual day-to-day events of any job. [...] Active listening is an important way to bring about changes in people. Despite the popular notion that listening is a passive approach, clinical and research evidence clearly shows that sensitive listening is a most effective agent for individual personality change and group development. Listening brings about changes in peoples' attitudes toward themselves and others; it also brings about changes in their basic values and personal philosophy. (Rogers and Farson 1957).

For me, listening implies awareness of silence when you hear the voice of the other/s in order to understand their ideas and expressions. Silence is a key element of active listening, and of transformation of attitudes in others.

The third author of relevance is the Indian writer and philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, who has dedicated his body of work to raising awareness about the importance of silence in meditation and as a way of finding inner peace. In a video called 'Meditation, the timeless and love', Krishnamurti comments on how important it is to listen to ourselves, our thoughts, our fears and our emotions without distortion or direction to find the meaning of life (Krishnamurti 1979). This speech helps me to understand how silence can be applied through meditation and how important it is to listen to our inner voice for solving our problems and advancing towards self-transformation.



Also of interest is the philosophy of Thich Nhat Hanh related to mindful meditation. This Buddhist monk has written about different aspects of peace and inner peace. His books and lessons show me the importance of silence in my daily life and how to apply the ideas related to silence in practical activities (Hanh 1975, 1987, 1988, 1991). In fact, the techniques and lessons developed by Thich Nhat Hanh and his followers allow me to approach the practice of meditation and to learn more about the power of silence from my own experience.

The authors that I referred to mainly show the side of silence with light, but silence also has a shadow side. As in energetic peaces, the idea to see the balance between light and shadow is a constant; it also happens whit human beings, we have a continuous dichotomy between our light thoughts and dark thoughts. Silence indeed has a light side the I described above and a dark side, which refers to those moments where silence means oppression, guilt, pain, those situations where the silence becomes a means to ignore or reject to the other, as I can see with cases in which silence is the synonymous of discomfort, is the silence of the victims, the silence of societies that feel oppression, the silence of women who are afraid to express their ideas to others.

In order to complement the perspective of recognized authors about silence and its role inside peace studies, I will show in the next section ideas gathered from interviews about silence as a research topic – ideas that I apply in my thesis.

1.4 Silence from different points of view

In order to complement the visions of academic authors, I interviewed six people chosen because of their various perspectives on silence and how to approach it from different theoretical frames. The aim with the interviews was to know different perceptions and understand how they see the role of silence in conflict transformation.



Firstly, I thought in my personal and familiar surroundings, for that reason I talked with my niece and my father; they can show me perspectives from different ages and different way of living. Secondly, to understand the role of silence in my social and professional contexts, I interviewed three professionals that work in the field of human rights, peace building and security: all of them contribute to conflict transformation in social areas. Finally, I was thinking in an approach to silence from cultural and spiritual aspects; for that reason, I interviewed a person who practices silence and conflict transformation through meditation.

My first interview was with my father, José Mera, whom I asked for his feedback on my research question about silence. He gave me many ideas related to the perspective of silence as a medium for transforming conflicts. Firstly, he showed me the importance of seeing silence as a path or a spiritual search. A situation becomes a conflict, he said, when the collective cannot find a solution and as a group decides to protest or to fight - but to remain silent against injustice is never an option. Secondly, as a research topic, silence has to be thought of as an individual decision, but in the midst of a conflict, it is an individual decision that can contribute to the collective welfare (Mera, personal interview, 27 April 2015). In that sense, silence is useful for listening and for mediation, and it can be a way for transforming conflicts by incorporating positions and reasonable ideas from different parties.

My second interview was with my niece, Juliana Manrique (11 years old). When I asked her if silence is a way to change or to solve a conflict I got a surprising answer: “*No, porque a veces es necesario intervenir en algunas cosas y si guardas silencio tal vez el conflicto podría seguir y agrandarse más*”²⁵. But when I asked her, if she liked silence, she said: “*A veces, cuando me relajo me gusta el silencio y a veces es incómodo estar en silencio,*

²⁵ “No, because sometimes it is necessary to intervene on some things and if you keep silence perhaps the conflict could go on and enlarged more” (Author’s translation).



por ejemplo, cuando estás sentada en el comedor y todos se quedan en silencio y no sabes de que hablar, eso es incómodo” (Manrique, personal interview, 27 April 2015)²⁶.

Juliana's ideas generated new questions about my topic of study: Can silence be something negative? As she said, sometimes remaining silent about a problem or a situation could be something worse than fixing it. But I continue with my idea of seeing silence as a medium to transform conflicts: in fact, I do not know if it is possible for it to be a positive and negative side for silence; silence is an expression with different readings, whether silence is something right or wrong is a personal judgment. Juliana said that she likes silence when she is relaxed, so it is a good way to see silence as a manifestation of calm, stillness and tranquility.

Juliana was not the only one who saw silence as a negative entity, Rosario Velásquez (my third interviewer), an expert lawyer in Human Rights, said something similar when I explained to her my thesis topic. She suggested to me that silence in the midst of conflict is always harmful, we must speak up so the facts of injustice are revealed. Silence is often complicity or fear (Velásquez, personal interview, 28 April 2015).

When I described my purpose in depth, she expressed that the practice of silence is different, that understanding silence as a medium of peace is a challenge, but it is very helpful in a place such as Colombia, where we do not often listen to each other. In that moment, a new element appeared for analyzing silence within my culture and my country: silence in a context of conflict, silence within a peacebuilding process.

In my fourth interview, conducted with Lina López, a political scientist who is working in peacebuilding in Colombia, the idea of collectives and conflict, mentioned by my father, came up again:

²⁶ “Sometimes, when I relax, I like silence. And sometimes it is uncomfortable to be silent, for example, when you are sitting in the dining room and everyone is quiet and you do not know what to talk about - that is uncomfortable” (Author's translation).



*El silencio no es solo un espacio personal sino colectivo. En mi experiencia profesional he trabajado con comunidades que han sido víctimas de un conflicto social y armado. Tan solo imaginar lo que el silencio puede provocar en sus memorias y recuerdos... silencios de miedo en contar lo que pasó, silencio para querer olvidar, silencio por no poder confiar. También silencios institucionales que significan su falta de presencia y compromiso, que los hace lejanos*²⁷ Lopez, personal interview, 2015

I can see that into the context of an armed conflict, silence can be harmful and it can be attached to the collective memory. Especially in the case of victims, sometimes they prefer to remain silent because they feel shame or fear of being victimized again. In fact, while searching for the idea of silence within the Colombian conflict, I found the testimony of a woman survivor of sexual abuse by paramilitaries:

*Durante nueve años decidí guardar silencio, me sentía avergonzada. El daño que le hicieron a mi alma nunca se irá... pero ahora puedo hablar de lo que me pasó. Me di cuenta de que podía ser la voz de miles de mujeres que han sido víctimas de violencia sexual, y eso es lo que hoy me da fuerza*²⁸ (Bedoya 2014)

The woman who gave this testimony is a well-known journalist and activist for women's rights in Colombia. Nowadays she is participating in the peace dialogues between the guerrilla and the Colombian government. In my personal opinion, in cases related to sexual violence silence is not an option, but the difference between seeing silence as harmful or as a healing process on the intention behind keeping silent. For instance, in my case as an individual, I can choose to hide something with my silence or I can use it to find answers and inner peace within me.

This latter idea was supported by the opinion of Jorge Moreno, a lawyer and expert in citizen security. He told me that while silence sounds interesting, it is utopian as a medium of conflict transformation in a country where armed conflict occurs daily (Moreno, personal

²⁷ Silence is not only a personal space but a collective space. In my professional experience I have worked with communities that have been victimized by social and armed conflict. Just to imagine what silence can provoke in their memories and recollections... silences of fear of telling what happened, silence for wanting to forget, silence for not being able to trust. Also institutional silences that convey their lack of presence and commitment that makes them distant. (Author's translation)

²⁸ For nine years I decided to remain silent, I felt ashamed. The damage they did to my soul will never go away ... but now I can talk about what happened to me. I realized that I could be the voice of thousands of women who have been victims of sexual violence, and that's what gives me strength today (Author's translation).



interview, 30 April 2015). This is precisely, from my perspective, where it is most needed to seek creative solutions, solutions that provide new alternatives and paths to follow – the practice of silence is just one of them, but it can be a source for tapping into that creative energy within personal or collective conflicts.

To see a different perspective on silence, I interviewed Marco Bermudez, an expert in meditation and a member of Peace Revolution. For him, silence can contribute to peacebuilding because it allows people to find inner peace and thus radiate positive energy to his/her environment and impact his/her relationships. He told me as well that silence is something intangible, but that it can also become an important topic of study to show its potential and benefit for people's lives. In his words, in many cases, people who work on issues related to peace and development want to change the world but fail to see that change starts with ourselves, and if a study is able to show that it would be a breakthrough (Bermudez, interview via Skype, 4 June 2015).

With this landscape in mind, researching silence remains a challenge. For that reason it is important to understand different perspectives about silence that can contribute to the advancement of my research. Creativity and imagination are key points in the path to discover the importance of silence in conflict transformation.

1.4.1 About my own motivations

Reading about different points of view about silence is an interesting exercise that shows me multiple possibilities to get closer to my study topic. One of my main motivations for writing my thesis on the power of silence for transforming conflicts is the chance to research alternatives to see the conflicts in my personal life and my context. Taking experiences from different societies and academic currents led me to exploring new approaches to the study of peace in practical and theoretical ways.



‘How can we learn from different silences?’ is a key question in my investigation. Becoming aware of the potential of silence, and the different facets that I can discover, is an exciting way to work through my ideas of identity, harmony, listening, inspiration, peace, stillness, and even fear with different stops and linkages.

My own experience and cultural context are fundamental motivations for the impact that I hope to achieve through my research. Even though it does not deal with silence within the Colombian context, many of the claims and ideas expressed in this document are connected to my personal history and of course that of my country, and they are fueled by the hope to contribute to the transformation of the Colombian conflict in a near future.

Finally, silence allows a connection among mind, body, and spirit. For me, the idea of silence is not ethereal – it is a medium that I can use to transform attitudes in various aspects of my life, linking physical and mental transformations. Silence is a driver of change, inspiration, and individual and collective mind-states.

1.4.2 Research question

Building upon my concept of silence, I now move on to my research question: How can the practice of silence become a medium for transforming conflicts? This question guides my research, literature review, interviews, and my description of personal experiences. In conjunction, these elements should help find the path into conflict transformation.

1.5 Silence between methodology and method

To address this section I want to clarify the distinction between methodology and method. Methodology describes step by step how I develop the research. According to the authors Peter Clough and Cathy Nutbrown “methodology is used to explain and justify the particular methods used in a given study. [In that sense] A methodology shows how research questions are articulated with questions asked in the field.” (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, 25,31). In my



case, methodology is a frame that helps to understand how silence can be a research problem from an academic point of view and how the practices of silence can become research methods for transforming different situations at personal and social levels.

The first element that I have clear is that the methodology for my research topic is mostly theoretical and qualitative, because this kind of methodology “[...] seeks to explore phenomena [and] is typically more flexible – that is, they allow greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant” (Mack and Woodsong 2005, 3). I am planning to develop my research in four steps: Literature Review, Selection of Relevant Practices of Silence, Description of Research Methods where silence is a cornerstone, Depth Interviews and Personal Experiences, so the idea of a qualitative approach fits well.

Into this qualitative methodology, I know from the perspective of Peace Studies that I have to approach my research problem in a transdisciplinary way that links different methods. In this line, it is important to understand that “[...] methods only –and this is crucial- only arise in the service of quite particular needs and purposes. Their usefulness falls away if and as these needs are met and these purposes fulfilled”. (Clough and Nutbrown 2012, 31). Thinking about my needs as a researcher, my research question and the field of Peace Studies, I have chosen some methods, based on breath and movement-oriented, that can show me the power of silence within conflict transformation, applying also the elicitive approach that I already explained.

In my initial review, I can mention some of the methods that fulfill my aims as researcher, such as the practices of Active Listening, Mindfulness Meditation, Vipassana, Yoga, Five Rhythms, and Theatre for Living; that I will explain in the third chapter. All of these methods show how silence can be used in different moments for transforming conflicts and how I experienced its practice. I consider these methods suitable for my research topic



and appropriate to reach my aims, because they include different visions and perspectives that allow me to understand the idea of transrational silences.

1.6 Conclusions: My first step toward silence

My life experience, my culture and my family have shaped my personal history and my perceptions about the world – these three elements are key points for explaining my ideas and for developing my academic research. Specifically speaking about silence, I have to say that it is a deep concept, full of mystery and things to discover. Without a doubt, my father and society are great sources of inspiration to understand why silence is so enticing and simultaneously disturbing. My culture (where silence does not play a central part of communication) can provide great input into why silence can contribute to finding peace, and my life journey can also provide elements to explain how silence is defined through the eyes of a mix of influences and subcultures.

Thinking about the world, my country, my family and myself, I have discovered that the origin of many conflicts is a failure to listen and our occasional preference for continuing talking instead of being silent – only in rare cases do we listen carefully to the positions or arguments of others. For that reason, I want to show with my thesis how silence can be a powerful path to finding peace and searching for alternative ways for transforming conflicts.

In the next section, I will describe some elements that inspired me to go deeper into the concept of silence as a research topic. I will focus my attention on silence from different perspectives of peace studies. I will try to direct this study taking into account my motivations and the relevance of silence in academic and social discussions.



2. Discovering the Mystery of Transrational Silences

In the first chapter, I mentioned the different perspectives to understand silence. It is important to note that there is not only one silence; in fact, there are many silences of distinct varieties. In my view, the concept of silences requires distinct points of analysis. This enables me to go beyond my own limits and preconceptions, and it also helps me build a path for conflict transformation from different angles.

In this chapter, I present the idea of conflict transformation and its link with different perspectives of silences; the chapter then examines the philosophies of peace families, referencing perspectives from multiple authors. It is important to note that the concept of peace families comes from approaches presented by Wolfgang Dietrich through his lessons in the Master of Arts Program for Peace, Development, Security and International Conflict Transformation and his different publications, mainly the three volumes of 'Many Peaces',²⁹ in which he researches the concepts of peace from distinct cultures and worldviews.

Following these philosophies of peace, this chapter is divided into six sections: In the first section, I introduce an approach to the idea of conflict transformation with the aim of understanding how silence can be seen through these lenses. In the second section, I begin to look at silence from distinct perspectives of peace; as such, this section, so this section is dedicated to silence from the energetic perspective of peace. In the third section, I bring together silence and moral forms of peace. In the fourth portion of the chapter, I introduce silence from a modern perspective of peace. In the fifth section, I go through a mirror that reflects silence and postmodern vision, and finally I present the idea of transrational silences as a holistic concept through the lens of transrational peace.

²⁹ Dietrich has published a compendium of three volumes named Many Peaces (Dietrich 2012, 2013, 2015), which he explains the approach to five understandings of peace.



2.1 Transforming conflicts in multicolor

While I studied the idea of peace families, I could not avoid relating each family to a color and sense. For me, the holistic idea of peace and conflict involves all five senses: touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste; every experience passes through those five filters and it converts into a singular rainbow.

Inside this multicolor surrounding, as I mentioned above, this chapter is dedicated to analyze silences from the perspective of peace families, taking the concept of conflict transformation as a starting point. In my view, the first question here is: Why do I talk about conflict transformation and not about conflict resolution through silence? To answer this question, I found inspiration from the ideas exposed by John Paul Lederach. He writes:

Conflict transformation is accurate because the core of my work is indeed about engaging myself in constructive change initiatives that include and go beyond the resolution of particular problems. It is scientifically sound because the writing and research about conflict converge in two common ideas: conflict is normal in human relationships and conflict is a motor of change. And transformation is clear in vision because it brings into focus the horizon toward which we journey, namely the building of healthy relationships and communities, both locally and globally. This process requires significant changes in our current ways of relating. (Lederach 2003)

The situation described by Lederach represents one of the aims of my study. When he says, “the core of my work is indeed about engaging myself in constructive change initiatives”. In that sense, silence is a medium to bring about change in personal and social situations determined by conflict, and in consequence I want to talk about my own experiences with silence. Therefore, this research looks for ways of engaging with alternative means of transforming conflicts, and not at the idea of controlling or eliminating the conflicts.

According to Lederach, those changes, motivated by conflict, are given at four levels: personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of human experience. With my study, I want to show how silence can influence these four levels in the path of conflict transformation. I focus on how silence can influence my personal and relational spheres and how these changes may affect the structural and cultural dimensions of my surroundings.



As I mentioned, the first dimension named by Lederach is the personal level, which “refers to changes effected in and desired for the individual. This level includes the cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and spiritual aspects of human experience over the course of conflict” (Lederach 2003). In this line, conflict transformation “minimizes destructive effects of social conflict and maximizes the potential for personal growth at physical, emotional and spiritual levels” (Ibid). I believe silence is an individual decision and it manages to help the growth of one’s inner self in different ways, allowing one to discover new things within. The first change that I noted through silence was my personal perception and my way of viewing conflict. Silence also allows me connect myself with my body, my mind and my spiritual beliefs. As Cristin Morandino, an editor of an alternative magazine, says about silence:

It could take us to a place where we hear our hearts beating. Or it could bring us to a point where we listen to our hearts and recognize the opportunity to sort out our deepest thoughts, fears and hopes. In both places we are creating something out of apparent nothingness. And that is the most sublime of creations. (Morandino 2002)

The second level in conflict transformation is relational, which “depicts the changes affected in and desired for the face-to-face relationships. Here issues of emotions, power, and interdependence, and the communicative and interactive aspects of conflict are central.” (Lederach 2003). As Lederach insists, conflict transformation minimizes poor communication and maximizes understanding. In this dimension, aspects as balance of power, emotions, communication and interdependence are key issues.

Lederach mentions that transformation in the relational sphere implies intervening around how “the patterns of communication and interaction in relationships are affected by conflict” (Ibid). Relatedly, I believe silence helps to improve communication because it does not only allow me to listen to others and myself, but it also offers the opportunity to see the whole picture of a community or society from a calm state of mind. As I mentioned in the first chapter, silence is a key aspect of communication; in some cases silence can break social communication, but also can lead to exploration of new ways of communication. Silence



helps me to listen to others, and I can learn from the experience of active listening, particularly when the main exercise is listening without judgment and based on nonverbal communication (Rogers and Farson 1987).

For conflict transformation on structural level, Lederach mentions how important it is [to] “understand and address root causes of violent conflict; promote nonviolent mechanisms; minimize violence; foster structures that meet basic human needs and maximize public participation.” (Lederach 2003) Likewise, the structural dimension stresses the ways in which social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. In my case, I can see how in a violent context, such as the Colombian context, the impact of conflict over social structures and institutions is great and the manifestation of this situation is the low credibility in institutions and laws, as well as the constant threat of ideas opposed to state order.

The fourth aspect of conflict transformation is the cultural dimension. As Lederach remarks, the cultural dimension aims

[to] identify and understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict; identify cultural resources for constructively handling conflict. [...]. This dimension refers to the ways that conflict changes the patterns of group life as well as the ways that culture affects the development of processes to handle and respond to conflict. (Lederach 2003).

In Colombia, the cultural dimension has a strong influence in violent expressions of conflict. I can say that Colombian culture has been determined by armed and social conflict as well as the expression of the armed actors and their victims, and even the whole society. Silence can be a therapy or space to transform the wounds caused by conflict, but also a way to keep secrets or to avoid the truth about a violent issue or violent actor. As the author Cristin Morandino says, silence “[...] however, is quite a challenge in a culture that routinely uses words like awkward and deafening to describe the state of silence”. (Morandino 2002) In fact,



in my personal and professional experiences related to victims of kidnapping or sexual harassment, victims use silence as a shield against those experiences.³⁰

This spectrum about the different levels of conflict transformation shows a wide range of possibilities of analysis about social conflict. The main motivation of conflict transformation does not focus on resolving the conflict, because as I describe it has a complex network of relationships and levels that generate new challenges, constantly changing the dynamics of conflict.

To complement Lederach's vision, I find it relevant to mention the transrational approach to conflict transformation and to understand silence as a blockage of energy. That blockage should be 'neutralized, [in consequence] the social system can grow through it and, thus matured, discover and develop new choices. [...] It creatively employs the energy emerging from the conflict's epicenter and I, therefore, call this process 'transformation' rather than 'resolution'". (Dietrich 2013, 8)

In this line of thought, and as I mentioned in the first chapter, it is important to highlight that the "energy of the conflict provides the method and direction of conflict transformation" (Ibid, 10). In other words, it means that conflict transformation is elicitive. For me, this concept is a base for my investigation because elicitive implies that aspects as common knowledge, values and communication techniques are fundamental when transforming determined conflicts between individuals, groups or communities.

Following the idea of the transformation of conflict, it is important, as Wolfgang Dietrich mentions, that the participants of the system in conflict become aware of additional choices. They must determine a minimum of three choices that allow them to reach new

³⁰ Some experiences were narrated by two Colombian politicians kidnapped by FARC EP guerrilla. One of them is Ingrid Betancur (Candidate to the Colombian Presidency in 2002), who published the experiences about her six years of kidnapping in the book "*No hay silencio que no termine*" (In English: There is no silence that does not end). The second one was the Congressman Oscar Tulio Lizcano, who escaped the kidnapping of FARC after eight years, he published his experiences in the book "*Años de Silencio*" (In English: Years of Silence).



perspectives and options in order to see the problem. For that reason, I present distinct positions from which silence can be seen as motor of change into the conflict.

These new perspectives and options open new doors for the participants and show the multiplicity of conflict transformation. This multiplicity suggests that conflict work requires elements from psychology and communicative skills that allow an understanding of conflict as a complex system with many social interactions.

From the idea of transforming conflicts, the following sections show from the lens of different families of peace how silence can be a way to transform the conflict, demonstrating how common knowledge, values and communication techniques are important to understand these perspectives. In some cases, with such a transformation it is possible to reach peace and other opportunities. Alternatively, the conflict can also open a door to new conflicts.

2.2 An energetic view of silence: cosmic breath

According to Wolfgang Dietrich, the idea of energetic peace is determined, as the concept mentions, by energy. This energy or cosmic breath is the maximum principle of life, and with this basic principle coexists all the elements into the universe. For that reason every action has consequences for all beings, and “that is why peace is the harmonious vibration of the All-One”. (Dietrich 2012, 54)

In this incessant vibration, nature and human beings are in constant interaction, and peace becomes a continuous goal that we reach not through rational or empirical preparation, “but through letting go of all concepts which bind us to this earthly life”. (Dietrich 2012, 55) Earthly life has its own dynamic where living beings develop their potential and human beings as part of it, reaching a special connection.



This energetic connection between living beings and the universe is relational and it creates a special rhythm of life, resonating sometimes harmoniously or disharmoniously. As Dietrich mentions:

Human *Dasein* [existence] is thus relational in a double sense: in relation to other living beings and toward the universe. It is in the consonance or dissonance of those vibrations that harmony or disharmony arises. It is not the meaning of wordly *Dasein* to resonate in complete concord with the universe but in harmonious relation to it. There from results that which the human senses perceive as peace. (Dietrich 2012, 56)

In this consonance or dissonance where harmony is a constant search, it is also important to understand that energetic forms of peace are the result of a permanent search for balance between light and darkness, and understanding that light is also darkness and darkness is also light. It seems to be an apparent contradiction, but it reflects that everything is in continuous movement and human beings should face this reality that allows them to understand that there are no absolute rights or wrongs in any situation because everything is constantly changing. This endless movement of the universe and human beings implies that peace from an energetic view is something experiential, embodied and practical; in consequence the art of peace can be found in everyday experiences.

Connected to the experiences of everyday life and the constant duality I face in my daily life, I found the concepts of harmony and cosmic breath to understand silence from an energetic perspective especially intriguing. The art of being human, Dietrich points out, mainly consists of the recognition of the signs or manifestations of the divine breath. For me, this divine breath is a perfect representation of the silence of the universe when the nature speaks with her own voice, and with her own rhythm. This rhythm shows how silence is dynamic, and that the “conditions [of the relations between human beings] are constantly changing with every breath. Therefore decisions also have to be adapted to those changes.” (Dietrich 2012, 57)



From the concepts mentioned above, it is clear that the path for understanding silence from energetic forms of peace is full of surprises and discoveries. I mentioned in the first chapter the idea of silence, looking at the perspectives of different authors such as Carlos Castaneda, Keith Basso and Gaspar Hernandez. As such, in this section I want to discuss their concepts of silence, showing how this energetic perspective reflects that nothing is good or evil, true or false, or right or wrong. Instead, I will highlight the multiple visions I use to understand silence.

I consider it necessary to illustrate the importance of shamanic origins of the energetic perspective before explaining the ideas of Carlos Castaneda. This will enable an understanding of the concept of silence, particularly because he bases his analysis on the stories of a Shaman Don Juan Matus. In order to understand this approach, it is useful to define who the Shamans are. According to a basic definition, they are “men or women, healers teachers, narrators, singers, or poets who address the great themes of fertility and death as well as healing of illnesses and social relationships.” (Dietrich 2013, 46). These characters develop a mediating role in different cultures or societies, seeking the roots of a conflict or situation to transform or heal it, and in the process establishing connections between people and the rest of the universe, following the cosmic law.

Despite the skepticism of the important role of shamans in many societies, including my own, recognizing the importance of shamans within a society or community involves understanding the importance of spirituality in conflict analysis and its role in its transformation. As Dietrich writes:

Shamanic rituals are usually not accepted by modern science as a treatment method for conflicts, issues or illnesses. These points to a failure of understanding: shamanic rituals are not meant as substitutes for adequate action, but rather as a way to see the action, but rather as a way to see the action in a larger concept. [...] I therefore consider the systemic function of shamanism in its cultural and social context. Rather, its message is that we, people from all cultures, are capable of being present, discovering our personal center, the heart of our personality. In this sense, shamans are political agents whose practices address the historical relationship between state and society. (Dietrich 2013, 48)



By understanding shamans as political agents, I can recognize Shamans are also peace workers in different contexts who use different methods to heal and transform conflict on personal and social levels and are able to connect us with our centers and also with the universe.

Following this line and starting with the ideas of Castaneda, I stated above that he focuses his attention on the idea of silence through the stories of Don Juan Matus, as he shows in his books 'Power of Silence' and 'Silent Knowledge'. In these books, he explains key concepts for my research that I mention with the aim of showing the importance of silence in my personal transformation and also in my idea for transforming conflicts.

Carlos Castaneda was an anthropologist and writer who described his personal experiences based on the stories taught by don Juan Matus, a Mexican Indian sorcerer³¹ (shaman). The biographies of Castaneda³² mention that it has not been possible to verify the existence of don Juan Matus and many of his tales, but the relevance for my thesis is the approach to silence from an energetic perspective.

The first concept that I consider interesting to understand the power of silence is the idea of energy. Castaneda quotes the teachings of don Juan, writing: [...] "Human beings are born with a finite amount of energy", don Juan said, "an energy that is systematically deployed, beginning at the moment of birth, in order that it may be used most advantageously by the modality of the time." (Castaneda 1987, 7) This idea of energy is connected to the

³¹ Concept used by Castaneda in his book "The power of silence". It is important to mention the word comes from Siberian language and it means 'heal doctor'. Shaman means also one who knows, he/she is a person, who works as a healer, teacher, narrator, singer or poet with the primordial topics of fertility, death, healing of physical and relational illness. According to Castaneda, the guide in the lives of sorcerers is called "the nagual". The nagual is a man or a woman with extraordinary energy, a teacher who has sobriety, endurance, stability; someone seers see as a luminous sphere having four compartments, as if four luminous balls have been compressed together. Naguals are responsible for supplying what sorcerers call "the minimal chance": the awareness of one's connection with intent.

³² One of the biographies of Carlos Castaneda was written by Dubant, Bernard and Marguerie, Michel. "Castaneda. Un salto a lo desconocido", where they described some of the misteries of the writer. (Dubant y Marguerie).



concept of silence, because, in few words: I can save energy by practicing silence in my daily life.

In parallel, he explains the idea of sorcery, a complex concept for my culture, because Colombia is a country with a deep-rooted religious culture in which the Catholic beliefs are predominant and sorcery or animist practices are considered sin or sacrilegious, meaning that they are against the principles set forth by God. Nevertheless, Castaneda presents an interesting approach to sorcery, clarifying:

From where the average man stands, don Juan says, sorcery is nonsense or an ominous mystery beyond his reach. And he is right—not because this is an absolute fact, but because the average man lacks the energy to deal with sorcery. We don't need anyone to teach us sorcery, because there is really nothing to learn. What we need is a teacher to convince us that there is incalculable power at our fingertips. What a strange paradox! Every warrior on the path of knowledge thinks, at one time or another, that he's learning sorcery, but all he's doing is allowing himself to be convinced of the power hidden in his being, and that he can reach it. (Castaneda 1987, 8)

The teachings of don Juan to Castaneda were of great interest to me because these excerpts about inner power and the importance to be conscious about it are indeed inside us. It is not necessary for someone else to teach us how to reach that inner power and, and nothing is strange or supernatural in that practice of sorcery. Relatedly, Castaneda mentions “the aim of sorcerers is to reach a state of total awareness in order to experience all the possibilities of perception available to man. This state of awareness even implies an alternative way of dying” (Castaneda 1987, 9). The idea of sorcery is linked to the idea of energy, because we have to reach our inner potential and the path, as Castaneda says, through silent knowledge and traditional and millinery practice.

Why is silence a good path to explore and find our inner energy? According to Castaneda, through inner silence we increase our perception, our connection with the physical body, our cognitive ability and our awareness about our surroundings and ourselves; in other words, silence is able to take us beyond the human condition.



Inner silence and silent knowledge are other concepts that Castaneda developed in his books and that I found very interesting. For Castaneda, inner silence is a natural state of the human perception, and in this state *“los pensamientos se bloquean, y todas las facultades del hombre funcionan desde el nivel de la conciencia que no requiere el funcionamiento de nuestro sistema cognoscitivo cotidiano”*³³ (Castaneda 1996, 26). In other words, inner silence is the only way to reach silent knowledge. Following that theoretical line, silent knowledge is defined as: *“Estado de la conciencia humana en que todo lo que es pertinente al hombre es instantáneamente revelado no a la mente o al intelecto, sino al ser total”*³⁴. (Castaneda 1996, 5).

Finally, it is important to remark that in order to reach silent knowledge, from which the essence of life is revealed to human beings, intense practice is necessary. Every human being, according to Castaneda, can discover his or her level of consciousness only if she or he practices silence continuously, at least for short periods of time. When this state is reached, the world stops completely and we are able to see things that were previously invisible to our senses. In fact, we can see how energy flows in the universe, as Castaneda describes.

The lessons of Castaneda reveal different aspects to understand silence and its power. In line with shamanism, which I before, I can see how silence could be a tool for shamans, allowing them to remove relational blockages and look for balanced relations between the spirit and body, and also with the rest of universe. In this line, I also could see how indigenous people can appreciate silence and how silence is a learning gap that we can unfold as people and that can contribute to better understand our setting, which is mainly composed of energy.

³³ Thoughts are blocked, and all man's faculties operate from the level of consciousness that does not require the operation of our daily cognitive system. Author's translation.

³⁴ State of human consciousness that everything that is relevant to man is not revealed instantly to mind or intellect, but to total human being. Author's translation.



To complement the vision of silence exposed by Latin American Indians, I will discuss a study by the cultural and linguistic anthropologist, Keith Basso. Basso studied³⁵ the meaning of silence for the Western Apache community settlement of Cibecue, located in east-central Arizona, North America.

Basso analyzed the idea of silence within a cultural framework; the starting point for explaining his ideas is the ‘ethnography of communication’, a key concept developed by sociolinguist and anthropologist Dell Hathaway Hymes (Hymes 1964). This approach to communication shows that the way to transmit messages is something other than linguistic communication, “[s]omething else is needed: knowledge kinds of codes, channels and expressions to use in what kinds of situations and to what kinds of people”. (Basso 1972, 155). In this line, as Basso mentions: “Although the form of silence is always the same, the function of a specific act of silence –that is, its interpretation by and effect upon other people – will vary according to the social context in which it occurs.”(Ibid, 155).

When examining the specific function of silence, Basso analyzes the Apache culture as a case study, determining different perspectives of silence within this culture. The first approach is the expression of silence in relationships with strangers in Apache culture. He writes that “In all cases ‘strangers’ are separated by social distance. And in all cases it is considered appropriate, when encountering them for the first time, to refrain from speaking.” (Ibid, 156). This social distance is manifested through silence.

It is interesting how Basso discovered how silence is read in a cultural context; in this case, silence means a lack of trust. It is also a social convention. Referring to this aspect of Apache indigenous people, the author writes: “Their verbal reticence with strangers is directly related to the conviction that the establishment of social relationships is a serious matter that calls for caution careful judgment, and plenty of time.” (Ibid, 157).

³⁵ Basso did his research over a period of sixteen months (1964 -1969). According to Basso, in those years the community of Cibecue was integrated by 800 residents. Their economy was based on agriculture, cattle raising, sporadic wage-earning and Government subsidies. (Basso 1972, 155).



The Apache Community draws on silence not only with strangers, also in the process of courting. Basso mentions that “during the initial stages of courtship, young men and women go without speaking for conspicuous lengths of time.” (Ibid, 156). According to his research, this situation occurs because this period is a process of mutual knowledge, characterized by shyness, fear, ‘self-consciousness’ and a symbol of purity, especially for women, remain silence in their first dates “[...] is a sign of modesty and that an eagerness to speak betrays previous experience with men.” (Ibid, 157)

The third case in which silence plays a fundamental role in Apache culture is when ‘Children, coming home’. During his surveys within the Apache community, Basso found that when a person returns to his/her house after a long absence, his/her family and friends remain silent. Usually, when young people return to their houses after finishing their studies, family and friends celebrate with the aim to listen and learn about his or her experiences.

Following his initial research conclusions, Basso discovered that the members of Western Apache culture remain silent in situations in “which one individual angered and enraged, shouts insults and criticisms at another” (Ibid, 158). The response of the community in these cases is to refrain from speech, and is a sort of social punishment or rejection related to this attitude. It can occur in different physical settings, but “wherever and whenever individuals lose control of their tempers and lash out verbally at persons nearby.” (Ibid, 158)

Although these situations can occur in different settings, “the Western Apache fear it most gatherings where alcohol is being consumed, [in these cases exists] the belief that individuals who are ‘enraged’ are also irrational or ‘crazy’. In this condition, it is said, they ‘forget who they are’ and become oblivious to what they say or do.” (Ibid, 158). Therefore, it is problematic to reason that silence is the most desirable attitude.

There are two more manifestations when silence is used by the Apache community. First, it is used during situations “which an individual finds himself in the company of



someone or kinsman has recently died” (Ibid, 159). Silence occurs because people are sad, so the reaction of the community is marked by minimal speech. A second instance is when someone is singing in rituals or ceremonies. This is because this represents a moment of concentration. For such communities, rituals represent special moments when spirituality and natural medicine converge.

In the case of mourning, the person who is in pain requires an unusual amount of physical effort to speak aloud, so by courtesy and consideration it is better not to try to start conversations. Furthermore, they can remember a sad moment through speaking. Lastly, the person who is facing intense grief changes his or her personality, is overwhelmed and he or she can react in a hostile and even physically violent manner. As such, it is often best to remain silent.

The explanation for remaining silent in ‘curing ceremonies’ is based on two perspectives. On one hand, silence is necessary in these cases because in Western Apache culture, the power used in these ceremonies can be potentially harmful, so it is better to leave the man or men in charge of the ceremony alone. On the other hand, when the medicine man starts the ritual, it transforms him so that he can better concentrate and obtain special mental powers. Thus, speaking to him or others associated with the ceremony is considered disrespectful and even dangerous.

After explaining all these situations and discussing when the Apache community uses silence, Basso argues “that keeping silent in Western Apache culture is associated with social situations in which participants perceive their relationship *vis-à-vis* one another to be ambiguous and/or unpredictable.” (Ibid, 161)

In this line, Basso examines three hypotheses through his study: (i) In Western Apache culture, silence remains associated with social situations in which the status of local participants is ambiguous; (ii) Under these conditions, fixed role expectations lose their



applicability and the illusion of predictability in social interaction is also lost; (iii) Remaining silent among the Western Apache is a response to uncertainty and unpredictability in social relationships.

As Basso argues, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions about the social meaning of silence for different indigenous cultures around the world. However, he does mention a study related to Navajo culture written by Priscilla Mowrer (Mowrer 1970), a Navajo indigenous woman who completed an investigation in a Navajo Reservation in east central Arizona.

She found similar explanations related to the use of silence for Navajos indigenous people. For example, it is common for young people of the opposite sex to remain silent in public, sometimes only holding their hands. This attitude demonstrates that they are interested one another. Additionally, people remain silent when their relatives return to the house after a long absence. When expressing anger, Navajos remain silent because they believe that they are not themselves. They also remain silent when someone dies and cry together in pairs.

With different manifestations of silence in Apache culture, analyzed by Basso, it is interesting to see how he focused his attention on the idea of silence as a manifestation of social relationships and as an instrument for transforming conflicts in cultural and social spheres. This idea is connected with the importance of collective knowledge recognized in the energetic approach. As Dietrich highlights: “the experience is passed on from generation to generation. [However] collective knowledge becomes ever greater, but not necessarily better” (Dietrich 2012, 63).

Following the idea of silence within indigenous communities, I found interesting examples related to the meaning of silence for Lakota indigenous people. The writer, sculptor, and educator Kent Nerburn, through his books, manages to show some of the mysticism and beliefs of the Lakota Indians on the different aspects of life and ways of expressing silence.



One of his most famous books is titled, “Neither Wolf Nor Dog. On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder”, in which he explains the meaning of silence for Native Americans. I found this very interesting for the purposes of my research. For instance, in one excerpt he talks about the concept of silence for the Native Americans, writing:

We Indians know about silence. We are not afraid of it. In fact, for us silence is more powerful than words. Our elders were trained in the ways of silence, and they handed over this knowledge to us. Observe, listen, and then act, they would tell us. That was the manner of living.

With you it is just the opposite. You learn by talking. You reward the children that talk the most at school. In your parties you all try to talk at the same time. In your work you are always having meetings in which everybody interrupts everybody and all talk five, ten or a hundred times. And you call that ‘solving a problem’. When you are in a room and there is silence, you get nervous. You must fill the space with sounds. So you talk compulsorily, even before you know what you are going to say. [...]

People should regard their words as seeds. They should sow them, and then allow them to grow in silence. Our elders taught us that the earth is always talking to us, but we should keep silence in order to hear her.

There are many voices besides ours. Many voices... (Nerburn 2002, 48)

The words expressed above have multiple connotations. On the one hand, they show how silence is a way to express knowledge and experience. They also show how silence is an expression of stillness and how nature speaks with silence, sending messages to human beings.

In addition to referring to the idea of silence, Nerburn also expresses his thoughts on the energetic comprehension about the universe and spirituality. In an interview, he stated:

The spiritual dimension of life pervades every moment and every action. [...] Spirituality appears in many colors. I respect any tradition where people are kind to each other, treat the elderly with honor and the children with reverence, and do not use their ideologies to quarrel with those of differing beliefs. I just find that at this point in my life, the Native traditions, with their belief in the power of nature and the value of silence, where each person must seek the Creator alone, nourish me more fully than other paths. (Grindon 2012)

Nerburn’s perspective of silence and spirituality and its connection to energetic approaches, particularly the idea of balance that I mentioned in the introduction of this section, appears to be a cornerstone for indigenous people. Balance between personal



relationships, nature and lifestyle has a strong impact on this generation and future generations, and silence is a perfect complement to reach this balance in life.

In addition to the authors above, I would also like to comment on the ideas presented by Gaspar Hernandez, a Spanish journalist who wrote a novel called '*El Silencio*'³⁶. Through this novel, he presents an interesting view of silence and its healing power. The book looks at the story of a woman who is diagnosed with cancer, and through silent meditation and visualizations, recovers her health. Hernandez makes different references to silence in his book, but I was particularly fascinated by his definition of silence:

*Me dio tanto por los silencios, tal y como lo entendía entonces, es decir, como ausencia de ruido – un nivel de silencio superficial, como lo entendería más adelante – [y entendí] que cada silencio era único, tenía su propia textura, estaba interrumpido por sonidos diferentes, sonidos mínimos como el del follaje, el aire fino, unos leves pasos o una voces a lo lejos [...]'*³⁷. (Hernandez 2009, 77)

He understands that every silence goes beyond the simple lack of sound and that each one is unique; each has a special characteristic, a brand, and the most important thing for me it is that each of these silences can be interpreted and interrupted in different ways.

He also writes about the meaning of meditation and the manifestations of our inner selves: "*Ahora sé que llama la atención consciente: escuchar con todos los sentidos, el diálogo interior silenciado, sin hacer asociaciones de ideas mientras el otro habla.*"³⁸ (Ibid, 32). With this idea, he describes silent meditation as an opportunity to recognize and listen to ourselves, even as an unconscious act: "*Yo, sin saberlo, durante los silencios, estaba meditando.*"³⁹ (Ibid, 79)

It is interesting to discover how this idea is connected with the vision of energetic peace, which states that part of the art of being human is also:

³⁶ 'The Silence' (Author's translation)

³⁷ He gave me so silences, as understood then, that is, as the absence of noise - a superficial level of silence, as I would understand later - [and I understand] that every silence was unique, had its own texture, was interrupted by different sounds, minimal sounds like foliage, thin air, some minor steps or voices in the distance [...]. (Author's translation)

³⁸ Now, I know that is called mindfulness: listen with all senses, the inner dialogue muted, without association of ideas while the other speaks.

³⁹ Me, without knowing, during silence I was meditating (Author's translation)



[T]he corresponding use of this sensorium, which wants to be learned and practiced. The method is mostly called meditation. Resonance always has to do with vibration. In the human being, with all her faculties, wants to bring herself into harmonious resonance with the macrocosm of the universe, to experience peace, then she has to mobilize all those aspects of herself that can resonate. (Dietrich 2012, 60)

In a related discussion about the relation to the manifestations of silence, Hernandez also talks about the healing power of silence: “[...] *durante los silencios experimenté un tipo de paz, de bienestar ingrávido, como nunca lo había sentido hasta entonces.*”⁴⁰ (Hernandez 2009, 76). The concept of peace, in this case, is something that every person feels inside herself/himself. Inner peace is a sensation that can only be described when it occurs. It is a personal feeling with distinct manifestations. As an example, he talks about the power of meditation inside the human mind:

*[...] la mente es como el mar, que cuando sopla el viento hay grandes olas que suben y bajan, pero cuando el viento se calma las olas decrecen y entonces la mente tienen la claridad del agua cuando no la agitas y se convierte en un espejo donde te puedes reflejar: Ahora hay muchos pensamientos en tu mente, pero si no les das importancia irán desapareciendo hasta que conseguirás una mente clara como un espejo que refleja lo que te rodea.*⁴¹ (Ibid, 85)

The idea of visualizations is complementary to meditation in the healing process; it means that while a person is meditating, he or she imagines scenes or colors that mean something positive. It helps to transform our own image and at the same time allows the brain to bring order to the body to be healthy, causing the flow of energy.

As a concept, the flow of energy is used to define a mental state that enables us to elevate our minds and through which we reach an authentic form of happiness. Discussing this idea, he quotes the doctor, writer and Hindu speaker, Deepak Chopra⁴², saying: “*Chopra decía algo así como que el silencio entre pensamientos es la vía de conexión con la energía*

⁴⁰ [...] during silences I felt a kind of peace, of being weightless, as I had never felt before. (Author's translation).

⁴¹ [...] Mind is like the sea when the wind blows there are large waves that rise and fall, but when the wind waves calms decrease and intone the mind have the clarity of the water when you shake and becomes a mirror where you can reflect: Now there are many thoughts in your mind, but if you do not give importance will disappear until you get a clear mind as a mirror reflecting what is around you. (Author's translation).

⁴² Deepak Chopra is also a writer who has written about spirituality in Hindu philosophy and the mind power in medical healing.



*del universo, la misma energía que hace mover los planetas y las estrellas.*⁴³ (Ibid, 88) In some way, meditation allows me to connect my mind with the whole universe, and silence is a medium to do that.

This particular approach from literature is the opportunity to connect the power of silence within the physical, spiritual and mental body. It also shows how this connection is useful to find harmony in my inner self and with my social environment. This harmony is especially relevant for understanding the role of silence in the energetic approach to peace; silence helps to reach harmony with the universe and the cosmic order and it is the language of nature that allows beings to synchronize with one another and with their environment.

The approach to energetic peace, through silence and different authors, helps me to understand how silence has many different interpretations. From my perspective, however, all of them bring us back to the idea of finding balance between one's inner and outer world. In connection to the energetic peace and the perspective of the different authors that I mention above, "[...] that peace begins in the self and that relations to fellow human beings, society, other creatures, nature, and the universe are the universe are shaped from there." (Dietrich 2012, 57).

Delving deeper into this perspective in order to think about the role of silence in conflict transformation, it is important to return to the Basso and Nerburn ideas, which are focused on the role of silence in a cultural dimension. Many of the practices of the Apaches and Lakota communities are oriented around a practice of silence for dealing with difficult situations. These include relationships with strangers, courting, anger or mourning. However, these practices also demonstrate how silence is indeed a language of nature and also a sample of the knowledge of the elderly.

⁴³ Chopra said something like the silence between thoughts is the way of connection with the energy of the universe, the same energy that moves the planets and stars. (Author's translation).



The ideas presented by Castaneda and Hernandez share the awareness of the personal dimension of conflict transformation. In this line, all of them mention the importance of understanding my inner self to build peace. They also remark that I have inside me all the tools and capacities to find inner peace. This is something that I need to work on, because to recognize that power is an individual task.

2.3 Silence from moral peaces: duality

Approaches to forms of moral peace stem from the idea of justice to find peace. Moral approaches derive their postulates from the religious concept of peace, which claims that there exists one God and supreme law or norm. In that sense, as Wolfgang Dietrich explains, “A moral image of peace is given whenever a norm that legitimizes itself through its sheer existence and social power also constitutes the ultimate explanation of this peace. In the widest sense, this occurs whenever peace is understood as a contract, as pax” (Dietrich 2012, 112).

In the frame of this contract, peace constantly shows a duality between right or wrong. Every action has to be classified as good or bad, and human beings have to follow this rule to reach peace and as a consequence, salvation. Dietrich writes that “The triumph of good over evil, true over false, God over Satan for this reason turns into a moral commandment of peace” (Dietrich 2012, 114).

Surrounding this continuous battle between God and Satan, the first reference to moral peace through silence is based on the ideas expressed by sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648-1695), a nun, poet and promoter of women’s rights in Mexico. Sor Juana, as a revelation against the strict ideas of the Catholic Church authorities in the seventeenth century in Mexico, decided to make vows of silence, becoming a cloistered nun.



Julie Bokser is a teacher at De Paul University and is specialized in feminist rhetoric⁴⁴ and the rhetoric of silence and listening. She writes that sor Juana Ines de la Cruz considered silence as “something to listen for and demanding that rhetors underscore their use of silence by “naming” it, sor Juana theorizes about silence as a persuasive entity.[...]” (Bokser 2006, 5). In line with this statement, the persuasive power of silence is a new element that appears in my analysis; this is a new perspective to understand the role of silence in the middle of a conflict transformation situation.

Additionally, again in the frame of moral approaches, it is interesting how sor Juana brings in a feminine perspective of silence. Bokser explains:

Operating from her position as a woman who has confronted others’ attempts to silence her, she takes a gendered approach to rhetorical theory, so that her contributions are important considerations in feminists’ recent efforts to regenerate rhetoric. Sor Juana’s rhetoric of silence calls attention to silence as meaningful and purposefully persuasive, especially for women and women’s communities (Bokser 2006, 6).

Besides poems and texts focused on women rights, sor Juana also dedicated her letters to the voices of indigenous and other Mexican ethnicities. The expression of female voices is an important issue for me, not only because of my personal story, but also because through the history of humanity the voices of women have been overshadowed. sor Juana employs silence as a powerful instrument to express her dissatisfaction with a situation of oppression and to vindicate the rights of women, despite following the traditions of the Catholic Church, to which she belonged.⁴⁵ Bokser states:

[Talking about her written] But if her exegesis is mild in tone, there is an intended ribbing in the way in which sor Juana refutes the Pauline tradition that taught girls and women that silence was fitting for them, and then endorses its use in new and subversive ways by sketching a positive rhetoric of silence that she, a woman, enacts. As others have noted, she refuses the “feminine’ convention of silence” even as she invokes it. (Bokser 2006, 6).

⁴⁴ Rhetoric means the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively.

⁴⁵ Sor Juana explains in *La respuesta* (her book) that she joined the convent because it was a way to avoid marriage and pursue salvation. (De la Cruz 1997 [1691], 51).



She takes a path to find silence through isolation within her religious community. In her view, this method is the best way to find concentration and focus on her concerns. Regarding this situation, Bokser notes:

Although she maintains significant interaction with the outside world, in many respects she is literally a “writer in a cell” (Brodkey, *Academic Writing* 56, quoted by (Bokser 2006, 14)). Unlike modern compositionists, she valorizes such isolation: “The noise of the community would interrupt the tranquil silence of my books” ((De la Cruz 1997 [1691], 51), quoted by (Bokser 2006, 14)).

Silence occupies a central place in the life of sor Juana. According to her poetry, silence is not only a mental state, it is also something that deserves to be heard:

Hear me with your eyes,
Now that the ears are so far,
And from my pen my laments
And injuries echo in your absence;
And now that my crude voice doesn't reach you,
Hear me silent, for I complain mutely. (OC 1.313 lines 7–12; translation, quoted by (Bokser 2006, 12)

With this poem she evokes other senses to feel silence, stating that silence must be heard because for her it is a way of protest - a silent protest. Silence entails something deeper than not pronouncing words, as she says: “[O]f those things that cannot be spoken, it must be said that they cannot be spoken, so that it may be known that silence is kept not for lack of things to say, but because the many things there are to say cannot be contained in mere words.” (Bokser 2006, 12)

The political struggle of sor Juana Ines de la Cruz with the Catholic Church took sor Juana to an ecclesiastical tribunal, two years before her death. She was accused of heresy and “what resulted was a public confession by sor Juana repenting her former sins, a renewal of her vows, and a profession of faith signed in blood. The title of this last item says it contains an abjuration of human letters, though the text itself does not mention this” (Paz 1988, 463) quoted by (Bokser 2006, 13).

For me, sor Juana's situation is a clear reflection of moral approaches, according to which the actions of the present time have an effect on the future. Of course, it is also a



reflection on the idea of salvation, showing that all our actions have consequences into posterior time. As Dietrich mentions, “the time of effect of moral peace is thus not the present, in which the norm is placed, but the future, as it is narrated into existence by those setting the norm. [Thus] the norm –setting declares peace to be the future salvations from those adversities and promises such a peace, if people follow its authority and its norms on this path.” (Dietrich 2012, 113).

The outcome of sor Juana’s fight was tragic, but it marked a historic milestone. Her legacy gave rise to the possibility to question the religious principles at that time and the role of women within the church, and even within society. Her silence was her refuge and counselor, as the author Cheryl Glenn mentions:

“[silence] is perhaps the most undervalued and under-understood traditionally feminine rhetorical site. Silence has long been an unexamined trope of oppression, with “speaking out” being the signal of liberation, especially given the Western tendency to valorize speech and language. But sometimes women choose the place of silence.” (Glenn 1997, 175-176) quoted by (Bokser 2006, 14).

In this case, silence becomes an instrument to break the gender and ethnic limits set up in a traditional society. From this perspective, I can also see how silence can become a way of communication, a medium to express disagreement about political and religious ideas. Sor Juana, with her poems, books, essays and written dialogues, looked for justice for herself, as a woman. She also looked to find justice for her community, because she wanted women to have the same rights and opportunities in education as men.

The idea of moral peace through silence, inspired by sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, was not the only one that I considered for my research. In recent years, some political manifestations have sought to assert their political rights using silence as their principal expression. Two of those manifestations are Women in Black, a feminine world web, and ‘*La Marcha del Silencio*⁴⁶ in Uruguay.

⁴⁶ The Silent March (Author’s translation)



Women in Black is a manifestation that captured my attention for different reasons. The first is that it is “a world-wide network⁴⁷ of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence” (Women in Black n.d.). It means that is not an organization, but a social movement around the world that wants to express its discontent about specific situations that occur in the frame of violent conflict.

The second reason has to do with way the women's movement is expressed publicly, mainly through vigils and wearing black:

Any group of women anywhere in the world at any time may organize a ‘Women in Black vigil’ against any manifestation of violence, militarism or war. Women in Black (WiB) actions are generally women only. Our actions often take the form of women wearing black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets. (Ibid)

In this case, silence is a symbol; it is a non-violent and non-aggressive form of action against any violent conflict. Wearing black is also a symbol because “in some cultures signifies mourning, and feminist actions dressed in black convert women’s traditional passive mourning for the dead in war into a powerful refusal of the logic of war.” (Ibid). Placards have slogans showing the principal reasons why the activists disagree with a particular violent situation.

As third reason, I highlight the feminist perspective that guides the group’s actions. It is interesting how the women express themselves in violent situations and how in response to that, it does not mean that men are not included in social claims. Instead, it means:

[...] women often inhabit different cultures from men, and are disproportionately involved in caring work. We know what justice and oppression mean, because we experience them as women. Most women have a different experience of war from that of most men. All women in war fear rape. Women are the majority of refugees. A feminist view sees masculine cultures as especially prone to violence, and so feminist women tend

⁴⁷ According to the movement it is impossible to know exactly how many Women in Black groups exist, how many women they include and how many actions have been held. (...) There are different countries reporting vigils included: Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Maldive Islands, Mexico, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA. The organizers estimate that altogether 10,000 women may have been involved. (Women in Black n.d.)



to have a particular perspective on security and something unique to say about war.
(Women in Black n.d.)

This group also emphasizes how to build a collective with a multiplicity of members around the world, including women of many ethnic and national backgrounds, all of them thinking and fighting for justice and peace for their territories in a pacific way. This is the fourth reason why I consider the analysis of Women in Black movement important for my thesis. This movement shows alternatives to transform the conflict and also how to build collective imaginaries despite differences, in this case, around concepts such as justice and peace.

Within the expression of this movement, different elements play a key role connected to silence, as images, alternative ways of communication, symbols and respect for difference. Following this path, it is interesting to discover how the sum of these aspects builds memories to protest and also “educate, inform and influence public opinion, and so try to make war an unthinkable option” (Women in Black n.d.). Paradoxically, here silence is the expression of many voices that want to be heard.

In parallel to Women in Black, the popular group denominated ‘*La Marcha del Silencio*’, celebrated in Uruguay every 20th of May (since 1996), looks for truth about disappeared people and justice for those responsible for acts of cruelty during the military dictatorship in Uruguay. I mentioned in the first chapter that one purpose of this perspective is to grasp how silence can contribute to connect the idea of justice and peace in my context, or in some cases how the idea of justice opposes the idea of silence in my culture.

The initiative of this massive walk was the public call for mothers and relatives of detained and disappeared Uruguayans and other organizations. The main idea behind this public act is:

Por verdad, memoria y nunca más marchamos en silencio el día 20 de mayo en homenaje a las víctimas de la dictadura militar y en repudio a las violaciones de los derechos humanos. [...] El homenaje a las víctimas no puede ser otro que el reconocimiento a través de la verdad de los hechos, la recuperación de la memoria y la exigencia de que



*en Uruguay nunca más exista la tortura, las ejecuciones y la desaparición forzada de personas*⁴⁸ ... (Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos n.d)

This case demonstrates the use of silence for a political claim. Here, justice and truth play a role to mobilize the population. Not only relatives of disappeared people during the military dictatorship in Uruguay (1973-1985) are involved in the march, but also Uruguayans who felt the consequences of the dictatorship. This includes those who suffered from political and media repression, outlawing of unions, persecution, imprisonment and the murder of opponents of the regime.

Every year *La Marcha del Silencio* has a distinct motto, but I found the following remarkable for the comprehension of the practice of the concepts of truth, justice and never again. They summon people mentioning the following idea: "For the past truth, in the present justice, forever memory and never again."⁴⁹ (Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos n.d)

These ideas do not only present the meaning of strong concepts around peace and conflict transformation, but also a complex understanding around time. For me, the March of Silence is an enormous opportunity to get it back and to recover the memories of people that disappeared in the middle of confusion and violence. It is a way to say 'I will never forget you' and also a way to change the future for next generations.

Within this context, the expression 'Nunca más' (never again) has a deep development for the social movement that inspired the March of Silence. It relates to the explicit rejection of the events that occurred during the military dictatorship and also is an invitation and compromise to practice the idea to solve the differences through pacific or alternative ways for solving conflicts:

Nunca más es la expresión del rechazo total e inequívoco al terrorismo de Estado; de la conciencia de la necesidad de construir realidades que prevengan su reiteración y del desafío de contribuir a hacerlo. Surge como clamor y compromiso. [...] Nunca Más implica hacer carne la cultura de resolver las diferencias, de atenerse al derecho con sus

⁴⁸ "In truth, memory and never again, we march in silent on 20 May in tribute to the victims of the military dictatorship and to protest violations of human rights. [...] The tribute to the victims cannot be other than the recognition through the truth of the facts, the recovery of memory and the requirement that in Uruguay there never torture, executions and forced disappearance of persons ..." (Author's translation).

⁴⁹ Para el pasado verdad, en el presente justicia, por siempre memoria y nunca más.



deberes y sus límites; significa la obra liberadora de desterrar la ignorancia y el menosprecio al semejante; significa desarrollar profundamente la democracia. Significa cultivar niveles superiores de calidad humana. [...] Este es nuestro compromiso con el Nunca Más, el fundamento de nuestra modesta contribución a la paz, nuestra forma de honrar la memoria de nuestros familiares y a la vida, que a pesar de todo, florece cada día.⁵⁰ (Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos 2010, 1-2)

With these examples I can see again the duality of moral concepts, where the idea of good or bad is always present. In this line, Dietrich comments on this situation, mentioning “Moral concepts of peace point from insecurity toward security, from injustice to justice, from error to truth – and on the basis of this fundamental assumption, the corresponding normative concepts are also congruent.” (Dietrich 2012, 114)

Women in Black and *La Marcha del Silencio*, working on conflict transformation with their actions, use these expressions to transform the individual, social, cultural and even structural level.

The movements are related because both develop their actions in order to change the way of communication for solving conflicts, the concept of power represented by the State or States on political or military levels. Both movements recognize interdependence and the importance of emotions in a context of conflict transformation and look to change the relationships between individuals with distinct points of view.

The two movements are cultural because they employ cultural resources, as symbols, wearing codes and placards with the aim to express their claims. From these experiences I perceive that they want to change, in the middle and long term, the cultural patterns and violent expressions in their societies. Two examples of this are the relationships between men

⁵⁰ Never again is the expression of total and unequivocal rejection of terrorism of State; awareness of the need to build realities that prevent their repetition and the challenge of contributing to. It emerges as clamor and commitment. [...] Never Again it involves to practice culture for resolving differences, to abide by the law with their duties and their limits; it means liberating work to banish ignorance and contempt to others; it means deeply develop democracy. It means cultivating higher levels of human quality. [...] This is our commitment to Never again, the foundation of our modest contribution to peace, our way of honoring the memory of our family and life, despite everything, blooms every day.



and women, as manifested by the Women in Black movement, and also the relationship between the population and State where distrust and fear are predominant in both cases.

These groups represent conflict transformation on a structural level because with their practices they evoke public participation. They want to transform the roots and causes of the conflict and to minimize future violent expressions and conflicts via nonviolent mechanisms as silence.

2.3 Silence through modern peace: machine and fear

Opening this section, it is important to recognize that concepts related to modern forms of peace seek to defend the assumption that human beings make decisions based on rationality, and according to this rationality the evidence given by science becomes a fundamental pillar. As expressed by Wolfgang Dietrich: “[I]f Christianity had separated humanity from heaven modernity separated it from nature and installed the conception of a world like mechanical clockwork.” (Dietrich 2012, 153).

Likewise, in the complexity of the modern world, rationality is a fundamental aspect of human beings because “rationality empowers the human being to see things from the perspective of other and to perceive the mutual enrichment that arises from all differences” (Dietrich 2012, 158).

Through the rational lens of modern peace, silence can be an object of study and science can help to understand the mystery behind silence. In line with this method, I consider relevant to mention the theory developed by Elisabeth Noëlle Neumann⁵¹, a political scientist from Germany. The concept is denominated “Spiral of Silence”, and this model is a multilayered study that seeks to measure the impact of silence in the process of communication and social behavior, principally applied to political tendencies. Neumann, “explains the growth and spread of public opinion, [and] the term spiral of silence refers to

⁵¹ She is also founder and director of the Public Opinion Research Center in Allensbach (the German counterpart of America's Gallup poll organization), and professor of communications research at the University of Mainz.



the increasing pressure people feel to conceal their views when they think they are in the minority.” (Noëlle Neumann 1995)

The Spiral of Silence focuses its analysis on the concept of public opinion. Public opinion, according to Neumann, is an opinion that can be expressed publicly without risk of social sanctions, but also as the dominant opinion. Therefore, to express divergent opinions that go against the majority in public can mean isolation; in consequence, public opinion imposes a posture and a submissive conduct (Noëlle Neumann 1995).

To develop its statements, the theory of Spiral of Silence based its analysis on a statistical model, demonstrating that science becomes an ally to probe the hypothesis. It does so in congruence with three premises:

1) people have a "quasi-statistical organ", a sixth-sense if you will, which allows them to know the prevailing public opinion, even without access to polls, 2) people have a fear of isolation and know what behaviors will increase their likelihood of being socially isolated, and 3) people are reticent to express their minority views, primarily out of fear of being isolated. (University of Twente 2010)

With these three premises as guide for her research, Neumann conducted surveys with different samples of citizens about controversial topics. She discovered a strong inclination of respondents to analyze the answers as a majority and to follow mass opinion; if they had opposing opinions to public views, they preferred to remain silent. I can clearly see elements from forms of modern peace in this research. Indeed, the modern approach, as I mentioned above, understands the world as a machine and “according to this view, everything that happens has a definite cause and effect. The future of any part of the universe could be predicted with absolute certainty, if its state at any given moment were known in all details.” (Heuser 2005, 39) quoted by Dietrich 2012, 136).

There are many ideas related to the Spiral of Silence, but I was particularly fascinated by the concept around the quasi-statistical organ:

Noelle-Neumann is constantly amazed at the human ability to discern the climate of public opinion. Science has fixed on five bodily receptors through which people sense their environment: eye (sight), ear (sound), tongue (taste), nose (smell), skin (touch).



Only half facetiously, the veteran pollster suggests that humans have a quasi-statistical organ—a sixth sense that tallies up information about what society in general is thinking and feeling. It's as if people come equipped with antennae that quiver to every shift in the social breeze. (Griffin 2008, 373)

The three premises as the quasi-statistical organ of the human body reflect how the rationality of human beings is a central aspect in the spiral of silence; here modernity finds its principal application, understanding the human body as a perfect machine capable of predicting and making decisions based on rationality.

Fear of isolation is related to the idea of security and insecurity; as the principal standard of modern peace, this fear explains the behavior of individuals in a collective, principally outlining their motivations for expressing their own positions in the face of a determined decision or situation. Expression is a key aspect in this theory; an individual may feel frightened to express his opinion in public and may fear being identified or isolated, which explains why silence becomes the best option in certain cases.

In this case, silence becomes a way to control public opinion; silence serves as a medium to avoid opposite voices in determined situations and also shows the dominant role of our surroundings, which we are continually looking at in order to define our position; in that sense, silence can be a synonymous to following orders and maintaining the status quo. As modern approaches assert “the process of selection under the pressure of the struggle for survival would be the driving force for species’ development from lower to higher beings”. (Dietrich 2012, 156).

Two key aspects from this modern view are clear with this explanation about silence. On one hand is the idea of the body as a perfect machine; on the other hand is the importance of fear as a motor to make decisions.

Now, thinking about the connotation of ‘modern silence’ as a way to follow the path of conflict transformation, I find a complex contradiction: if fear is the main explanation to remain silent, then it is difficult to think about conflict transformation from this perspective.



However, I can see fear as an emotion related to my personal sphere; in this line, fear can reach a deep connection with my emotional side and find a link with my spiritual, perceptual and cognitive aspects. Perhaps by looking for conflict transformation on a personal level, fear and silence can become an excuse to get into my most intimate personal corner and transform my deepest conflicts.

Furthermore, the personal sphere can impact my relational aspects, so it is interesting to understand, using my rationality, how aspects of my personal field can affect my relationships, triggering new conflicts and at the same time transforming them. Silence in communication, as Neumann shows with her research, has an effect on the conception of power and relationships, generating a continuous interdependence and serving as key aspects in conflict transformation.

2.4 Silence through postmodern perspective: Deconstruction and Plurality

According to Wolfgang Dietrich the term ‘postmodernity’ “is not a dismissal of modernity but its twisting, its radicalization in the form of a critical reworking”. (Dietrich 2012, 162). In this line:

The postmodern mentality accompanies modernity everywhere. Its classics have many aspects which crystallize in concepts like Enlightenment, reason, secularization, freedom, equality, justice, growth, free trade, tolerance, democracy, human rights, progress, technology, development, security, sustainability, pop culture and many more and in always new formations. Wherever they appear they also cause contradictions, discomfort, disagreement, frustration and protest or, in short: postmodern mentalities. (Ibid, 163)

For postmodern mentalities, from my perspective, silence is a curious object of study that allows the deconstruction of concepts and ideas around language. This process occurs because as human beings, we have an obsession to name everything: every action, every feeling and chaining all things; an idea always leads to another word. We can create a story with series of events. Examples of this approach are the notions presented by the philosophers



Jose Luis Ramírez, Michael Foucault and Vincent Martinez Guzman, who all show how silence can be understood from the perspective of language and communication.

Firstly, the Spanish philosopher José Luis Ramírez develops an essay based on the linguistic connotation of silence, seeking to decipher ‘the meaning of silence and the silence of the meaning’. For him, silence is an action; it is not a substance or a thing that an individual can collect or label. Following his ideas:

Preguntarse lo que significa el silencio en un caso determinado no equivale a preguntar qué significa una cosa determinada, sino qué significa el hecho de que alguien, en un momento determinado, no diga nada. Qué quiere decir el no decir nada en ese caso concreto. (Ramírez 1989, 5)⁵².

For Ramírez, the idea of saying nothing does not mean silence. Silence (with a capital letter) goes beyond. It is an act full of individual and social meaning. It is individual because silence derives from a personal decision and it links different senses such as hearing and sight. He writes: “*Si el silencio es primordialmente algo, es silencio auditivo, no visual*”⁵³ (Ramírez 1989, 5). It has a social meaning because it produces an effect over your surroundings and over other people. It is consistent with the following postmodern interpretation: “Every event in the world is influenced by the whole universe. [...] Nobody can speak about nature without at the same time speaking about her/himself.” (Dietrich 2012, 178 -179).

The line of postmodernity revolves around the search for one truth about the idea of plurality. In a postmodern scenario, the main concern is to understand the connections between distinct approaches to knowledge. In consequence, “postmodernity thus says goodbye to the notion of a conceptual truth.” (Ibid, 200)

Ramírez talks about different spheres where silence has become multiple interpretations. On a personal level, he mentions that all social relationships are determined

⁵² Ask to yourself what is the meaning of silence in a particular case is not equivalent to ask what a certain thing means, but what does the fact mean that someone, at a particular time, say nothing. Do you mean to say nothing in that particular case. (Author’s translation)

⁵³ If silence is primarily something, silence is auditory not visual. (Author’s translation)



by basic rules and silence laws. This is because if everyone speaks outloud everything that he or she thinks about someone else, coexistence would be impossible. Furthermore, referring to silence in a political order, he takes up the concept of silence from a modern perspective in which fear is a principal motivation:

Todo régimen social, sea descaradamente despótico u oficialmente democrático, desarrolla sus propias técnicas para administrar la palabra, para imponer el silencio. [...]El silencio utilizado como instrumento de poder es el significativo del miedo, de la inseguridad y de la desconfianza, el signo de lo imprevisible y difícil de interpretar⁵⁴. (Ramírez 1989, 13)

Likewise, he explains a constructive image of silence into the social sphere as synonymous with quietness, stillness, harmony and tranquility. He calls to attention the importance of spaces dedicated to silence in the past, such as libraries or churches. In contrast to this view, he uses as a reference point the contradiction of the current society, where technology is a constant of relationships and where noise is gaining ground.

Pero el silencio, digo, no significa siempre amenaza, sino también tranquilidad, reflexión, armonía. La meditación, la contemplación mística y la vida monástica siempre se consideraron como formas edificantes de silencio. Junto a los espacios del ruido, la biblioteca y la iglesia eran los espacios del buen silencio. Algo hay, sin embargo, de patológico en la actitud de la sociedad moderna frente al silencio. Parece como si la sociedad tecnológica hubiera hecho de él el enemigo que hay que confinar y suprimir. Nuestros espacios público y privado se ven invadidos totalmente por el ruido, el sonido y la palabra. Desde las calles y los medios de transporte hasta la intimidad de la vivienda. El silencio no es una cualidad que los urbanistas y planificadores tengan en cuenta; al contrario, parece como si hubiera una política de colonización del espacio de silencio por el ruido, una conspiración de ruido⁵⁵. (Ibid, 18)

Once again, Ramírez reflects a postmodern perspective with this explanation about the importance of silence and what he names ‘a conspiracy of noise’ in the current society where

⁵⁴ Every social regime is brazenly despotic or officially democratic, developed their own techniques for managing the word, to impose silence. [...] Silence used as an instrument of power is the meaning of fear, insecurity and distrust, the sign of the unpredictable and difficult to interpret (Author’s translation).

⁵⁵ But silence, say, does not always mean threat, but also tranquility, reflection, harmony. Meditation, mystical contemplation and monastic life were always considered edifying forms of silence. Along with the noise spaces, the library and the church were great silent spaces. There is something, however, pathological in the attitude of modern society against silence. It seems as if the technological society would have made him the enemy to be confined and suppressed. Our public and private spaces are completely invaded by noise, sound and speech. From the streets and conveyance to the privacy of the home. Silence is not a quality that urbanists and planners take into account; on the contrary, it seems as if there is a space colonization policy of silence by noise, noise conspiracy (Author’s translation).



plurality and contradictions present a wide range of possibilities. As Dietrich mentions about the importance of dispute, referring to the ideas by the postmodern French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who said: “Consensus is a horizon”, he said, “that is never reached” (Lyotard 1984, 61) quoted by Dietrich, 2012, 201).

Following Ramirez, Dietrich discusses that understanding silence from postmodern perspectives implies applying one of the main principles. He states that “language and its rule are recognized as instruments of power, investigated, and treated accordingly” (Dietrich 2012, 198). Following this principle, I want to discuss some ideas on silence put forward by the philosophers Michael Foucault and Vincent Martínez Guzmán.

Michael Foucault, French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, philologist, literary critic and one of the most prominent postmodern authors speaks about silence. Like Ramirez, Foucault spoke of the polysemy of silence and referred to the importance of recognizing several silences and things that may or may not be articulated in speeches. This relates to Wolfgang Dietrich’s claim that “multiplicity has to remain the central element of postmodern thinking on peace” (Dietrich 2012, 207). Thus, besides the multiplicity of silence, Foucault shows how silence is a deliberate and conscious decision:

Silence itself—the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault 1978, 27)

Like Foucault, the Spanish philosopher Vincent Martínez Guzmán approaches silence as a way of expression and communication in the line of conflict transformation. Martínez Guzmán understands silence as a human action that we are responsible for as agents of our actions, spoken and silent. He argues that we are the cause of our acts of speech and our



silence. These words do not mean that they are arbitrary and that everyone can do what he or she wants with his/her words and silences. It means that what I do, what I say and what I decide not to say connects me with others and also implies responsibility. (Martinez Guzman 1999, 111-112)

Martinez also speaks about the multiplicity of silence. In his analysis of silence as way of communication, Martinez points out that: “*Cada sociedad practica una selección diferente en la masa enorme de lo que habría que decir para lograr decir algunas cosas, y esta selección crea el organismo que es el lenguaje, [...] Cada pueblo calla unas cosas para poder decir otras.*” (Martinez Guzman 1999, 116) Thus each society decides the use of words and silence in its internal codes.

In addition to this kind of silence, there is another silence that Martinez identifies as a silence derived from the knowledge of the other: “*A nadie se le ocurre decir lo que presume que ya sabe el otro*” (Ibid, 116). Finally, he identifies a gestural silence, or the quiet gestures that accompany language or speak for themselves.

In addition to acknowledging the plurality of silence, Martinez is interested in showing how silence can be a lens for conflict transformation. To emphasize his point, Martinez Guzman analyzed the use of silence in a discursive way, focusing on a speech by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico in 1998 (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional –EZLN*)⁵⁶. With its speech, the EZLN proposed a relationship between resistance and silence in their fight for recognition of indigenous rights:

*[...] Descubrimos en la palabra un arma, ahora lo hicimos con el silencio. Mientras el gobierno ofreció a todos la amenaza, la muerte, la destrucción, nosotros pudimos aprendernos y enseñarnos y enseñar otra forma de lucha y que con la razón la verdad y la historia se puede pelear, ganar... callando.
[...] Silencio, dignidad y resistencia fueron nuestras mejores armas.*

⁵⁶ The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), often referred to as the Zapatistas, is a revolutionary leftist political and militant group based in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico. Since 1994, the group has been in a declared war "against the Mexican state", and against military, paramilitary and corporate incursions into Chiapas. In recent years, it has focused on a strategy of civil resistance. The Zapatistas' main body is made up of mostly rural indigenous people, but includes some supporters in urban areas and internationally. (Levi 2004)



[...] Vimos que callando mejor podíamos escuchar voces y vientos de abajo y no sólo la ruda voz de la guerra arriba. Vimos que en silencio también nos hablamos como lo que realmente somos no como el que trae la guerra sino como el que busca la paz, no como el que su voluntad impone, sino como el que un lugar donde quepan todos anhela. [...] Vimos que nuestro silencio fue escudo y espada que hirió y desgastó al que la guerra quiere y la guerra impone. [...] Vimos que no peleando peleábamos. Y vimos que la voluntad de paz también callando se afirma, se muestra y convence. (EZLN 1998)

According to Martínez Guzmán, to analyze this speech is not about ending a romantic vindication of silence as a revolutionary weapon. It is rather to combine the analysis of what we do, what we say and what we keep silent about other human beings, committed to a search for alternative struggles to cope with human conflict. Speech and silence as acts of communication and interpellations, mutually, according to the ideas of Martínez Guzmán, may show a conception of human beings in which we can reconstruct how we comprehend things and how we might present them. In other words, we can use the weapons of the word and silence to vindicate our struggles. (Martínez Guzmán 1999, 118)

With the ideas of three authors and in line with the postmodern perspective and the explanation of silence from this approach, we can see that conflict transformation can work on personal, relational and cultural levels. The personal and relational levels are reflected within this approach, talking about plurality and mutual understanding. To reach appreciation of the multiplicity of ideas within me and with other people is a cornerstone of conflict transformation. Now, as Martínez Guzmán shows with the EZLN discourse, silence is evidently relational. It can determine a hostile or peaceful relationship with others and also can become an extraordinary way to show disagreement or support for the ideas and attitudes of others.

In addition to the personal and relational spheres mentioned before, I find it interesting to highlight cultural aspects of conflict transformation seen through a postmodern lens and linked with the idea of truth, which states that everything depends on taking into account the idea of plurality and different perspectives. For Ramírez, the notion of silence is deeply linked to culture: *“La mentalidad hispana es más discursiva, haciendo uso de la palabra a menos*



*que haya motivos para callar. La mentalidad sueca es más pragmática: allí se calla si no hay motivo para hablar*⁵⁷” (Ramírez 1989, 12).

Finally, according to Ramírez, the idea of silence takes a different shape and interpretation in each culture, which is supported by the following postmodern idea of Dietrich: “Reexaminations and agreements always take place within respective ruling horizon, which circumscribes interpersonal relations just as much as relations between cultures and generations. Truths are constituted within this horizon. [...] Truth is thus the fruit of interpretation.” (Dietrich 2012, 202)

From a postmodern perspective where silence has multiple interpretations within language and communication, postmodern silence shows how this act of quietness has consequences on the whole world and how the system around this silence requires continuous adaptations and changes to understand its real meaning. From this postmodern plurality, the next section is dedicated to show how silence has a multiplicity of interpretations and how all are valid and useful.

2.5 Transrational silences: a myriad of concepts

The transrational perspective implies taking into consideration different views. Therefore, following this line, a transrational concept of peace contemplates plural understanding of peace, and in this case, of silence. Likewise, this approach enables us to see and to analyze different forms of peace in their contextualized surroundings, understanding the context and conditions with an open perspective and accepting that one’s own perspective is just one among many distinct possibilities to interpret peace.

Different interpretations of peace imply different interpretations of silence. Therefore, in the next paragraphs I focus my attention on how silence can be understood from multiple

⁵⁷ The Hispanic mentality is more discursive, using the word unless there is reason to keep quiet. The Swedish mentality is more pragmatic: there is silent if there is no reason to talk. (Author’s translation)



disciplines and practices. With this aim, I present approaches to silence from psychology. I look at the perspectives of Gregory Batenson, Fritz Perls and Claudio Naranjo. I also analyze silence from the spiritual beliefs of the monk Thich Nhat Hanh and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Finally, I look at it from an anthropological perspective through the work of Andres Cancimance and literature by Cheryl Gleen. All of these scholars contribute to the conceptualization of transrational silences that seek to understand silence in the context of conflict transformation.

First of all, I want to take a closer look at the transrational approach because I consider that is important to understand its origins. In this line, according to the literature, one of the starting points of transrational ideas is the humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology “seeks to make human beings aware of the possibility of perceiving themselves and their personal authenticity as accurately as possible.” (Dietrich 2013, 27) Following this excerpt, different authors have developed analyses and theories around personal authenticity; one such author is the English and North American zoologist and biologist, Gregory Bateson.

On his path to discover the idea of personal authenticity, Bateson developed one of his research projects around communication. For him, communication is a fundamental function of human beings. It occurs through different expressions as photographs, images, and speeches, among others. I found his ideas relevant because I see silence as another way of communication, and as an alternative manner of communication with myself and even with others, particularly in moments when words do not suffice. For Bateson, a person’s communication expresses his or her way of thinking and feeling (Dietrich 2013, 28).

Considering silence as an alternative way of communication and following the precepts of human psychology leads us Gestalt therapy, which “differs from standard psychoanalysis by entering the field of nonverbal experience. This therapy rejects the privileged status of the mind and provides a method that places the body and its movements and sensations on the



same level as the mind, with its abstract and verbal symbols” (Dietrich 2013, 32). According to Dietrich, Gestalt therapy has provided vital tools for peace work, allowing for the innovation of elicitive conflict transformation.

One of the founders of Gestalt therapy is the German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Fritz Perls. Perls developed his theories influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, using such perspectives to find balance and peace. Again, alternative communication appears as a key aspect in this kind of therapy. Perls developed multiple investigations about the expressions of the human body, including breath, voice, movement, posture and facial gestures. He also highlighted the importance of understanding the power of here and now.

Now, having understood the origins of the transrational approach and its contributions to conflict transformation, I will discuss authors that allow us to build a concept of silence from transrationality. First, I will look at Carl Rogers and Richard E. Farson, who, in harmony with the principles of humanistic psychology and Gestalt therapy, developed the method of Active Listening as a method to practice silence in a conscious way. In the frame of psychology, they discovered the importance of nonverbal communication. This method is part of research on human behavior and training in specific professional areas. It uses the person centered approach from humanistic psychology.

Nonverbal communication became the object of different analyses by Rogers. First, he demonstrated that a person can speak out about his/her concerns, clarifying his/her mind without the intervention of a counselor. On the other hand, he researched the impact of conversation on a group: “he developed a democratic method: an interpersonal encounter characterized by emotional and nonverbal expressions and a certain measure of good faith. Furthermore, empathy played a crucial role –the attitude of direct, active and understanding listening.” (Dietrich 2013, 41).



Rogers also explains how this listening exercise requires attention, concentration and avoiding the necessity to answer and judge continuously the words of another individual. In other words, it is a continuous experience of giving and receiving. All of these features mentioned summed the importance of nonverbal expressions, gestures, body posture and breathing intervals. In my view, all are different expressions of silence, which become an alternative way of communication.

In consequence, according to Rogers, listening leads to changes in people's attitudes toward themselves and others, sometimes modifying their values and personal philosophies. The practice of active listening brings personal openness, emotional maturity, less defensive attitudes, and greater willingness to understand different viewpoints, effectively leading to a change in personality. Roger's thinking is expressed accurately with the next description about the importance of nonverbal communication in the exercise of active listening:

Note All Cues. Not all communication is verbal. The speaker's words alone don't tell us everything he is communicating. And hence, truly sensitive listening requires that we become aware of several kinds of communication besides verbal. The way in which a speaker hesitates in his speech can tell us much about his feelings. [...] We should also note such things as the person's facial expressions, body posture, hand movements, eye movements, and breathing. All of these help to convey his total message. (Rogers and Farson 1987, 3-4)

This approach to the idea of listening with total meaning demonstrates the importance of silence in the process of communication. It allowed me to understand that the context and way of transmitting the message are equally important as the message actually transmitted.

Now, looking more in depth at the contribution of active listening to conflict transformation, Rogers used psychoanalysis to demonstrate the inner potential of human beings for understanding themselves and to modify their behavior in search of self-realization, a basic requisite for conflict transformation. According to Dietrich:

Rogers's significance with respect to elicitive conflict transformation lies in the development of the non-directive principle of conversation. Non-directivity does not aim to resolve conflicts; it seeks to support people in the personal growth. It underlines the importance of feelings and emotions in the counseling situation, with emphasis placed



upon the personal relationship between counselor and client. The focus is on the present, rather than the diagnosis of conflict causes. (Dietrich 2013, 40)

After describing the scope of active listening, I met Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, master of a mindfulness meditation method that focuses on silence as a basic element of its practice.

Like Fritz Perls, one of the fathers of Gestalt therapy, Thich Nhat Hanh spreads the power of the here and now. Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth for Social Service in South Vietnam in 1960. In this school, the lessons imparted by Nhat Hanh focus on engaging the students with the idea of compassion and making them more aware of the importance of living in the present (here and now). The most interesting element, however, is that once the students finished their studies, they helped the community with its necessities, such as rebuilding villages, teaching children, organizing cooperatives and helping medical centers in the middle of the Vietnam War. (Nhat Hanh 1975, 8)

In spite of many voices against the practices of Thich Nhat Hanh, his students had courage and faith in their actions, showing that is possible to change minds in the middle of conflict. This lesson of pacific resistance shows me, as a practical example, how silence and meditation can change people and even the world.

When introducing the importance of meditation and its effects, Naht Hanh uses examples of daily life in which concentration and attention are important. He mentions basic things such as washing dishes, eating fruits or more complex situations such as managing time or supporting a family. For him, all of these situations are perfect opportunities to meditate.

Thich Nhat Hanh practices a kind of meditation recognized as mindfulness meditation. This practice is used in our daily life and he defines it as follows:

When walking, the practitioner must be conscious that he is walking when sitting, the practitioner must be conscious that he is sitting, when lying down, the practitioner must be conscious that he is lying down... No matter what position one's body is in, the practitioner lives in direct and constant mindfulness of the body... The mindfulness of the



positions of one's body is not enough, however we must be conscious of each breath, each movement, every thought and feeling, everything which has any relation to ourselves (Nhat Hanh 1975, 7).

The primary invitation of the mindfulness practice is to be conscious about ourselves and our present setting. The transrational approach to peace suggests "the human observer is always a part of the system world. This is why it is impossible for her/him to see the whole system. The observation determines what is seen." (Dietrich 2012, 268). For me, the practice of mindfulness implies focus on my mind and my breath. In a discussion about breathing,

Thich Nhat Hanh mentions:

You should know how to breathe to maintain mindfulness, as breathing is a natural and extremely effective tool which can prevent dispersion. Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again. (Nhat Hanh 1975, 15)

It is interesting to discover, how our body and our essential functions can be tools to find peace, and, in this case, to stop mental dispersion and to build up concentration power. However, focus on our minds and our breath is does not always an easy task; sometimes is difficult, requiring an additional ingredient: silence. As Thich Nhat Hanh remarks:

Of course, walking alone on a country path, it is easier to maintain mindfulness. If there's a friend by your side, not talking but also watching his breath, then you can continue to maintain mindfulness without difficulty. But if the friend at your side begins to talk, it becomes a little more difficult. [...]Your breath should be very quiet, so quiet that a person sitting next to you cannot hear it. [...] From the moment you sit down to the moment your breathing has become deep and silent, be conscious of everything that is happening in yourself. (Nhat Hanh 1975, 16)

Following this line, Thich Nhat Hanh, introduces some keys for practicing mindfulness, mentioning the 'spirit of silence'. This spirit allows us to reach a better comprehension of our setting and understand every action. As he states:

For those who are just beginning to practice, it is best to maintain a spirit of silence throughout the day. That doesn't mean that on the day of mindfulness, you shouldn't speak at all. You can talk, you can even go ahead and sing, but if you talk or sing, do it in complete mindfulness of what you are saying or singing, and keep talking and singing to a minimum. (Nhat Hanh 1975, 31)



Nhat Hanh goes further with his teachings about the practice of meditation and its benefits for every person. He looks at transforming this practice into a method for healing people, communities and the Earth. The Dalai Lama affirms:

He begins by teaching mindfulness of breathing and awareness of the small acts of our daily lives, then he shows us how to use the benefits of mindfulness and concentration to transform and heal difficult psychological states. Finally he shows us the connection between personal, inner peace and peace on Earth. (Nhat Hanh 1991, xi)

The process of healing has different levels for Thich Nhat Hanh, but always comes together in our own being. Healing implies transforming ourselves in order to spread this transformation to others. With this process mentioned by Nhat Hahn, I can understand the power of meditation and its effects in myself. The ideas exposed by Naht Hahn are directed to reach a true change and the transformation of conflicts. They teach me more about the art of transformation, and these authors show me that we have the tools of transformation in our hands.

As Nhat Hanh highlights, mindfulness is at the same time a means for change and an end of this change. It is both the ‘seed and the fruit’. This idea coincides with the notions expressed by Bateson, particularly that “the mind is an ecological system and that introduced ideas, like introduced seeds, can only take root and flourish according to the nature of the system receiving them” (The Institute for Intercultural Studies 2009). Both Thich Naht Hanh and Bateson found that mind is full of power and is capable of generating deep changes in each person and his/her community. In this frame, silence is a tool for self-healing and to find inner peace. It is a conscious silence that is able to transform your inner self and your surroundings, playing an active role in this transformation.

To complement this holistic view of silence, I also want to introduce the ideas of the Indian philosopher and writer Jiddu Krishnamurti. This author, through his books and public speeches, shows the importance of meditation and the quest for a silent mind as a way to find



inner peace. This approach reflects how transrational forms of peace “integrate the moment of transpersonality and spirituality, of intentionality as well as the connectedness between all things and thus the moment of peace out of harmony.” (Dietrich 2012, 266)

There are multiple publications and conferences in which Krishnamurti expresses that the path for transformation of his individual needs towards recognition of himself. He focuses on this process and its potential benefits for the world. I mention some of these public conversations with the aim to illustrate how the practice of silent meditation can transform me and help me to transform my personal conflicts.

I experienced a transformative moment when I read a speech by Krishnamurti about silence, titled “The quite of the self-forgotten” (Krishnamurti 1985). He talked about the importance of self-knowledge through silence and meditation. For him, the practice of meditation allows us to be aware of our personal interests and also to recognize how to act in different situations, particularly when facing pressure or confusion.

This lesson served as an invitation to understand myself. One way to reach that understanding is through silent meditation, when I can sit down in front of myself and my thoughts, my own struggles and challenges, and propose alternatives and ideas in order to find myself without fear. In words of Krishnamurti:

The more one struggles against a habit, however deep its roots, the more force one gives to it. To be aware of one habit without choosing and cultivating another, is the ending of habit. Then I must remain silently with what is, neither accepting nor rejecting it. This is an enormous task, but I see that it is the only way if there is to be freedom. (Krishnamurti 1958)

It is interesting to look more closely at this approach, because through his speeches, Krishnamurti insists on pointing out that meditation and personal seeking is an individual process, and that meditation is a completely personal experience during which silence is a mediator. On a particular occasion, he states that talking about meditation and the importance of silence is a completely personal process:



[...] Now: such a mind is quiet. And you need to have a mind that is absolutely silent, absolutely, not relatively - there is the silence when you go of an evening in the woods, there is great silence, all the birds have gone to bed, the wind, the whisper of the leaves has ended, there is great stillness, there is the outward stillness. And people observe that stillness and say, 'I must have that stillness', and therefore depend on the stillness of being alone - you understand? - being in solitude. That is not stillness. And there is the stillness created by thought. Which is, thought says, 'I must be still, I must be quiet, I mustn't chatter,' and gradually it produces a stillness. But that is not it, because it is the result of thought operating on noise. Right? So we are talking of a stillness which is not dependent on anything. And it is only that quality of stillness, that absolute silence of the mind that can see that which is eternal, timeless, nameless. This is meditation. Right? Right sirs. (Krishnamurti 1958)

According to the above, we see that achieving absolute silence is a challenge for Krishnamurti. From my personal experiences, I can verify that this is true. It has been a slow process for me to learn how to mediate, during which my thoughts and fears are my principal enemies, constantly trying to prevent me from reaching a silent mind. At the same time, as Krishnamurti mentions, what does it actually mean to meditate?

[...] Have any of you done meditation? Probably not, or probably have - transcendental meditation, Tibetan meditation, the Hindu meditation, the Buddhist meditation, the Zen meditation. Probably you have played with all those - seriously or flippantly. All those, as far as one can understand, and the speaker has discussed this question with all the scholars of all the various circuses, and their whole concept is, that thought must be controlled, that one must have discipline, one must subjugate one's own feeling to something other than 'what is', through awareness, through control, through constant alertness - you know all this, don't you? And repeat certain mantras, slogans: you can repeat 'amen' or 'Coca-Cola' or what you like (laughter) - no, don't laugh, they are all similar. So what we are saying is: meditation has been accepted to be all this. Now if you want to find out what is meditation, not just accept what somebody says, if you want to find out, certain obvious things are necessary. There must be no authority, because then you depend on that. [...] Because it is your life, not my life. This is your everyday life we are talking about... (Krishnamurti 1979) (Highlight out of the original text)

This passage discusses meditation as personal choice, meaning that only I can find the true aim of meditation and the sense of this practice. For me, meditation is a challenging process with multiple obstacles because my mind is always playing with memories, thoughts and distractions. However, it is also interesting how in a moment my mind flies far away and it finds, at least fleeting periods of time, inner peace.

Following Krishnamurti, the silent path of meditation is something that I have to build on my own. I must do so without high expectations, only with my own tools and preferably



without being influenced by someone else. For that reason, silence is the best means to prepare myself. However, it is interesting that this author explains that silence is an end in itself. He responded in this way when he answered the question of whether or not one should seek silence:

There can be no silence as long as there is a seeker. There is the silence of a still mind only when there is no seeker, when there is no desire. Without replying, put this question to yourself: Can the whole of your being be silent? Can the totality of the mind, the conscious as well as the unconscious, be still? (Krishnamurti 1958)

Such questions have multiple answers and approaches, particularly when addressed from different perspectives of peace. It is interesting how these ideas can come together, responding to the question of how to find inner peace and finally how silence can help to accomplish this goal. Finally, I want to quote a key idea, expressed by Krishnamurti, when he talked about silence and its meaning in our lives. He writes:

[...] Is silence to be cultivated, carefully nurtured and strengthened? And who is the cultivator? Is he different from the totality of your being? Is there silence, a still mind, when one desire dominates all others, or when it sets up resistance against them? Is there silence when the mind is disciplined, shaped, controlled? Does not all this imply a censor, a so-called higher self who controls judges, chooses? And is there such an entity? If there is, is he not the product of thought? Thought dividing itself as the high and the low, the permanent and the impermanent, is still the outcome of the past, of tradition, of time. In this division lies its own security. Thought or desire now seeks safety in silence, and so it asks for a method or a system which offers what it wants. In place of worldly things it now craves the pleasure of silence, so it breeds conflict between what is and what should be. There is no silence where there is conflict, repression, resistance (Krishnamurti 1958).

From my knowledge of the power of silence and also the power of the mind, I have found that both are necessary to transform the conflicts inside and around us. The idea of conflict, for Krishnamurti, does not mean that there is a problem. Instead, it means that there is a struggle between opposites as ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Such conflicts occur within us, and only we ourselves have the capacity to transform them.

Completing the visions of Naht Hanh and Krishnamurti about silence and peace, I want to introduce the ideas of Claudio Naranjo, Chilean psychiatrist, anthropologist and psychologist. Naranjo uses methods from psychiatry and humanistic psychology to understand the behavior of human beings.



Naranjo wrote the book “The Way of Silence and the Talking Cure on Meditation and Psychotherapy”, an approach to meditation from a theoretical and inter-disciplinary perspective. In this book, he discusses meditation as a healing process. Accordingly, to understand meditation, Naranjo implies the importance of building a holistic concept with different dimensions and from different perspectives. He states: “I propose an understanding of meditation as a multifaceted mental phenomenon involving a suspension of the ego or an understanding of its illusionary nature.” (Naranjo 2006, 6)

In this line, Naranjo’s approach to meditation begins with the idea of recognizing the heritage of Eastern spiritual traditions. He also emphasizes the need to show the benefits of meditation and its links with relaxation, stability, improved concentration and therefore the possibility of developing capacities for joy and appreciation. Beginning with this idea, I want to highlight some elements that Naranjo presents and how they can contribute to my analysis, particularly considering silence as the core of the practice of meditation.

For understanding the process of meditation, Naranjo establishes relations between meditation and virtue. Referring to this relationship, Naranjo states that virtue is usually a prior step to meditation, and that for beginning the practice we need to put emphasis on virtue and honing our attention capacities. He highlights the importance of ridding ourselves of our passions and prejudices in order to begin meditation. As a consequence, both virtue and meditation involve renunciation and detachment from our egotistical motivations;

All spiritual traditions have recognized that life is influenced by meditation and mystical experiences in the direction of virtue. [...] Implicit in the practice of virtue are qualities such as loving, kindness, compassion, friendliness and contentedness, without which “right action” would only be rule-bound behavior and fall short of true virtue. (Naranjo 2006, 27).

From these discussions, I can extrapolate that meditation, in addition to helping us become more aware and focused on the present, enables us to also expand love, compassion and satisfaction. In fact, as Naranjo mentions, the basic components of meditation are



detachment, the evocation of sacredness, surrender, love, attention and not doing (the process of stopping the mind). He concludes that all of them are equally important.

In order to understand the essence of meditation, Naranjo presents some basic differences between distinct forms of meditation. I find them relevant for my research. In this line, Naranjo mentions that in the Buddhist tradition,⁵⁸ there exist two main kinds of practices: *shamatha*, which consists of the calming of the mind; and *vipassana*, which consists of looking keenly at the state and content of the mind, moment after moment.

In other traditions, there are practices, such as shamanic trance or kundalini yoga,⁵⁹ during which the practitioner searches to surrender control. In the Zen tradition,⁶⁰ spontaneity and expression are the keys to meditation through art and life. This is also true for Zazen⁶¹, one of the forms of meditation derived from Zen practice, which invites us to cultivate the mind and also to reach a non-obstructed state of mind. In parallel, meditation inside the Taoist tradition⁶² evokes the practice of doing nothing in order to let go of stress and worries. In

⁵⁸ The word Buddha means “the awaked one”. The Buddha taught that the unenlightened human being lives in a state that may be compared to sleep or to dream. Through the clear light of wisdom, and completely unaided, the Buddha is the one who was awakened from that dream to the true nature of existence. [In that sense] Buddhism certainly does not fit into template for religion created in the Western world. Whether that signifies that Buddhism is not a religion at all, or that it is simply a different kind of religion, is a moot point. To put the argument for the second possibility, it might be said that whereas the religions that grew up in the Middle East are essentially belief systems, Buddhism is a system of education (Jayasaro 2013, 22,67).

⁵⁹ Kundalini Yoga has its roots in the Tantric Yoga tradition, which dates back to the eighth century. In 1969, Sikh leader Yogi Bhajan (born in 1929) brought the practice to North America Kundalini Yoga incorporates movement, dynamic breathing techniques, meditation, and the chanting of mantras, such as *Sat Nam* (“I am truth”). The goal is to build physical vitality and increase consciousness. Using sound, breath, and posture, Kundalini Yoga aims to develop spiritual awareness by freeing the serpent power (kundalini) that is coiled in the base of the spine and drawing it upward through the seven chakras (Hancock 2014)

⁶⁰ Traditionally Zen is a form of Buddhism that strictly emphasizes 'sitting meditation' for the realization of Buddhist truths, particularly for realizing the truth of no-self, emptiness, and the uncreated Mind. Zen is also a form of Buddhism that emphasizes the originally pure nature of the mind, much as other Mahayana schools of Buddhism. (Jayasaro 2013, 242)

⁶¹ Zazen is the form of meditation at the very heart of Zen practice. In fact, Zen is known as the “meditation school” of Buddhism. Basically, zazen is the study of the self (The Mountains and Rivers Order 2012).

⁶² Accordingly Naranjo, Taoism is the outcome of the Hindu civilization, although has many spiritual influences. Taoist meditation is focused on flow of energy and light, it has a direct impact on health as expression of serenity and equanimity. In this kind of meditation, the practitioner has a guide, meditation is a process where meditator walk by different mental states. (Naranjo 2006, 338-341)



sum, it means to stop external and internal movement. Finally, in Buddhist tantric traditions,⁶³ meditation is focused on wisdom and change in the physical body. In brief, these are some of ways to meditate that Naranjo found relevant to analyze the mental effects of meditation.

The descriptions of different kinds of meditation allow Naranjo to conclude that meditation seeks to control the mind (active). In cases when meditation tries to make the mind surrender continuous activity (passive), meditation reaches the dimension stop/go or stillness/surrender. This characteristic reminds us that meditation is peace as a continuous back and forward spiral.

Therefore, meditation does not only allow for an understanding of peace - it also has healing power, as Thich Nhat Hanh mentioned. As Naranjo notes, to stop our thoughts in a moment of mental agitation or to surrender in a moment of confusion or anguish are natural remedies for the soul and even for the body. Such situations can lead to self-realization. The connection that leads to a mind and body connection during meditation activates centers of energy, liberating the mind and allowing for the flow energy.

Regarding the link between meditation and psychotherapy, Naranjo explains that both spiritual beliefs and psychotherapy look to achieve the same final goal: “remove the obscuration⁶⁴ of the human ego to the full expression of potentialities of the person can develop.” (Naranjo 2006, 112). For Naranjo, the word ego refers to all things opposed to being or essence: “it is a specie of mental parasite that absorbs our vital energy and limits the expression of our potential” (Ibid, 112). In brief, both psychotherapy and spiritual traditions pursue searching for awareness; the recovery of physical, emotional and cognitive conscience.

Naranjo’s path through different spiritual traditions has helped me to develop a better understanding of transrational philosophy and to collect more pieces for my collage of

⁶³ Tantric traditions considered physical body, and especially some body regions as doors towards the experience of the divine. Tantric meditation is a process guided which body discovers distinct states. (Naranjo 2006, 338)

⁶⁴ The author uses the obscuration neologism to indicate the dimming of consciousness as a result of a loss of consciousness of being. (Naranjo 2006, 112)



transrational silences, including concepts such as the ego, stop/go and relational meditation that can determine distinct relationships mediated by silence. For Naranjo, silence is a medium and an ending. Silence has multiple versions and readings from distinct spiritual beliefs and practices, and is also a way of expressing compassion, love and awareness.

Despite considering silence as something spiritual, silence and silences also have a special connotation in everyday life. As I showed, silences can be a fundamental element in communication, in arts, in politics, in philosophy, and in language and culture. This is because one of the aims of transrationality is to understand how multiple perspectives have a place in a shared viewpoint of the world, where different perspectives, beliefs, and ideas can be equally relevant to understand what happens around us.

Therefore, in this transrational comprehension of silence and in order to complement my vision of silences and to link silence with my cultural context, I want to present the ideas exposed by Andrés Cancimance, Colombian anthropologist and social worker, who developed an analysis of silences in communities affected by violence in Colombia.

Cancimance published his investigation in a publication denominated “Silence as a Practice of Resistance: Accounts of Dwellers of El Tigre, Putumayo, Who Survived Armed Control by the Bloque South of the AUC”. In his study, Cancimance opens a new door to appreciate silence. He shows that silence is something practical, and that it is a way to express oneself in the middle of violence and also a way to mobilize the community. In this research, Cancimance states:

Described and analyzed the narratives about silence that a group of dwellers of the inspection of El Tigre, Putumayo, in the south of Colombia, employed as a way of surviving violent death and expulsion under the armed control regime that paramilitary groups from the Bloque South of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) established after having perpetrated the massacre of January 9th, 1999 in this locality. (Cancimance 2015, 138)



After spending an extensive period with the community of El Tigre, the author discovered that silence became a strategy of day-to-day resistance⁶⁵ in a context dominated by illegal armed groups, affirming that silences change depending on cultural and political contexts. In this line, he defined three kinds of silence of the dwellers: sorrow silences, silences that should speak, and organized silences. In opposition to traumatic or passive conditions related to violent contexts, Cancimance sees silence as a motor of change.

According to the author, the community of El Tigre was affected by illegal economies and continuously faced the presence of illegal armed groups. In response, it developed its lifestyle in a context dominated by violence. It is important to understand violence as a dimension of life and culture, and not as an exclusive domain of death or something extraordinary. In this mind frame, we see that the community makes violence a way of life. Community members adapted their economic, political and social cohesion processes to this dynamic. However, an incident in 1999 completely changed the community's lifestyle and its perception of its future.

On January 9th, 1999, a group of 150 paramilitaries arrived to inspect El Tigre, located in the south of Colombia. During that incursion, they killed 28 men, kidnapped and “disappeared” other community members, physically and verbally abused local women, and burned houses, motorcycles and vehicles. This situation caused great pain among the population. In June 2001, the paramilitaries announced they would remain in the area indefinitely. This period is recognized by Cancimance as a manifestation of ‘sorrow silences’ (*silencios de dolor*).

According to Cancimance, sorrow silences were the product of the occupied control by paramilitaries, a period of time when the armed actors imposed rules on the population, displaced people, and continued the killings, torture and abuses of civilians. He states:

⁶⁵ This type of resistance should be understood not as a deliberate act of opposition to large logic of oppression, but as dignity to note loss and courage to claim the place of devastation. Author's translation (Ortega 2008, 18) quoted by (Cancimance 2015, 144).



Con la instauración de aquel control armado, se dio inicio a una actitud de silencio que doña Liliana describió como silencios de dolor: no decir nada frente a los actos represivos de los paramilitares, aceptar las órdenes impuestas sin protestar, encerrarse en sus casas y evitar lugares comunes o públicos fueron acciones que caracterizaron esa actitud. En palabras de los habitantes se trató de un silencio doloroso, "porque veíamos toda la maldad que los paras tenían y no sentíamos incapaces de intervenir, nos tocaba solo ver y callar. Eso dolía mucho"⁶⁶ (Cancimance 2015, 149).

With their lives dominated by fear and silence, the inhabitants decided to organize around the defense of peasants as youth, women and men. They did so with the aim of finding new meanings of social fights and identity. This social mobilization begins the second moment of silence, the moment when silences start to speak. In this period, in congruence with Cancimance's description, people from El Tigre made the decision to intercede and confront the paramilitaries. In particular, they intervened on behalf of those who were unjustly accused by the illegal armed group. In other words, people attempted to protect their communities and their families and to recover their belongings.

A third moment of silence occurred when paramilitaries decided to go out of El Tigre; in that moment, the community began its organized silences. After six years of suffering and fear, the paramilitaries left El Tigre in 2006 due to the actions of the guerrillas in the area. In this case, the actions of another illegal armed group managed to lead to their withdrawal from the community. During this confrontation, 40 people were killed; the majority belonging to the ranks of the paramilitaries. Even though death continued to haunt the community members of El Tigre, this time they had courage. For that reason, the exit of paramilitaries allowed communal organizations, churches and social groups to begin to propose new spaces to rebuild the social web and start over, giving way to organized silences.

⁶⁶ With the establishment of that armed control begun an attitude of silence that Mrs. Liliana described as sorrow silences: nothing to say against the repressive acts of the paramilitaries, accept orders placed without protest, shut themselves in their homes and avoid common or public places were actions that characterized this attitude. In the words of the inhabitants it was a painful silence, "because we saw all the evil that the paramilitaries had and did not feel powerless to intervene, we played just see and be silent. That hurt a lot." Author's translation.



From this story of armed domain, Cancimance demonstrated with his narratives that silence has a value as a practice of daily resistance. From it, a variety of actions to survive surface, and the community can begin to build a destination beyond the war. He notes:

*Sostengo que los silencios son una forma susurrada de enfrentar las condiciones de violencia y no una condición traumática, pasiva y derrotada de afrontar el conflicto. Los silencios, además de hacer parte de una lógica campesina, han permitido a varias generaciones sostenerse en el campo colombiano atravesado por el conflicto.*⁶⁷
(Cancimance 2015, 152)

Cancimance managed to connect silence with my cultural context, often dominated by violence. However, he does so with many opportunities for change, a situation that I will review in more detail in the next chapter. The idea around silence as motor for change continued to resonate in my mind, and the ideas presented by Cancimance captured my attention. I started to think in greater depth about how silence can lead to change on personal and social levels, and how despite the fact that society can see silence as something traumatic in the middle of violence others see silence as a chance.

Silence, in this case, is a social practice that reflects feelings of sorrow and pain, but also hope, desires and social consciousness. When everything looks dark, silence is in the middle of that darkness. Silence is, in this context, the way to survive in the middle of the conflict.

In this line, the idea of seeing silence as a chance to do something different in the middle of a violent context is also analyzed by Cheryl Glenn, Professor of English and Women's Studies and Director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Pennsylvania State University. When I talked about forms of moral peace and I mentioned the ideas of sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, I quoted some of the comments of Glenn because I considered them relevant for that perspective. At the same time, however, Glenn introduced me to many elements of the transrational perspective in her studies.

⁶⁷ I argue that silence is a whispered way to address the conditions of violence and non-traumatic, passive and defeated to face the conflict condition. Silences, in addition to part of peasant logic, have enabled several generations sustained in the Colombian countryside crossed by the conflict. Author's translation.



Glenn analyzes silence as an art for resisting discipline(s). In this line, Glenn begins her approach to silence by mentioning that silence can be a specifically feminist rhetorical art, often one of resistance. This idea comes from the predominant talkative culture in western societies, in which gendered speech is related to the idea of masculinity and silence is categorized as feminine. In her words: “That said, I don't see speech as always masculine or powerful, nor do I see silence as always feminist-let alone always successful.” (Glenn 2002, 262)

Glenn studies, from distinct levels, the form and properties of a speech through different historical moments and with multiple authors. She discovered that silence can be heard as a feminist position that can resist disciplinary typecast, and that it also embraces political resistance as well as sociopolitical culture and power. It is full of meaning, as she emphasizes:

Silence is not, in itself, necessarily a sign of powerlessness or emptiness; it is not the same as absence; and silencing for that matter, is not the same as erasing. Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function. Ratcliffe reminds us, “Silences need not be read as simple passivity. [They] take many forms and serve many functions...” (Glenn 2002, 263).

Silence takes many forms and serves many functions, ranging from stoicism and passivity to activity and resistance. The range of possibilities in which silence serves different forms of expression includes aspects such as language, where breaks are keys to understanding the meaning of sentences. According to Glenn: “every silence there is something of the spoken word, as an abiding token of the power of silence to create speech”. (Ibid, 263). However, at the same time not all silences are positive, feminist, rhetorical or successful.

Glenn's description of different political episodes when women remained silent allowed her to infer that silence is a resistance method, and that it should be included as a rhetorical art. In opposition to the idea that only words are important in speeches, she demonstrated silences are also key:



[...] Rhetors using silence will not be participating in the traditional rhetorical discipline of combat and dominance; they will be sharing perceptions, understandings, and power. They will use silence to embody new ways to challenge and resist domination-and, when necessary, discipline. (Glenn 2002, 284)

Silence, for Glenn, is a political tool to express resistance against control and domination. Silence is also an element that determines social relations and the relationships between women and men, recognizing relationships and power dynamics.

Finally, to close this section on transrational perspective about silences, it is important to return to several concepts that I consider relevant for my analysis. I will start with the ideas of Batenson, who emphasizes alternative ways of communication among human beings as determinant. These are concepts that support the statements of Rogers, who emphasizes nonverbal communication and the idea of reading symbols and gestures in practice. In particular, he focuses on how active listening is the first point of entry when beginning to comprehend the world of transrational silences.

Once I presented the idea of communication within the transrational approach, focusing on the perspectives of Khrishnamurti and Thich Naht Hanh, I found the importance of understanding the power of meditation and the idea of the here and now. I began to recognize that I have in my hands the tools to change myself and my context, and I came to realize that I could transform my body and my mind through the practice of meditation, focusing on silence as a core element.

The importance of meditation as a transformative practice has guided me to new discoveries. I have found that silence allows me to connect my mind, body, and soul with the aim of healing my physical and mental body, cultivating in this path the virtues of compassion, love and peace. These realizations follow the revelations of Claudio Naranjo.

Andres Cancimance and Cheryl Glenn showed me how silences can be a motor of change and resistance, mixing passions, fear and courage. Understanding how silence can



mobilize people and communities has also shown me how silence can effectively to be a medium for conflict transformations on personal, social, cultural and structural levels.

All of these ideas support the philosophies of Lederach and Dietrich, directed at conflict transformation. They present a personal transformation focused on cognitive, emotional, perceptual and spiritual aspects, and how these areas permeate other spheres such as relational, structural and cultural areas.

Having studied the authors in my transrational rainbow, I came to understand the practice of meditation as explained by Thich Naht Hanh, Krishnamurti and Naranjo. I began to transform my personal conflicts through spiritual practices and by exploring my cognitive, emotional and perceptual sides. Additionally, using the ideas of Rogers and Batenson and by improving my modes of communication, the changes that I noted in myself began to impact relational aspects and my understanding of the idea of interdependence and the importance of others.

Following the approaches by Cancimance and Glenn, I came understand silence as a way to bring about change in a cultural sense, working on cultural resources, cultural patterns, and looking to transform violent expressions inside the community and/or even society.

Finally, all the authors, from their particular points of view, show the practices related to silence as a way to achieve structural changes in societies in which individuals achieve structural changes in their ways of thinking and acting. For example, this occurs by using nonviolent mechanisms, minimizing violent acts, and promoting public participation. For me, however, one of the most important things is to recognize the roots and causes of their own conflicts.



2.6 Conclusions: Some words for opening new doors

The path presented here demonstrates how to interpret silence from different perspectives of peace, where the values of harmony, truth, justice and security hold true, and how these perspectives are a motivating approach to the subject of silence in line with the perspective of conflict transformation. Claiming to exhaust all approaches to silence is an impossible task, but with the previous review, I sought to show different positions, and especially to appreciate how silence can be understood from different categories of analysis.

Likewise, this chapter validates how silence can be reflected in conflict transformation from personal, social, cultural, structural, energetic, moral, modern, postmodern and transrational perspectives. In harmony with these philosophies, I can see the idea of peace as a holistic concept with different colors and nuances. These perspectives also provide me with a framework to organize my ideas and follow the aim to understand the complexity of silence and its contribution to elicitive conflict transformation.

In the next chapter, I attempt to validate all the perspectives presented with my personal experience of conflict transformation. In my personal life, silence has played a core role and it has led to a number of changes, as I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. In particular, the idea of transforming a conflict is related to presenting different choices to the participants in the conflict, with the ultimate goal of making them aware of new perspectives and options.



3. My Silences, Your Silences in a Transrational Rainbow

In the second chapter, I exposed different visions about silence in the frame of five peace families. This chapter is dedicated to relating that information to my research question: How can the practice of silence become a medium for conflict transformation?

In order to answer this question, I take elements from the first chapter, where I presented part of my personal story and my interest in silence as a topic of study, as well as some impressions of people that I have met and consider relevant to my research development. Also, I use theoretical elements exposed in the second chapter, in which I described distinct perspectives for understanding silence and its relation to the idea of conflict transformation. Finally, I complement this information with my experiences and the experiences of people that practice or have discovered different practices of using silence as one of its primary means.

To open this chapter and understand its scope, it is important to highlight the linkages between silence, awareness and stillness within the practices that I describe below. The methods in which silence plays a key role lead to the achievement of stillness and involve awareness. Awareness is basically the ability to directly know and perceive, to feel, or to be aware of events or situations. It is the state or quality of being conscious about something, and stillness is the state or an instance of being quiet or calm. As Eckhart Tolle, rightly affirms, “Whenever there is some silence around you, listen to it. That means just notice it. Pay attention to it. Listening to silence awakens the dimension of stillness within yourself, because it is only through stillness that you can be aware of silence.” (Tolle 2003, 4). In essence, silence is a way to find stillness, it is a way to separate one’s self from one of the six senses, the sense of hearing. The absence of sound supports awareness achievement.

In addition to understanding the importance of awareness and stillness, in this chapter I link these practices with the approach of transrational peace and the idea of elicitive conflict



transformation that let me engage as an active peace worker, creating and discovering new ways of dealing with conflict, taking the context into account, and focusing on ‘breath-centered methods’, as Wolfgang Dietrich called it. I consider silence to be a cornerstone of this practice therefore, I also present silence as social mobilizer in different settings such as the process of peacebuilding in my country and in arts such as dancing and theater.

Moreover, I consider these methods appropriate to develop my research because it reflects one of the principle of Gestalt therapy and humanistic psychology, which is “based on the guiding principle that elicitive transformation does not develop or offer a content solution for the conflict episode, but it creates a safe space for the parties, in which they can work on changes in their relationships along the horizons of their intelligibility”. (Unesco Chair for Peace Studies 2014, 5).

In keeping with these statements, this chapter has two main purposes. The first one is to show some practices in which silence acts as the basis of its philosophy and works on the transformation of personal conflict, seeking impact at an individual and collective level. The second one focuses its analysis on manifestations of silence in situations of social and armed conflict and training aimed at the artistic expression of the body, seeking to understand the actions and characteristics of a peace worker in conflict transformation, taking in account that my job and my academic experiences revolve around this profile.

With these goals in mind, I divide this chapter into four sections. The first section is oriented to analyze my experience with the method of active listening, considering the exercise of listening, which is key to communication and understanding between human beings. In the second section, I focus my attention on the practice of meditation from vipassana, mindfulness meditation, and yoga that combine the training of the mind as well as the spiritual and physical body. In the third segment, I look at the role of silence in transforming social and political conflicts, showing silence as a social mobilizer. Finally, in



the fourth section, I analyze the idea of silence in arts such as dancing and theater, understanding how these methods convert silence into a medium for conflict transformation.

Before beginning, it is important to mention, as Wolfgang Dietrich states, “I have chosen the methods about which I have personal experience, or the effects of which I have experienced, or which I have tested in practice and in teaching (or which I have tested under my responsibility), so that my work may avoid presumption or be a copy of the work of others” (Dietrich 2013, 15). I do something similar, by describing practices I have experienced myself or that I have had the opportunity to share with somebody else in an attempt to put a series of pieces together.

3.1 Silent Active Listening: Listening with my whole body

“The word 'listen' contains the same letters as the word 'silent’”
Alfred Brendel

The poet, pianist and Austrian writer Alfred Brendel shares my perception about listening and silence. Silence, within the exercise of listening, allows you to listen to others, listen to yourself, and calm your mind in order to listen. For Carl Rogers, listening allows changes in people attitudes toward themselves and others, sometimes modifying their values and personal philosophy.

The exercise of active listening goes beyond simply listening. It implies full attention to the other, his/her body gestures, his/her attitudes, his/her silences, his/her expressions, among other aspects observed in a real active listening exercise.

The method of Active Listening developed by Carl Rogers and Richard Farson, is suitable for the purpose of my thesis because in their words is “the act of mindfully hearing and attempting to comprehend the meaning of words spoken by another in a conversation or speech” (Rogers and Farson 1957). I can apply its principles to my family and my



community. In this case, silence acts as a medium of communication and expression that requires understanding the needs of others and following their messages.

For peace workers, the activity of active listening seeks to transform different situations. As Rogers mentions, successful active listening begins with you making a conscious effort to approach the conversation with a positive attitude towards the other person and to encounter the sense itself. In this path, active listening is characterized by undivided attention, empathy, respect, acceptance, and congruence, which are all necessary for the labor of the peace workers and active listeners.

With regards to Rogers's definition of these aspects, I can say, in brief words, that undivided attention implies total attention on the speaker. Empathy begins with awareness of another person's feelings. Respect implies thinking well of every person rather than judging them. Acceptance is linked to the concept of respect and it also requires a nonjudgmental attitude. Congruence is an invitation to openness, frankness, and genuineness as a listener. I consider these aspects very important for listening and also for understanding how simple activities of daily communication become complex acts that mix different skills and abilities.

Now, the role of active listening, within the approach of conflict transformation is something that deserves my attention. As I pointed out in the second chapter, one of the bases for the transrational idea of conflict transformation is humanistic psychology and in consequence, I consider it relevant to highlight why Carl Rogers promoted the idea of progressive and democratic education through the exercise of communication and conversation. As Wolfgang Dietrich mentions about Rogers's proposals:

[L]ies in the development of the non-directive principle of conversation. Non-directivity does not aim to resolve conflicts; it seeks to support people in their personal growth. It underlines the importance of feelings and emotions in the counseling situation, with emphasis placed upon the personal relationship between counselor and client. The focus is on the present, rather than the diagnosis of conflict causes (Dietrich 2013, 40).



The importance of feelings and emotions mentioned by Dietrich about Rogers is one of the keys in active listening exercises, where two or more people sit in front of each other, focus their energies solely on the task of listening in order to connect their lives and experiences. As Dietrich mentions,

For Rogers the trusted conversation is the primary medium through which counselor can encourage a client to take responsibility for conflicts. Clients are encouraged to express thoughts and feelings as freely as possible; counselors respond with emphatic and resonant replies intended to help clients clearly see and accept their spontaneous selves. In the safe setting of counseling, the feelings awakened and discovered lead to actions with the clients' goal in mind. Finally, the clients – not the therapists – clarify and summarize final conclusions (Dietrich 2013, 40).

In this regard, active listening is not only useful to practice in our daily life, but also in the professional psychological frame, in which the therapist becomes a 'facilitator' or 'convener;' he or she is a medium to see different points of view about the same situation. As the teacher José Luis Palacios-Garoz expresses about the act of listening,

*Escuchar requiere acallar el diálogo interno, enmudecer el yo, para poder percibir con claridad la profunda unidad y la íntima armonía, el amor que rige los destinos de todas las cosas. Pero el silencio no es sólo ausencia de ruido, ausencia de palabras. El silencio es positivo*⁶⁸. (Palacios-Garoz 1999, 102)

This idea expressed by Palacios-Garoz shows me how I can understand the power of silence and its benefits, such as unity, harmony, and love, by doing a listening activity. Because of these benefits, he describes silence as something positive. Following the idea of silence as something positive, I consider listening to be an activity that needs to be practiced every moment of every day when we have the opportunity to interact with someone. It requires concentration and learning about alternative ways of communication.

Listening also implies the practice of not speaking, as the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh states. But to be silent, in order to do a real exercise of active listening, goes beyond saying no words, it means also, to be silent in your mind, and to silence the internal voices,

⁶⁸ Listening requires silencing the internal dialogue, muting one's self, to see clearly the deep intimate unity and harmony, love that rules the destinies of all things. But silence is not only the absence of noise, the absence of words. Silence is positive. (Author's translation).



your ego voice. As I explained in the second chapter regarding the concept of ego, Claudio Naranjo affirms, “it is a kind of mental parasite that absorbs our vital energy and limits the expression of our potential” (Naranjo 2006, 112). This parasite is also defined by the artist Gabrielle Roth, who said:

Ego is all the voices in our heads chattering like a bunch of soap opera characters; all those divas, demons and doyennes dripping with diamonds telling you that you aren’t rich enough, smart enough, beautiful enough, talented enough, sexy enough – or that you’re more of the above than anyone else, only the world hasn’t discovered yet. These voices drawn out the song of the soul, the part of us that has no identity to protect or viewpoint to project. (Roth 1998, 185)

The ideas expressed by Naranjo and Roth about the ego reflect the importance of silencing the internal voices when practicing active listening. In consequence, the practice of active listening has two fundamental elements: silence the mouth and the mind, which means playing a continuous game with yourself.

In addition, I would like to mention my co-worker’s idea, who taught me the power of active listening, “active listening allows you to be fully present and understand details in a conversation that are unnoticed to the naked eye. It is a way to discover the real meaning of the messages” (Santos, personal interview, October 15, 2016).

The idea of to be fully present is for me a central aspect in the listening exercise. Precisely in the next passages, I talk about my own experience with the practice of active listening and how I can see this method as a way to transform conflicts.

My experience...

Eight years ago when I worked with local communities in different regions of Colombia, one of my co-workers gave me special instructions for one particular meeting:
Active Listening, girl! Just active listening.
In that moment, the orientation felt curious and even funny for me.
How could be listening be an active exercise?
The answer came years later, when I started my Master in Innsbruck.
In front of somebody else, every morning,
I understood the full meaning of active listening:
Listening with my whole body.



As I comment above, my own experience with silence as part of the exercise of listening shows me the connection between different actions and different senses: listening with my eyes, with my hands and my heart. In other words, listening to another with my whole body in order to understand the meaning beyond the pronounced words and even listen to the words that the other person does not say or does not want to say.

Along with this line, I want to use my experience to show how the practice of active listening encourages openness, emotional maturity, less defensive attitudes, and greater willingness to understand different viewpoints. During my three terms as a peace student at the University of Innsbruck, I had the opportunity to share this exercise with people from different cultures and backgrounds, from Norway to Azerbaijan, Jamaica, and Ghana; all of them showed me the amazing power of listening.

The exercise of listening with my whole body is a challenge because it implies focusing my attention on someone else's different manifestations, the tone of his/her voice, his/her hands, eyes, mouth and his/her body posture. Taking into account all these elements, I can understand the feelings of the person, the message that he/she wants to transmit and the sensations or worries that the message evokes.

For example, when I have the opportunity to work with communities in Colombia, in my personal exercise of active listening, I can see differences between men and women when they express their ideas. When I remain silent and I concentrate my attention on the expressions of women, I can sense a fear of taking a stand against a topic and fear of rejection by others. I can also see how men assume positions of power or how they seek to be right against different views. This description is a mirror in which I can see the power of active listening that reflects a cultural and social context and it allows me to understand how listening does not only consist of hearing voices and words, it is also understanding the messages and symbols behind the words.



Also, I can see that in order to achieve a real active listening exercise, I must quiet my own voice and silence my own ego. Yes! Ego is a constant adversary in the activity of listening. Ego is that undertone inside us that wants to make decisions and creates answers for everything based on how it will make us look or feel, or so we think. Ego is like a constant voice over that tries to determine what is right and what is wrong. In other words, when I really do the exercise of active listening, my ego needs to be silent, tucked carefully into a corner. It is only when I become silent in my mind that I can truly listen.

The interpretation of what the other means in an active listening exercise is one of the most interesting silent exercises, when I start to see signs in the body of the person I am talking to, ideas expressed by his/her eyes, unsaid words, her/his hand gestures.

In my perspective, for the purpose of conflict transformation, the technique of active listening allows me to understand that I am present; listening carefully to the persons with my body and all five senses it also contributes to understanding the content, feelings and body language. The exercise also implies leaving behind judgment and evaluation and focusing on becoming a witness, continuously changing the role of who is listening and who is being listened to. Along with this vein, transformation achieved by active listening in my life is directed to transform conflict at a personal level because listening requires a greater sense of calm and self-assurance than talking, so learning how to listen is a long individual process.

3.2 My first meditation: The door toward my mind

“Meditation is silence, energizing and fulfilling.
Silence is the eloquent expression of the inexpressible”
Sri Chinmoy

The inspiration given by Sri Chinmoy to develop this section starts with a reflection about silence and meditation as insights of satisfaction and energy. Sri Chinmoy was a Bengali spiritual guide who teaches how meditation can be useful in the fields of music, poetry,



painting, literature and sports. He made contributions in each of these fields which were far-reaching. As he stated, “From my concentration, prayer and meditation I am able to bring forward inner strength, inner power, and use that power to increase my outer strength” (Chinmoy 2016).

Meditation is almost a mandatory method within my investigation, exploring different kinds of meditation based on the power of mind and breath. While meditation has multiple techniques and practices, scientists usually classify meditation into two categories based on the ways in which we focus attention: Focused Attention and Open Monitoring. In the case of Focused Attention the idea consists of:

Focusing the attention on a single object during the whole meditation session. This object may be the breath, a mantra, visualization, part of the body, external object, etc. As the practitioner advances, his ability to keep the flow of attention in the chosen object gets stronger, and distractions become less common and short-lived. Both the depth and steadiness of his attention are developed. Examples of these are: Samatha (Buddhist meditation), some forms of Zazen, Loving Kindness Meditation, Chakra Meditation, Kundalini Meditation, Sound Meditation, Mantra Meditation, Pranayama, some forms of Qigong. (Diensfmann 2015, 2)

In contrast with Open Monitoring meditation, the main idea is:

Instead of focusing the attention on any one object, we keep it open, monitoring all aspects of our experience, without judgment or attachment. All perceptions, be them internal (thoughts, feelings, memory, etc.) or external (sound, smell, etc.), are recognized and seen for what they are. It is the process of non-reactive monitoring of the content of experience from moment to moment, without going into them. Examples are: Mindfulness meditation, Vipassana, as well as some types of Taoist Meditation. (Diensfmann 2015, 2)

In brief, all traditional techniques of meditation recognize that the object of focus is just a way to train the mind so that effortless inner silence and deeper states of consciousness can be discovered. In that sense, it is interesting to go further in different techniques of meditation for discovering the power of silence related to conflict transformation, because the center of the practice is the person with his/her feelings, body, and mind.

Then meditation practice involves body and soul, transforming the lives of those who practice it. In order to better understand this idea, I can mention some of the concepts



presented by Buddhist meditation practices where meditation is a method of modeling feelings and changing perceptions. Therefore, “meditation is a way to train the mind into a permanent state of awareness. This state could be achieved by training the person to be fully present and focus his/her attention on all senses” (Velaverde Fernández 2013, 88).

To be aware with all senses sounds like a basic function for all human beings, but is more difficult in daily life, when there are many distractions, such as technology, communication devices, multitasking and full-time jobs, and the demands of social life. So, meditation becomes a way to escape from this over demanding situation. As the author Karma Lekshe Tsomo mentions:

The development of mental balance and the cultivation of virtues such as loving kindness and compassion are believed to create conditions conducive to peace and happiness. The Buddhist texts contain myriad methods for cultivating these virtues, which then serve to prevent violent conflicts, resolve tensions, maintain equilibrium and automatically create inner peace. [...] One who cultivates peace in meditation becomes more peaceful, less reactive, and more mindful in everyday encounters (Lekshe Tsomo 2014).

It is important for me to recognize that there are many ways to find inner peace, which “from a Buddhist perspective is tranquility of mind and being centered” (Velaverde Fernández 2013, 4). Two of them come from the Buddhist and Hindu traditions such as mindfulness and yoga. In line with these traditions and in the search for inner peace, it is important to highlight a common element within these practices and their practitioners, as the psychologist Charles Snyder comments,

Inner peace practitioners develop self-analysis techniques so that they may reach an understanding of their role and identity in life and in relationships with others. This training is intended to develop positive characteristics in people and to help them become more resilient in their psychological wellbeing (Snyder y Lopez 2002, 20) quoted by (Velaverde Fernández 2013, 5).

To develop positive personal characteristics in order to be more resilient is really interesting for my research. A resilient person is a person who is able to recover from illness,



depression or personal adversity, and the idea of finding a way to be more resilient is an excellent opportunity to transform personal and even social conflicts.

The authors that I quoted affirm that you can practice meditation in multiple ways, that there is a variety of philosophical schools and cultural expressions. However, it is also important to state that it brings benefits for the physical and spiritual body. The practice of meditation reduces anxiety, develops physical strength and helps to better understand ourselves and our surroundings.

The benefits of the practice are just some of the positive elements that it brings. As I presented in the second chapter, when I talked about the ideas of Claudio Naranjo, meditation has a special power, because this practice not only helps our mind to be aware and focus on the present but also allows us to expand love, compassion, and satisfaction.

Also, I mentioned the basic components of meditation as detachment, evocation of sacredness, surrender, love, attention and the process of stopping the mind. All of them are important to understanding how a person can change his/her attitudes against the rest of the world, achieve personal growth and create a peaceful society. Because of this, I consider this practice as a medium of achieving conflict transformation, following the precepts of transrational peace, where different choices for transformation are appropriate.

Meditation is not a magical practice; it is also susceptible to mistakes and it does not guarantee that the objective of change is achieved. Individuals in all societies are vulnerable to the reality of their communities. As the author Lekshe Tsomo mentions, “Despite their peaceful ideals, Buddhist countries have seen their share of brutal dictators and genocidal conflicts” (Lekshe Tsomo 2014, 232). For that reason, the skills of non-violence and meditation require training, time, and deep commitment.

Related to the contributions of meditation to the conflict transformation process, it works on different levels – personal, relational, cultural and structural. As explained by



Lekshe Tsomo, “Beginning with acknowledging and transforming the seeds of violence in one’s mind, one extends this peaceful agenda from the individual level to the family, community, country and beyond to the entire universe” (Lekshe Tsomo 2014, 233). In that sense, meditation has an effect that is played repeatedly, like an endless wave in the minds of the men and women who practice it.

In complement, the words of Swami Veda Baharati are interesting, explaining concepts of peace in South and East Asia stating, “The interpersonal conflicts and inter-state hostilities both have their origin in the conflict that are internal to each individual mind. The paths of meditation and transcendence lead to the internal resolution of these conflicts and thereby help to resolve the external hostilities” (Baharati 2014, 197).

Into the practice of meditation for transforming conflicts, I discovered an interesting experience called Peace Revolution, a network that linked people around the world through meditation for transformation. According to the followers of this global network, this idea was a product of people’s frustration in real life, where their lives are guided and influenced by their cultures and customs or their socio-economic status, leaving behind real motivations to live. Many of them are frustrated by the quest for lasting happiness and genuine peace of mind. In this line, Peace Revolution “is creating a new “paradigm shift” intent on redirecting and refocusing all of our personal priorities from an outward search to an inward quest designed to discover and cultivate a lasting, self-sustaining happiness” (Peace Revolution 2013).

The organization seeks to transform lifestyles, work on personal development and turn them in “Human Change Agents” directly and indirectly affecting everything around them in a positive way. The method that they choose to achieve the positive change is “Dhammakaya Meditation”⁶⁹ (Body of Enlightenment) that consists of bringing together mind and body

⁶⁹ The Dhammakaya meditation method was revived in Thailand almost 100 years ago by the Great Master Phramongkolthepmuni, famously known as Luangpor Wat Paknam. It is one of the most popular meditation



directing the process of breathing and meditation to the stomach or abdomen, as the center of the body, and keeping it there for longer periods of time. This practice opens spaces for feelings such as purity, softness, delicateness, refinement, and freshness, with a peaceful state as the final result.

Precisely, with the aim of better understanding the Peace Revolution philosophy, I interviewed Marco Bermudez, a member of Peace Revolution, looking for understanding the power of meditation and silence around the healing process and conflict transformation. For me, Marco opened a new door for understanding silence. He showed me the benefits of silent meditation at an individual level, social level and specifically as part of the peacebuilding process. He insisted that silence was intangible, but told me that it has tangible results in our mind, our body and our way of seeing the world. Now, with the practice of meditation I can understand him better.

For him, the peacebuilding process starts inside us, in our minds. With his experience as a meditation practitioner and leader of the Peace Revolution, he discovered that meditation is a tool for peacebuilding because it promotes inner peace and this condition allows for a better relationship with your surroundings. He stated, *“Todos quieren cambiar el mundo, pero no se observan ellos mismos, es necesario ayudar a las personas a cambiar por dentro, para lograr ese cambio real.”*⁷⁰ But the experience with meditation goes beyond this, as Marco said. The real changes come from our inner self, and of course is a process of constant evolution.

So, in middle of this positive imperfection and continuous evolution, in the next sections, I present some of the techniques meditation uses as its main instrument of personal

techniques practiced by Buddhists and non-Buddhists around the world. The method is simple, easy, and effective. Everyone can learn how to do it and can achieve inner peace and happiness that you may never have known existed. “Dharmakaya” is a Pali word, which means “Body of Enlightenment.” The term appears in many places in the Buddhist scriptures of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tibetan) schools. The uniqueness of the Dharmakaya meditation is that it teaches about the center of the body as the natural home of the human mind as well as the inner gateway to enlightenment. The stiller the mind is at its natural home, the deeper the happiness one experiences. Dharmakaya meditation also has a moral impact on the mind. A person who meditates regularly will become gentler, kinder, and more peaceful (Dharmakaya Foundation 2016)

⁷⁰ Everyone wants to change the world, but they do not observe themselves, is necessary to help people change from within, to achieve that real change (Author’s translation).



change. I start with some insights about my experience with meditation and its scope. Then, I refer to the technique of Vipassana derived from Theravada⁷¹ Buddhism. Thirdly, I present the method of mindfulness focused on the idea of here and now and originally from Buddhist philosophy. Finally, I close this chapter with a brief description of Yoga, also framed within Indian philosophy.

My experience...

The first time that I meditated I was working with a project called Peace Laboratories, I met a Buddhist monk who wanted to teach us how to breathe and to find inner peace. The first time that I meditated I was in the middle of three countries: Austria, Switzerland, and Italy, I was seeing the Inn river flowing with energy and deep calm. The first time that I meditated I was in the middle of a room full of people in absolute silence imagining amazing sights in their minds. The first time that I meditated...

Every time that I meditate I feel like it is my first time. The first time that I can connect myself with my surroundings and see things that I normally ignore as options, desires, feelings, worries.

I have meditated in different places, alone or with different people, but I always discover different things about myself. In 2008, I had the opportunity to meditate with a Buddhist monk, Claude Anshin Thomas⁷², who was invited by the government of Colombia to talk about the power of meditation based on Zen practice and its relation to violence, war, and conflict transformation. This monk spreads the philosophy of nonviolence around the

⁷¹ Theravada (pronounced — more or less — "terra-VAH-dah"), called the "Doctrine of the Elders," is the school of Buddhism that draws its scriptural inspiration from the Tipitaka, or Pali canon, which scholars generally agree contains the earliest surviving record of the Buddha's teachings. (Robinson and Johnson W.L 2005). Another feature of Theravada is that it tends to be very conservative about matters of doctrine and monastic discipline (Gombrich 2006).

⁷² The monk Claude Anshin Thomas, before dedicating his life to the meditation, was combatant in the Vietnam war, drug addict and drug dealer in Iraq (Camargo 2008). Thomas is author of the book *At Hell's Gate – A Soldier's Journey From War to Peace*, which he described his experience in Vietnam and his transformation with meditation.



world, and he taught me, for the first time, how meditation could contribute to conflict transformation at a social and cultural level. With his personal history, he showed me how someone who dedicated part to his life to the war could find an answer in meditation for transforming conflicts around the world and spread his experience to reach a real change in different communities.

Meditation is an interesting practice for me. Years later, I discovered how meditation can connect my senses with nature. In the first chapter, I mentioned the Native Spirit experience as part of the curricula of the peace studies. During this encounter I had the opportunity to meditate in the middle of nature, with the flowing river, the wind blowing and the trees speaking in their language. These moments allowed me to discover the importance of listening to nature and my inner voice; to experience silence as something magical that reveals secrets about myself that I usually ignore due to the noise of my daily life.

When I finished my second term at the University of Innsbruck, I came back to Colombia and I went to a group meditation session. This session was intended for families and friends of people with terminal illnesses and critical health conditions. The meditation session sought to provide a comfortable place for these people and also to show how meditation can heal the people's soul and body and transform their internal conflicts and concerns. The meditation was guided by a member of the Peace Revolution organization that I described above, which encourages a culture of peace through the dissemination and teaching of meditation.

These experiences depict how meditation appears in different moments of my life and how this practice has many alternative ways to be practiced and expressed. I feel that each practice of meditation brings me new discoveries and surprises.

Now, as I mentioned above, to pursue the idea of finding inner peace is just one of the ideas that appear in my mind when I think of meditation. Also, the idea of finding the



connection between my mind and my body, sharing my concerns with the universe, and reserving a special place far away from daily life. Again, silence plays a key role in meditation because it encourages this connection with the universe. Inner peace is a kind of peace that goes from the inside to the outside, and it is able to multiply, if we learn how to cultivate it, we can share it with others. Inner peace deals with our emotions and values, not only with our mind.

So, in the path of meditation, I have discovered its benefits not only for my personal health, in terms of calmness, stillness, and purifying energy, but also in my wishes to do more good things for myself and for others. In my case, the experiences with meditation have shown me new possibilities to do something or solve problems, because it allows me to see the whole picture with different alternatives and perspectives. It clears my mind.

Here, I present some ways of meditation that I consider relevant to my study as a result of my own practice. I have understood their power in myself and others reflected in the transformation of personal and social conflicts.

3.2.1 Vipassana: Breathing in silence

Buddha used to call it vipassana.
The word is beautiful, simple, meaningful.
It means just watching, pashya means to see
and passana means to see very carefully.
Vipassana means to see carefully but without thinking.
You are just there, sitting silently, doing nothing.
Bhagwan (Osho)

Looking very carefully at silence, as Bhagwan mentions about the teachings of Buddha, is the essence of the technique of vipassana. Bhagwan, now called Osho, born in India as Chandra Mohan Jain, and formerly known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was a mystic, guru, and spiritual teacher who created the international Rajneesh movement, which has continued after his death along with the teachings of meditation and vipassana.



Vipassana consists of looking keenly at the state and content of the mind moment after moment, as I mentioned in the second chapter. This technique is an ancient form of meditation where one sits in stillness and silence for extended periods of time. In fact, the technique of vipassana, according to Osho's teachings means,

[...] watching your breath, looking at your breath. It is not like yoga pranayama: it is not changing your breath to a certain rhythm - deep breathing, fast breathing, no. It does not change your breathing at all; it has nothing to do with the breathing. Breathing has only to be used as a device to watch because it is a constant phenomenon in you. You can simply watch it, and it is the most subtle phenomenon. If you can watch your breath then it will be easy for you to watch your thoughts (Osho 2011).

Regarding the importance of natural breathing, another perspective about Vipassana is mentioned by the Indian doctor and spiritual master Amit Ray, who held that vipassana meditation, is an ongoing creative purification process. Observation of the moment-to-moment experience cleanses the mental layers, one after another. He describes vipassana as a continuous process that leads to internal mental and spiritual cleaning.

The technique of vipassana is rooted in Theravada Buddhism, an ancient tradition that means 'Doctrine of the Elders,' and it follows the teachings of senior monks, who preserve these traditions and in consequence is a conservative wing of Buddhist tradition. Vipassana "aims to cultivate a way of seeing that is free from illusions – that is, a higher order of seeing, enabled by an enhanced mindfulness capable of cutting through manipulation or blindness and of grasping reality directly. Vipassana is a path of self-change through self-observation" (Dietrich 2013, 69).

Self-observation in middle of silence is the core activity of Vipassana, this technique is suitable for showing the power of silence in the process of internal transformation, as Dietrich describes this method:

Each breath is carefully observed, starting with the sensation air entering the body, to the movements of the abdomen and the chest to complete exhalation. Next, the practitioner focuses on the subtle effects that an increased awareness of the breath produces in the body and the mind. Practitioners then realize they cannot be what they are observing and thus let go of the identification with body and mind (Ibid, 69).



Breathing is then one of the most important actions into the practice of vipassana, “breathing is an existential action at the contact boundary involving, space, time and power” (Dietrich, *Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Turn in Peace Politics* 2013, 45). For me, it allows us to understand that we are alive, it is the essence of life. Also, I find that breathing is the only one process dependent on the nervous system that allows becoming conscious, achieving control of the process. It can as well induce a mental state to control stress, anxiety, depression or other mental states, all of them present in episodes of conflict (Alzate Medina 2015, 20).

Now, to understand better the technique of vipassana in western traditions and its applicability in the process of conflict transformation, it is important to have a look at the footprints of vipassana in humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology focuses its study on the behavior of human beings, as I mentioned in the section dedicated to transrational silences.

It is important to remark, that this method today is used to heal, as the medic and scientist John Kabat-Zinn does with the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR)⁷³, which is currently implemented in several hospitals and health clinics to help patients deal with stress, illness, and pain. (Diensfmann 2015, 8) (Cochran 2004). Precisely mixing the insights of humanistic psychology and the heritage of ancient tradition of vipassana, Jeru Kabbal, founder of the Institute for Accelerated Personal Transformation, created the technique of quantum light breath®, developing a highly effective meditative breathing technique that works with suggestive music, in other words:

Jeru realized that when elements of Vipassana were combined with deep rhythmic and consciously connected breath, it could bring a participant into the recognition of Oneness without having to sit still in silent meditation for hours a day. Jeru used verbal and energetic guidance along with evocative music to lead people into the recognition of the

⁷³ This Program was developed in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.



mind's separate realities and to encourage an experience of the mystery of true presence (Bock 2015).

In the words of Wolfgang Dietrich, the technique of quantum light breath is the result of Kabbal's discovery of connections among quantum physics, Advaita philosophy, and the individual experience of vipassana meditation. The role of these techniques in the approach of elicitive conflict transformation is also explained by Dietrich, when he says:

Vipassana and Advaita open up the path to a philosophy that situates peace in a transrational framework, no longer understanding it is an individual or collective experience subject to normalization, but as freedom from fear within the tense interrelationship among emotions, feelings, and the imaginary. Inasmuch, as this is case, vipassana is a peace-oriented philosophical inspiration (Dietrich 2013, 69,73).

Again, this example shows that everything in the universe has a strong connection; people, spaces, dynamics and realities. These realities showed Kabbal the importance of liberating consciousness from irritating situations, ideas and illusions, and thus transforming conflicts.

With his powerful breathing techniques, Kabbal "considers that subconscious feelings and thoughts remembered as emotions cannot be erased from the unconscious mind; however, they can be addressed from an adult, conscious presence and once observed and recognized as illusions, be transformed" (Dietrich, Elicitive Conflict Transformation and the Transrational Turn in Peace Politics 2013, 70). The institute of Jeru Kabbal highlights,

The quantum light breath is a highly focused breathing meditation process that greatly accelerates the user's personal transformation by bypassing the conscious mind and releasing old programs directly from the subconscious. It basically eliminates the need for analysis, painful emotional experiences, years of therapy or growth groups and unfruitful meditations. It usually takes the user into an expanded state of consciousness. Universal love is experienced as a reality and not as an unreachable concept. There is a deep connection to the Universal Intelligence (The Clarity Project 2014).

During my Master's Studies, I experienced the universal love and transformation, with the practice of vipassana and one of the techniques promoted by Jeru Kabbal with his method



denominated Clarity Process.⁷⁴ This method continuously accompanied by quantum light breath shows me the power of the subconscious mind using a technique oriented to facing our inner child of four years old, the age in which Kabbal considered that we develop our main features and survival strategies. Kabbal's philosophy seeks to demonstrate that before four years old, each person did everything in order to survive, before this age survival depended on the care of others, at four years old the survival strategies are no longer necessary because we can survive for ourselves.

These techniques described around vipassana are only one sample where breathing and awareness find a common place, that place where your physical and spiritual body can make new discoveries and to demonstrate their highest abilities to find yourself and in the path find inner peace. In the following paragraphs, I show how the practice of vipassana helped me understand some of my abilities and experience deeper feelings hidden in my daily life.

My experience...

I have been many times with myself in a silent meditation, conscious of my breathing and attentive to every change that occurs in my body and my mind. I have experienced loneliness, happiness, confusion and sadness with my inner child and I have to fight with my worst fears and challenges, opening the Pandora's box of my mind.

When I concentrate power in my mind and my breath in silence, I feel as if I have opened a Pandora's box full of surprises and mysteries that reflect my deepest desires, fears, and anxieties.

To observe the natural rhythm of breathing is an individual and collective exercise not just for individuals but also for communities and even cities. Recently, one of my co-workers,

⁷⁴ Clarity process is a system that uses your own innate intelligence to find the Unity that you seek. No need for gurus, surrender, isolation or asceticism. The Clarity Process® revolves around 5 levels of consciousness which can be achieved in workshops, retreats and intensives. These five levels are: Discovery, Evolvement, Freedom, Unity and Ultimate Clarity (The Clarity Project 2014).



Sandra Miranda, in a meeting about the actual of peace and conflict in small cities said; ‘each city breaths differently,’ therefore, every place has its own rhythm. This reality lets us understand that breathing becomes a long, long loop that connects everyone, everywhere. Conflicts and their transformation are continuous, and vipassana helps practitioners in this continuous transition, making them aware of themselves and their environment.

With the practice of vipassana, as I mentioned above, I had the opportunity to talk with my inner child⁷⁵ of four years old and to see her with my adult conscious. That experience showed me that I cannot control all situations; I am simply living the present, an example for transforming my personal conflicts. Also whit this experience, I could understand the power to be conscious about myself and the origin of some of my fears, silence again is a great ally to look inwardly.

Finally, about my experience with vipassana I must say that its contribution to conflict transformation lies in different aspects. First, the intercultural combination of many roots of transrational approaches and elicitive conflict transformation. Second, both are important tools for self-observation and self-actualization. Third, vipassana and quantum light breath are practical methods that allow the frequent practice, guiding conflict transformation at a personal and social level. Fourth, these techniques allow us to understand the conscious and unconscious aspects of human behavior, elements necessary to work on conflict transformation with individuals and communities. All these elements help understand the power of vipassana for conflict transformation, and also how we can observe and train our mind and body to get more out of the process.

⁷⁵ I experienced this technique in my class dedicated to Elicitive Conflict Mapping, during summer term of 2015, with the Core Faculty Member of MA in Peace, Security, Development and Conflict Transformation of UNESCO Chair for Peace Studies, Josefina Echavariá Álvarez.



3.2.2 Mindfulness: The power of here and now

Breathing in, I calm my mind and body.
Breathing out I smile. This is the present moment.
Thich Naht Hanh

There are many practices for meditating, but as the Buddhist monk Thich Naht Hanh mentions, just the action of breathing that brings me to the present moment is a good way to meditate. In the second chapter, I explained that one of the aims of mindfulness meditation is to be aware of the idea of here and now, which I consider an extraordinary method to be conscious and also a method for opening my heart.

Meditation is a way to train the mind into a permanent state of awareness. This state could be achieved by training the person to be fully present and focus his attention on all the senses. The effects of meditation go beyond to mental and spiritual levels. According to the global organization Peace Revolution, “meditation improves our physical body by reducing blood pressure, stress, lowering our heart rate, increasing the brightness of our complexion and making us a naturally calm and stable person” (Peace Revolution 2013, 1).

Also, the ideas of Thich Naht Hanh and Claudio Naranjo related to meditation are important to mention. As I described in the second chapter, these two authors show the importance of ‘the here and now’ in meditation practice, in the material and metaphysical world. Also, as Naht Hanh explains, this living consciousness has to be applied in the present reality, not only in meditation sessions but also in one’s daily life.

I find mindfulness practice useful for conflict transformation. Before practicing it often my mind was in the past or dreaming about the future and I could not see clearly what was happening in the present. As the monk Thich Naht Hanh explains, “We are sucked away into the future –and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life” (Nhat Hanh 1975, 5).



Thich Nhat Hahn explained the power of to be present, describing the mindfulness practice, “I’m being completely myself, following my breath, conscious of my presence, and conscious of my thoughts and actions. There’s no way I can be dosed around mindlessly like a bottle slapped here and there on the waves” (Ibid, 4). Again, breath and consciousness appear as central elements in these practices, demonstrating their power over the physical and mental body. As Thich Nhat Hanh, mentions in one of his lessons: *“Tu silencio interno te vuelve sereno. Practica el arte de no hablar. [...] Instálate en el silencio y la armonía de todo el universo.”*⁷⁶

Complementing Thich Nhat Hahn’s ideas about mindfulness meditation, it is important to mention a recent approach to this practice, led by Jon Kabat-Zinn, mentioned in the first chapter. Kabat-Zinn promotes mindfulness meditation with the aim of reducing stress. He created a special program that today is implemented in several hospitals and health clinics to help patients deal with stress, illness, and pain, called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR). Kabat-Zinn provides us with a current definition of mindfulness that

involves willingness to drop in on yourself to live more in the present moment to stop at times and simply be rather than getting caught up in endless doing while forgetting who is doing all the doing, and why it has to do with not “miss taking” our thoughts for the truth of things, and not being so susceptible to getting caught in emotional storms, storms that so often only compound pain and suffering, our own and that of others. This approach to life is indeed a radical act of love on every level (Kabat-Zinn 2013, 5).

This radical act of love that I can practice with mindfulness is a manifestation of the most positive side of meditation. Kabat-Zinn explains how this kind of meditation is an invitation for everyone to become more familiar with their body, mind, heart and life and discover new things about themselves or notice things that have been ignored, cultivating a better relationship with yourself and with others.

⁷⁶ Your inner silence makes you calm. Practice the art of not speaking. [...] Settle in silence and harmony of the whole universe. Thich Nhat Hanh (Author’s translation)



Keeping the ideas of Kabat-Zinn in mind, I also want to mention a fundamental element of mindfulness meditation: awareness. In the practice of mindfulness, this capacity has a special connotation, as Kabat-Zinn says,

Becoming aware of what is on our minds from moment to moment, and of how our experience is transformed when we do, is precisely what mindfulness practice is about. [...] And just for the record, mindfulness is not about forcing your mind not to wander. It is more about being aware of when the mind is wandering and, as best you can, and as gently you can, redirecting your attention and reconnecting with what is most salient and important for you in that moment, in the here and now of your life unfolding (Kabat-Zinn 2013, 7).

According to these teachings, the next paragraphs illustrate some basic elements of mindfulness meditation that I have recognized through my experience and find pertinent for conflict transformation. I want to show the experience with this practice and tackle some changes that I noticed in the vision of my life, in the path to becoming more aware.

My experience...

The practice of mindfulness came to me in an unexpected way,
I arrived at a special group full of internal codes,
but with openness and trust.
Nobody knows the personal story of somebody else,
but everybody has a special connection
and one aim in common: to meditate in absolute silence.
My name is not important, the important thing is
what I want to share and my personal experience, around silent meditation
with the idea of here and now.

My experience with mindfulness meditation in a large group has been full of surprises and questions. Sometimes I feel comfortable and other times worried, but I always find the experience interesting for my personal growth because I had the opportunity to find myself, thinking about my concerns of here and now and sharing these concerns with others.

When I finished my Peace Studies in Innsbruck and came back to Colombia, I wanted to go deeper into meditation practice, so I looked for a meditation group in my city. I was lucky to find a group that practiced mindfulness meditation in a mystical way, mindfulness in



total silence, with time to share after the meditation. With this experience, I learned that in middle of silence you can connect with yourself and also with many other people. It does not matter if you know their names or personal stories. The idea of mindfulness, as I mentioned above, is to be fully present. It seems obvious, but with the speed of daily life and worries for the future, it is difficult to be fully present, in fact, it is a complex task.

Mindfulness meditation manages to combine different perspectives of energetic and transrational approaches. In first place, taking account the importance of breath in this technique, I can mention that this vital function reflects the resonance with the outward world and also represents harmony or dissonance with that world. It is the reflection of many feelings. On the other hand, breath into transrational perspectives has an integrative function between body and mind. It has a symbolic and practical importance for peace and conflict work because it determines rhythms and movements.

For me, it is important to understand the contribution of mindfulness to conflict transformation. Firstly, being conscious about ourselves and our current setting shows how human beings are part of a complex system, in which every action has an effect on someone or something else. This principle helps us understand how conflicts are interconnected with many situations and conditions. As a consequence, its transformation requires thinking about this connectivity.

Also, mindfulness within the perspective of conflict transformation allows us to understand the miracle of daily life. For me, this contribution is the most valuable because when I understand the miracle of my life, I am able to understand the miracle of other people's lives around the world. With this process, I find the real value of being alive and its benefits. Thus, the idea of conflict and the idea of seeing suffering or harming someone else begins to have a negative impact on my life.



Finally, when I reached a dimension to everyday reality I start to enjoy it more, without remorse for what happened or concerns about what will happen, hence, conflict transformation plays a new role. In many cases, I see the need to avoid them or find short-cuts to really focus on the situations that help me to enjoy every day.

Having understood the power of the here and now in meditation, I turn now my attention to a meditation technique that includes being aware of my body as well as having awareness of what happens in my mind.

3.2.3 Yoga: Flows of energy and strength

‘True yoga is not about the shape of your body but the shape of your life.’
Aadil Palkhivala

Aadil Palkhivala, teacher of yoga as holistic healing practice⁷⁷ explains how the practice of yoga is something deeper than a physical practice; it is a spiritual lifestyle that can transform my individual way of seeing the world and my relationship with others. In the following paragraphs, I focus my attention on the explanation of the main principles of yoga, my experience with this practice, the perspective of some experts, and its role in the process of conflict transformation.

First, it is important to mention that this practice has its origin in ancient traditions. Yoga meant the union between the individual and the Supreme. Practitioners of yoga, best known as Yogis, consider *Patanyali* to be the father of Yoga. He probably lived in the third century BC. He wrote the Yoga Sutra, a book in Sanskrit, in which he compiled and ordered the teachings of yoga philosophies into an eightfold path, called Ashtanga Yoga, *ashta* means eight and the word *anga* means limb (Velaverde Fernández 2013, 89) and (Carrico 2007).

⁷⁷ His teaching style combines body postures with recitations of poetry, philosophical insights and humor.



In order to more deeply understand this philosophy, it is important to mention the basic element of these eight paths. I found a basic guide written by yogi Mara Carrico, which explains the elements of this way of eight steps.

The first path is denominated *Yama*, “deals with one’s ethical standards and sense of integrity, focusing on our behavior and how we conduct ourselves in life.” Within *Yama* there are five basic principles: *Ahimsa* (nonviolence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (continence), *Aparigraha* (non-covetousness).

The second path is *Niyama* has to do with self-discipline and spiritual observances. Within this philosophy, there are also five *Niyamas*: *Saucha* (cleanliness), *Samtosa* (contentment), *Tapas* (heat; spiritual austerities), *Svadyaya* (a study of the sacred scriptures and of one’s self), *Ishvara pranidhana* (surrender to God) Ibid 2007.

The third path, are *Asanas*, the postures practiced in yoga. In the yogic view, the body is a temple of spirit; the care of which is a significant stage of our spiritual growth. Through the practice of *asanas*, we develop discipline and concentration, both of which are necessary for meditation.

The fourth path is *Pranayama*, which refers to breath control that focuses its attention on techniques designed to gain control over the respiratory process while recognizing the association between breath, mind, and emotions.

The fifth path is known as *Pratyahara*, which means withdrawal or sensory transcendence. It is during this stage that we make the conscious effort to draw our awareness away from the external world and outside stimuli. This practice lets us step back and look at ourselves.

The sixth path is called *Dharana*, also known as concentration. This state leads us away from distractions, “we learn how to slow down the thinking process by concentrating on a



single mental object: a specific energetic center in the body, an image of a deity, or the silent repetition of a sound” (Ibid, 2007).

The seventh path is Dhyana, meditation or contemplation. I recognize this stage as the uninterrupted flow of concentration. “At this stage, the mind has been quieted, and in the stillness, it produces few or no thoughts at all” (Ibid, 2007).

The final path or step is denominated *Samadhi*, the state of ecstasy. The meditator comes to realize a profound connection to the Divine, interconnectedness with all living things, with this realization comes different sensations and ideas. This final step, when enlightenment is reached, is described as

The peace that passeth all understanding; the experience of bliss and being at one with the Universe. [...] What Patanjali has described as the completion of the yogic path is what, deep down, all human beings aspire to: peace. We also might give some thought to the fact that this ultimate stage of yoga—enlightenment—can neither be bought nor possessed (Carrico 2007).

I find several of these elements compelling. On the one hand, the idea of nonviolence as a basic principle, the idea of connecting your physical body and your breath with your mind in order to achieve spiritual growth and recognize the link between breath, mind and emotions, and last but not least the experience of finding peace. Also, the importance of the body conceived as a temple of spirit that I have to care for and nurture.

Additionally, the importance of inner peace in vipassana and mindfulness meditation, in yogic philosophy; inner peace is a primary goal of this practice, as Angela mentions, yoga has the powerful technique of creating a sense of inner peace. In fact, one of its purposes is to find the root of the mental conflicts and cut those roots.

Swami Veda Bharati explains that “Peace is an inner quest or an urge, not derived from external conditions. We seek peace because our mind seeks to be easeful, at comfort. Because, ‘how can one not at peace [*a-shanta*] derive pleasure or comfort?’” (Baharati 2014,



193). Finding this interior peace is the challenge, in consequence, Swami Veda Bharati points out some aspects necessary for inner peace:

The acceptance that the trans-qualitative Divine Peace-Being, who is facing in all directions in one's interior space, grants and mental comfort, meditation and yoga practices, conquest of senses, intense desire for the pacification of the poisons of worldly involvements, observation of those who are at peace because of these means. When interior peace is obtained through these means, one develops the capability to calm one's own mind, the waves of the mind subside, the senses gradually calm down and no longer burn with uncontrolled and unchanneled desires and the glance and the very presence conveys peace (Baharati 2014, 195).

It is also important to understand what peace means, and Swami Veda Bharati has an accurate definition, stating, "Peace is a state of consciousness and mind that is free of internal conflict(s) within an individual as well as collectively within, and consequently among, groups of individuals known as nations religions or ethnic units and [the entities known by] such other terms" (Veda Bharati 2014, 191).

Precisely, talking about the conflict in yoga practice and when I think about its transformation, it is helpful to mention how the practice of yoga can contribute to leaving behind the blockages of energy that often are a manifestation of conflict. The idea of the practice is to avoid fighting with the energy that flows, at a personal and social level.

When I talk about the social level, I thought, how can I extrapolate the ideas of yogic philosophy to daily events in my country, where conflict and the continuing need to identify good and bad people are a priority for the society that wants punish and reject those considered to be bad? From that query stems my interest in applying the transrational conception of peace in this situation. As Wolfgang Dietrich clarifies,

The transrational approach views crimes as blockages of energy. A crime causes sorrow, fear, outrage, and anger. It is, therefore, a dysfunction in the flow of interhuman relationships. In order for such a dysfunction to be resolved, more work is needed than identifying and punishing the criminal. Indeed, in transrational peace, the significant work begins with the resolution of the crime (which is not a priority in the larger context). In order for the energy blockage that results from it to be transformed, the crime has to be twisted, *verwunden*.⁷⁸ In other words, it must be remembered and neutralized, so that the

⁷⁸ According to the original version of Dietrich's book: With 'twisting' the author applies the meaning originally given by Martin Heidegger to the word '*Verwindung*'. This word is more akin to recovering from a disease or dealing with pain than to a technology-driven solution to metaphysics. It was the contemporary Italian



social system can grow through it and, thus matured, discover and develop new choices (Dietrich 2013, 8).

The new choices mentioned by Dietrich are part of my research and today more than ever in Colombia, I think that it is necessary to create new options for transforming conflicts that I have on a personal level as well as a social level.

Precisely in this discovery path, I met a teacher of Yoga, Angela Carreño, and I took that opportunity to discuss with her the meaning of yoga and its contribution to conflict transformation. Angela is a Colombian woman, journalist, and internationalist, who has worked around the world with migrants. She is also an internationally certified yoga teacher who learned about this practice in India. Moreover, she lived in Thailand where she learned about meditation techniques, Reiki, Ayurveda and Thai massages. Three months ago she returned to Colombia and she was open to sharing what she had learned in her years of pilgrimage. In this process, she taught me about new yoga practices such as Hatha Yoga and Restorative Yoga.

Some of her answers regarding the idea and meaning of Yoga and its relation to silence are particularly interesting. First of all, when I asked her about the meaning of Yoga, besides mentioning the idea of union, she explained to me that “the word comes from the Sanskrit root ‘Yuj’, that means to join. It is the practice that helps you to join body, head, spirit and the universe and help human beings become aware of our deepest nature” (Carreño, via email, 18 September 2016).

After taking that first step towards understanding yoga, I wanted to understand the role silence plays in this practice, which becomes a way of understanding the world. Angela gave me an illustrative answer about the role of silence.

Silencing the mind and body is the ultimate purpose of yoga. Silence helps us with introspection and watching the activities of the mind, it is the best environment to

philosopher Gianni Vattimo who introduced the word into postmodern continental theory a field from which some peace theory has drawn (Dietrich 2013, 229).



meditate, even though advanced meditators can do it in any circumstance. Also if you are in silence you can hear the breathing better that is the most important tool we have and the one we ignore the most, controlling our breathing helps us to cope with panic attacks, fear, pain and any discomfort. No in vain pregnant women take courses about breathing to better manage the situation during the delivery. Silence of speech could be the easiest practice, but silence the mind is the most difficult (Carreño, interview via email, 18 September, 2016).

Silence joined by the importance of breath becomes an essential principle of yoga. For Wolfgang Dietrich, there are multiple breath-oriented approaches to elicitive conflict transformation, which allows us to go deeper into the path of transformation. He states, “Breath is an expression of life, precisely speaking, of the moving nature of universal life energy. (...) when conflict is understood as relational, the breath of the involved parties is relevant to the dynamics, perception and transformation of the conflict” (Dietrich 2013, 45).

This expression of life is exactly what yoga seeks to release, and for me, it is a clear idea of how silence can be a medium for conflict transformation because, in this case, it allows us to find ourselves and be with the universe. As Angela Carreño states,

Yoga helps us to silence our mind, a really hard experience, mostly nowadays in the Western world where we are exposed to information, music and activities all the time. The objective to silence the mind is to discern the Self hidden within us. Also, it helps us to learn, to listen and to be comfortable in silence. There are other kinds of silence that can be practiced: silencing our desires, silencing our ego, silencing critical judgment, etc (Carreño, interview via email, 18 September 2016).

As I mentioned in the second chapter, when I explained some of the main ideas promoted by Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, silence and meditation are fundamental elements in achieving self-knowledge. Silence becomes a fundamental aspect of yoga; silence in this practice and even in the real world, seems to be something unreachable, something that easily escapes from our daily routine. It is a challenge to be comfortable in silence, as Angela Carreño said. Regarding this critical aspect, I asked her, how does she believe that yoga could help to transform a conflict in her life? She replied,

Yoga has the powerful technique of creating a sense of inner peace, harmony, and clarity of mind. It teaches us to be patient, humble and to observe. These three could be very useful to transform a conflict or to cope with it calmly. Yoga practice is not about



relaxation, it is about how to cope with the discomfort of your body. It is a practice of how to manage internal conflict and how to improve your mental, energetic and physical state step by step (Carreño, via email, 18 September 2016).

This idea shows me a new way to see yoga, how to deal with discomfort. In many cases discomfort is seen as something to be avoided in life, in relationships, and in political dynamics. However, in daily life I know that it is common, it happens very often, and if I can deal with physical discomfort, I also have to deal with mental discomfort, a basic principle to transform a personal, social or political conflict.

My experience...

The union between body, mind, and spirit comes to my mind when I practice yoga. Focusing on my strength and inner power drives me to new goals and new physical and mental levels that I never thought possible. I have practiced different Yoga techniques from *Nidra Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Kundalini Yoga...* but really I have practiced just one Yoga, the practice that connects my heart to my mind and my body.

This practice that I describe as a way to put pieces together, allows us to be aware of our personal interest and recognize how to act in different situations. For this reason, Yoga implies discipline and continuous discovery. I am just starting the path, but I am interested to know more about this practice.

The full meaning of Yoga goes beyond understanding the theory behind the practice. Yoga for many people is a way of life. My experience with the practice of Yoga is recent, but interesting because I have discovered the limits of my body and also the capacity of my mind.

In line with the idea of connecting the mind, body, and spirit with the universe is the concepts of energetic peace and transrational peace. In them the idea of energy and universe play a key role. The awareness of being part of a greater beginning allows us to understand that human relationships are complex but essential for understanding the dynamics of the



universe and also the conflicts. I believe that within the practice of yoga, silence is fundamental because it allows us to listen to ourselves, our breath, our body and our mind.

To listen ourselves is the dynamic that opens the door for self-knowledge; that is for me a key aspect in the training of conflict transformation with transrational perspective as a peace worker and a person involved in different conflicts. For that reason, I find the practice of yoga as an example of how silence can contribute to the comprehension of conflict transformation because it includes: self-awareness and openness, selective authenticity, attention and empathy in relationships and respect for the self-healing powers of the conflict on the technical level, which Wolfgang Dietrich mentions as some of the minimums for elicitive conflict transformation.

Finally, I can say that yoga is a tool to be more aware of my body, control my mind and find inner peace. It is an everyday challenge that also teaches me to be humble and accept my body and mind, knowing that there are always more abilities to explore and develop. For the purpose of my study, I consider that virtues such as non-stealing, truthfulness, nonviolence, non-covetousness and continence, promoted by the yogic philosophy are important things to work on for conflict transformation, especially in cases when balance and calmness are required.

Thus, yoga is the last way I present as a meditation technique in which silence, breath, awareness and inner peace converge. Multiple lessons appear through self-knowledge and personal growth, some of which I hope to apply in the process of conflict transformation as a peace worker.

After explaining different methods used to find inner peace, in the next section, I analyze silence as a motor for social changes, showing different experiences that are related to my personal story and hoping to contribute to finding alternatives for conflict transformation in my current setting, full of confusions and doubts.



3.3 My experience with silence as a social mobilizer: Do dreams come true?

“Que hoy se silencien los fusiles es histórico.”⁷⁹

Alan Jara

This sentence ‘Today the guns are silenced is historical,’ was stated by Alan Jara, the current director of the Colombian office dedicated to assisting victims of the armed conflict,⁸⁰ and it serves as significant proof of change in the history of my country. Today Colombia goes along the path to peace and shows a new face to the world. For a period of fifty-two years of conflict between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP), the idea to quiet the weapons of the guerrilla is almost a reality after four years of negotiation and a new peace deal between the actors.

I found this reference interesting for two reasons. The first one is because silence in this context means an enormous change, and second, because Alan Jara was kidnapped by the guerrilla for eight years.⁸¹ Nowadays, he is in charge of defending other victims, and with his words, he demonstrates his ability to forgive.

In Colombia this idea of forgiveness does not seem to be easy. In a historic opportunity to vote in a plebiscite to support or not the peace agreements with the guerrilla, in 2016, the majority of Colombians decided to vote against it. Today, Colombia is facing an uncertainty situation regarding the future of the armed conflict, marked continuously by revenge. But, I still keep the hope of peace in Colombia, when I expressed my deep sadness by the results of the plebiscite, one of my friends Ela Rowek, from Innsbruck University, said to me “Keep your head up, keep your heart strong.”

⁷⁹ ‘Today the guns are silenced is historical’ (Author’s translation).

⁸⁰ In Spanish *Unidad de Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*, more information about it is available at: <http://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/en>

⁸¹ He was kidnapped on July 15, 2001 in the municipality of Lejanías of Meta department at the time visiting some projects built under his administration, moving in a vehicle of the United Nations, the organization that invited him, after completing his duties as governor of Meta. He was kidnapped by front 26 of the FARC-EP, who stopped the vehicle and forced the former governor down. According to the FARC guerrillas, Jara would be subjected to a ‘political’ trial to account for and be no help against them. He was released on February 23, 2009 through a humanitarian exchange.



In this particular case, it is very important to highlight how silence can contribute to the transformation of a social conflict. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the transrational understanding of silence implies finding alternatives in the midst of confusion. As Dietrich mentions, quoting Lederach, the key abilities of peace workers in elicitive conflict,

The capacity to see the situation beyond the urgent push for an immediate definition of the problem and a quick solution; the capacity to integrate multiple time frames; the capacity to turn contradictions, opposites, situational dilemmas, and paradoxes into choices; the capacity to be on friendly terms with fundamental complexity of conflicts and the capacity to see identity needs behind seemingly factual issues (Dietrich 2013, 12).

Currently, Alan Jara and I are peace workers in a country with a long armed conflict, with enormous challenges because every day the explicit violence captures our attention. Victims and victimizers are in constant exchange, the relation between them is like an eternal spiral. In other words, both of them continuously exchange their roles, one day one person is a victim and the next day can be a victimizer.

To avoid falling into this spiral, it is important to remember our mission and our limits, as peace workers, precisely Wolfgang Dietrich states,

As peace workers are always part of the system of healing of which they want to contribute to, they need a high degree of intuition, empathy, ethical maturity, and aesthetic awareness which can be gained via experiencing the inner mountain lake –the transpersonal exploration of the peace (Dietrich 2012, 265).

In the path to becoming a peace worker who uses silence as a medium for conflict transformation, I found it interesting to mention the practical experience with meditation in the middle of the negotiation between the guerrilla and the Colombian government, led by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.⁸²

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is a 60-year-old Indian guru, who in 1981 founded an international, non-profit, educational and humanitarian organization, called the “Art of Living,” that offers courses focused on teaching breathing techniques and personal development in around 150

⁸² In 1981, after ten days in Silence and practicing meditation in the river Bhadra, located in the south of India, he created ‘sudrashan kriya’, a breathe and meditation technique. (Granja 2016)



countries. Its educational and self-development programs offer powerful tools to eliminate stress and foster a sense of wellbeing. Appealing not only to a specific population, these practices have proven effective globally and at all levels of society. In 1997, he also founded the International Association for Human Values (IAHV) to coordinate sustainable development projects, nurture human values and coordinate conflict resolution in association with The Art of Living in India, Africa, and South America (The Art of Living 2016).

As an ambassador of peace, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar plays a key role in conflict resolution and spreads his vision of non-violence at public forums and gatherings world-wide. Precisely, since 2014, a Colombian delegation asked Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to collaborate with the Colombian peace process. In 2015, the guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar came to Colombia and to Cuba (where the guerrilla delegates and the Colombian government advanced the negotiation process), to intervene for the first time in a Latin-American conflict and start a deep transformation process guided by meditation.

Ravi Shankar had several rounds of discussions with the FARC-EP members, victims and governmental representatives in an exercise of confidence-building in the peace process. In fact, as is mentioned in the news,

FARC has requested Ravi Shankar to actively participate in the peace process. He said: “In this conflict, everyone should be considered as victims. And inside every culprit, there is a victim crying for help”. After many discussions, the FARC finally agreed to embrace the Gandhian principle of non-violence. Commander of the FARC, Ivan Marquez, declared in the press conference that they would adopt it. The FARC agreed that hatred had derailed the peace process. Marquez said, “We will work for peace and justice for all the people of Colombia” (The Economic Times 2015).

As the guru mentions, in this transformation process everyone should be considered victim. In consequence he explains with his words, how tolerance to support this process can be reached through spirituality, saying:

El verdadero trabajo empieza ahora. La gente que ha estado en la selva por tanto tiempo, cuando vuelvan a la sociedad necesita un toque de curación, al igual que las víctimas. Las víctimas deben poder dejar atrás el pasado y buscar un futuro más brillante. La consciencia de la víctima y del culpable no son para nada positivas para la



sociedad. Debemos curar la consciencia de las víctimas y por el otro lado, necesitamos lograr la reconciliación con la consciencia de los culpables. Cuando una persona siente que es culpable, va a querer justificarlo; inconscientemente va a victimizarse. Entonces la mente se vuelve muy compleja y en esta situación la meditación y los ejercicios de respiración pueden hacer una diferencia muy grande. Esto lo digo desde mi experiencia, habiendo trabajado con victimarios y personas en las cárceles⁸³ (Granja 2016).

The role of meditation in this process shows me how the idea of reconciliation and change can be present during the transformation of social and armed conflicts that implies concentration and deeply spiritual and mental work. The past and future are constant references in the process of transformation, according to the guru, to leave the past behind and look for a brighter future is a big step for people involved and engaged with the change process.

Inside my cultural context, the exercise of leaving behind the past is an intricate task, in my perspective. The Colombian past has been marked by violence and its many direct and indirect victims are in the eye of the hurricane. The whole Colombian society, including myself, has suffered from this violent context. For that reason, the past has a special place in our collective imagination, but sometimes it seems that we cannot move forward; the past is our permanent and eternal place.

In consequence, I think that the change implied by meditation allows us to think about the idea of here and now, leaving the past behind, forgiving and looking toward the future. In fact, when the guru explains how to overcome the war through spirituality he says, *“La guerra empieza con la falta de entendimiento, de comunicación, de confianza. Entonces, si se*

⁸³ The real work starts now. People who have been in the jungle for so long, when they return to society need a healing touch, like victims. Victims should be able to leave the past behind and look to a brighter future. The consciousness of the victim and the offender are not all positive for society. We must heal the consciousness of the victims and on the other hand, we need to achieve reconciliation with the consciousness of the culprits. When a person feels that he or she is guilty, he or she will want to justify it; unconsciously he or she is going to victimize. Then the mind becomes very complex and in this situation meditation and breathing exercises can make a big difference. I say this from my experience, because I have worked with victimizers and different people in prisons. Author's translation.



quitan estas cosas y la gente piensa desde una perspectiva más amplia, cualquier conflicto se puede resolver.”⁸⁴

With his words and his practices, the guru exemplifies a whole process of elicitive conflict transformation. He shows the importance of analyzing cultural patterns, using cultural resources, calling for nonviolent mechanisms with public participation given the human needs and the roots of the conflict. In the words of John Paul Lederach, the structural and cultural levels of conflict transformation have to be worked on from personal and relational changes. One example mentioned by the guru about his perception of the members of the FARC-EP reflects this perspective,

*Yo veo a todo el mundo como parte de mí. Toda persona estresada y tensa es totalmente diferente, y ellos están así. Para una madre, si el niño está llorando y haciendo pataleta –lo que sea que esté haciendo el niño–, la madre sabe por qué no comió, por qué no durmió; ve más allá de su comportamiento. Yo no veo el comportamiento de ellos, veo la causa de ese comportamiento. Y la causa es el estrés y la falta de este conocimiento, la falta de tranquilidad*⁸⁵ (Granja 2016).

As Krishnamurti, Thich Naht Hanh and Swami Veda Baharati state, the guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar illustrate how the mind has full power and is capable of generating deep changes in each person and his/her community. As he answered during one of the meetings in Havana (Cuba), when one of the members of the guerrilla asked, “Do you think spirituality is possible without social justice?” He says, “No, social justice is the first step of spirituality, in fact, spirituality brings social justice, one brings the other” (Shankar 2016).

He follows a holistic view of silence, integrating the idea of rationality with the importance of spirituality in order to transform the conflict. He states, “to seek peace we must make an extra effort” (Shankar 2016). In fact, as a product of the process with the guerilla, Sri

⁸⁴ The war begins with the lack of understanding, communication, trust. So if these things are removed and people think from a broader perspective, any conflict can be solved. Author’s translation.

⁸⁵ I see everyone as part of me. All stressed out and tense person is totally different, and they are well. For a mother, if the child is crying tantrum and doing-what it is you’re doing the boy, the mother knows why he did not eat, why he did not sleep; she sees beyond his behavior. I do not see the behavior of them, I see the cause of this behavior. And the cause is stress and lack of this knowledge, lack of tranquility. Author’s translation.



Sri Ravi Shankar helped the main members of FARC-EP accept the principle of non-violence, publically announcing a cease-fire in Colombia.

The lessons of this process come in different directions. On one side, the idea of recognizing ourselves as victims makes us understand we all have things to heal and allows us to put ourselves in the shoes of others. On the other hand, he states the idea that I mentioned in this chapter, that we are part of a whole, one way or another everyone is connected with people and also with the universe. As a consequence, our actions have a direct effect on our surroundings, so if we want to transform it, we should transform ourselves.

Now, the holistic view of silence also lets us understand silence as something alive, with an active role in the transformation of conflicts. In the second chapter, I mentioned how Andres Cancimance wrote an analysis about the power of silence as a mechanism of resistance and therefore as a way of conflict transformation within a transrational perspective.

In a personal interview, Cancimance explained how he discovered distinct silences within Colombian conflict, using the south of the country that suffered the impact of the violence as an example, exercised by the armed actors, and why silence for him is a medium for conflict transformation. In first place, about the multiplicity of silence he described the following perspective:

El silencio tiene un polisemia sumamente rica es como que hay una variedad enorme, yo llegué a categorizar el silencio en distintos niveles a partir de la narrativa de la gente. [...] El primer silencio con lo que me encontré estaba muy ligado al trauma porque fue más en la experiencia de víctimas de una masacre, pero incluso ahí en medio de los sobrevivientes, uno podía ver las distintas maneras de silencio. En los casos de imposición del silencio que me encontraba estaba relacionados con que la gente no podía procesar sus duelos, el campesino no podía decir me duele o confrontar al paramilitar por el dolor que le estaba generando determinada perdida y eso hacía que el paramilitar impusiera una lógica de silenciamiento, ahí el silencio estaba asociado a cosas no se podían nombrar. Entonces los campesinos, decidieron que debían procesar su dolor, que ese dolor debía salir por algún lado y procesarse, me encontré con la experiencia de un grupo de hombres y mujeres, que señalaban: creemos que la manera de expresarnos es a partir de la literatura, entonces nos vamos a organizar alrededor de la biblioteca pública y vamos a crear una revista de literatura y a partir de ahí creemos sesiones de poesía y de cuento, pero lo que más nos interesa es crear sesiones donde la gente nos escriba sobre cosas dolorosas que no puede decir porque el contexto no se los permitía.[...] Era una estrategia de confrontar al paramilitar y decir oiga yo puedo procesar mi dolor y usted no me puede impedir que yo



*expresé que esto me está doliendo, esa es una manera de cómo el silencio ya no era un silencio impositivo, sino era un silencio que estaba más bien ligado a la praxis, a la acción, porque el silencio es acción para nosotros que nos permite sobrevivir*⁸⁶ (Cancimance, personal interview, 6 September, 2016).

This description about the recognition of silence as medium of expression was an interesting discovery. Silence is a way to process pain in the midst of the armed conflict, but also a way to survive. They used literature as a way to express their feelings and their sorrow. Men and women, according to the above description, remained silent as a mean of survival, a way to protect their loved ones and a way to find new artistic alternatives to express themselves. Their silence thus, became an action with a threefold purpose, recognizing different silences in different moments with different meanings and expressions.

Silence, in the middle of armed conflict, has different connotations, as I explained when I started this section. It is possible to see silence as something negative, a product of social trauma, but it is also possible to understand silence as a way of social transformation. Cancimance supports my vision regarding this duality, saying,

*Entre las dos caras del silencio siempre hay una capacidad de acción y capacidad de respuesta. [...] Si uno dice que caracteriza al silencio como práctica de resistencia es que se hace en la vida cotidiana, que es un acto sutil que contraviene un poder determinado impuesto y que se asume entonces como una actitud. La actitud del silencio no puede verse sola, el silencio no puede verse aislado, éste debe estar ligado al tema de la entidad, el tema de la comunidad, de recursos sociales y otros factores que nutren esa idea del silencio*⁸⁷ (Cancimance, personal interview, 6 September, 2016).

⁸⁶ Silence has an extremely rich polysemy, there is a huge variety. I came to categorize the silence at different levels from the narrative of the people. [...] The first silence what I found was closely linked to trauma because it was more on the experience of victims of slaughter, but even there among the survivors, one could see the different ways of silence.

In cases of imposition of silence that I was related that people could not process their pain, the farmer could not say it hurts or confront the paramilitary about the pain, caused by certain loss and that made the paramilitary impose a squelching logic, there was silence associated with things they could not name. Then the peasants decided they must process their pain, that pain should go somewhere and processed, I found the experience of a group of men and women, who pointed out: we believe that the way we express ourselves is from literature then we will organize around the public library and we will create a literary magazine and from there we sessions of poetry and story, but what interests us most is create sessions where people write us about painful things that do not you can tell because the context is not allowed. [...] It was a strategy to confront the paramilitary and say listen: I can process my pain and you I cannot stop me to express that it is hurting me, that is one way of how the silence was no longer an imposed silence, but it was a silence that was rather linked to the praxis, action, because silence is action for us that allows us to survive (Author's translation).

⁸⁷ Between the two sides of silence there is always a capacity for action and responsiveness. [...] If I say what is the main characteristic of silence as a practice of resistance is that it is in everyday life action, and it is a subtle act that violates power given and then it is assumed an attitude. The attitude of silence can not be analyzed in isolation; it must be linked to the issue of the entity, the issue of community, social resources and other factors that nourish the idea of silence (Author's translation).



The interesting point for me about this explanation is the capacity for action and responsiveness of silence. Silence is something that allows action and mobility toward a social cause. This condition converts silence into an outlook for living related to multiple aspects within a community, leading to conflict transformation in personal and social aspects. As Wolfgang Dietrich mentions, “transforming a conflict does not consist of random change, but of change that allows the participants in a system to become aware of additional choices[...] Conflict transformation is the search for new perspectives and options in relation to the problem” (Dietrich 2013, 9).

Cancimance also explained why he considers silence as a medium for transforming conflicts, with his experience working with the communities in the south of Colombia, telling me,

La base de la actitud de silencio estaba muy ligada a la esperanza de la vida, es decir si algo caracteriza la actitud del silencio es que las comunidades tienen esperanza por vivir y cuando eso mueve a una comunidad, esa esperanza por sobrevivir, por rehacerse, por reconfigurarse, ahí estamos hablando directamente de una actitud de silencio que transforma. Pero cuando la comunidad pierde ese silencio esperanzador estamos en el escenario de la inmovilidad de la no acción, estamos en el silencio traumático. En el plano de lo individual lo que la comunidad empezó a hacer luego de la salida de los actores armados, fue procesar sus propios duelos, su gran hazaña es reconstruirse a ellos mismos porque nadie va a venir a hacerlo por ellos⁸⁸ (Cancimance, personal interview, 6 September, 2016).

Hope is something that we need, as Colombians, to keep the hope of life in order to move the community and start over is something remarkable in the middle of the political and social uncertainty that we are facing. We cannot fall into the traumatic silence that Andrés mentions because it is the silence that paralyzes us and prohibits us moving forward and finding alternatives to transform the conflict. The nuances of silence that Cancimance shows

⁸⁸ The base of the attitude of silence was closely linked to the hope of life, something that characterizes the attitude of silence is that communities have hope to live and when it moves to a community, that hope to survive, remaking by reconfiguring, here we are talking directly to an attitude of silence that transforms. But when the community loses hope that we are in the stage of immobility of inaction, we are in the stage of traumatic silence. At the individual level what the community began to do after leaving the armed actors, was process their own grief, their great feat was rebuilding themselves because no one would come and do it for them (Author’s translation).



with his research and the idea of the power of silence to transform a situation. It is something that is worth rescuing from this approach and that I consider relevant for the work done by peace workers.

Precisely, the following explanations show how silence and some techniques applied by the negotiators and communities can be used for transforming the conflict and creating alternatives to find a consensual solution to the current situation in my country. Silence here is also an example of transrational peace; it shows that it can heal the deep wounds of the soul, with a process of meditation with a group of victimizers, silence as the motivation of social protest, and as a mechanism of daily resistance within a context of war and sorrow.

My experience...

When I started to write my thesis, the peace agreement in Colombia between the government and the guerrilla, was only a dream, today I believed that it was a reality. My first thought about this historic event was that “dreams come true.” When I woke up from my dream, in an emotive event on 26 September 2016, with a deep minute of silence all the country and the guerrillas not only remember to the victims but also ask for forgiveness... but still the majority of Colombian people are not convinced about the idea of peace, forgiveness, and prudence are essentials in these moments, silence can be an exit to finding peace.

Following this chapter of my life with a personal, familiar and cultural story signed by violence, as I mentioned in the first chapter, the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, is a new opportunity to start over for a nation that does not recognize alternative ways to transform its conflicts. However, the referendum for the peace agreement resulted in statement of the Colombian people against the agreement with the guerilla FARC-EP. In this moment, pain and hopelessness seize those who believe that it is possible to achieve peace with the guerrillas.

In this context of conflict, I see two faces of silence. The first one is the dark face of silence when silence is a way to hide the memories of violence and oblivion. The second one



is the luminous face of silence when silence represents the ability to be resilient and the idea to reconnect my mind, my heart and my spirit using my abilities to start over.

To understand the dark face of silence, it is important to remember the interviews that I quoted in the first chapter and it also shaped my own experience. One of my interviewees, Jorge Moreno, an expert in security topics, mentioned that my perspective of seeing silence as medium for transforming conflicts was something difficult in the middle of a conflict, such as the Colombian conflict, and even utopian conflicts. Lina López and Rosario Velásquez, peace worker and lawyer, expressed their doubts about remaining silent in a context determined by an armed conflict because on multiple occasions it can be associated with fear, complicity, deep sorrow, and political paralysis. These are some examples of how silence has distinct connotations and how its practice can have a negative impact on society. In fact, many times I remained silent to the inability to respond to violence and astonishment caused by events that justified an endless war, but this exploration is an opportunity to expose reasons for changing these perceptions.

The luminous side of silence and its relation to hope are something that I discover with silence in the middle of the conflict in my country. My silence has been transformed; nowadays my silence is for listening to different opinions, trying to understand the motivations behind certain actions. My silence is for understanding how my story signed by violence has to be a motor for transforming the experience of my country and avoid repeating it. Silence is now an opportunity to remember all the victims and their families that I met in middle of the conflict, silence is now this mental moment that opens a new door for transforming my future.

As third example, in order to understand silence as a social mobilizer, I have to mention the ‘March of Silence’ in the city of Bogotá, after the rejection towards the adoption of the peace agreement with the FARC–EP in a national referendum. I had the opportunity to



participate in this demonstration, a mobilization of the citizens with the aim of demanding to the national Government and the political parties in the opposition to sign the peace agreement. Despite my hopelessness, the massive march showed me that there is still social mobilization promoting peaceful options.

For me, the march had three moments: before, the day of the march, and after. The day before I received an invitation to march in silence for Colombian peace, it said: “*Vamos juntos a marchar en silencio porque el conflicto nos duele a todos y todos queremos la paz. Queremos marchar en contra la abstención, la polarización política, la violencia y la intolerancia*”⁸⁹. The click was immediate; the silence would be the social character of social mobilization, in the country where the violence has caused painful silences for years. Despite the uncertainty, it was worth giving it a chance.

The invitation followed with these words, “*La intención es expresar de manera contundente y unificada nuestros deseos de poner fin al conflicto con las FARC y darle inicio a la postergada construcción de paz en Colombia.*”⁹⁰ The aims were clear, but after the public voting on October 2 of 2016, the choices are limited, my distrust about participation was strong, I thought that very few people would follow the call, but even so I was willing to see the power of the call of silence.

The day of the march I was invited to participate of it with a group of friends, who like me, wish that the peace process evolves further. At the meeting point, everything was a surprise, thousands of people wearing white clothes, with candles and messages to support the peace process. The walk was slow, overwhelming, full of ‘shhh,’ silences and some songs, the anthem of Colombia played loudly. During the march, I discovered the amazing power of

⁸⁹ Let’s go together to march in silence because the conflict hurts everyone and we all want peace. We want to go against abstention, political polarization, violence and intolerance (Author’s translation).

⁹⁰ The intention is to express strong and unified way our desire for an end to the conflict with the FARC and give a start to the delayed of peacebuilding in Colombia (Author’s translation).



silence in social movements, silences that wanted to scream that our deepest desire is peace for Colombia.

After the march, with a positive surprise, I could see how silence was able to mobilize thousands of people around a common cause of peace. One of the media publications stated,

*Eran miles y miles de personas en silencio. Casi todas con velas y banderas blancas y unas ganas de gritar que se aguantaron por mucho tiempo. [...] Fue un silencio poderoso, convocado por universitarios, para marchar por la paz y contra la guerra. [...] Juntos lograron que miles de personas reemplazaran las arengas por el silencio. Un silencio que solo rompió el himno nacional. [...] El silencio fue tan potente como un grito humano*⁹¹ (León 2016).

With the idea that the silence was as powerful as a human cry, I would like to believe that the power of silence that was able to mobilize nearly 30,000 people, re-directed the negotiations of the peace agreements, between the Colombian Government and the FARC in a new phase, in which all the living forces of Colombia will be represented. This was for me the clearest example of the power of silence in the middle of the conflict; silence can transform conflicts, in contrast to many situations in which words end up seeking to injure the protagonists of ideas contrary to ours.

As I mentioned in the second chapter, when I referred to demonstrations such as *Mujeres de negro* and *La Marcha del Silencio* in Uruguay, it is clear how this kind of expressions through silence seek conflict transformation at a relational, cultural and structural level.

To close this section, it is important to rescue the word hope. The alternatives based on silence that I presented are just some of the possibilities to work on conflict transformation and the idea of change in the Colombian reality. The mission of thousands of peace workers

⁹¹ There were thousands and thousands of people in silence. Almost all with candles and white flags and a desire to shout that they endured for a long time. [...] It was a powerful silence, organized by academics, for marching for peace and against war. [...] Together managed to thousands of people to replace the rants by silence. A silence that was only broken by the national anthem. [...] The silence was as powerful as a human cry (Author's translation).



in my country, today more than ever, is to seek and find alternatives to transform the armed conflict that we have been facing for many years.

In the last section of this chapter, I want to present how silence can be an innovative element within practices of dancing and theater which also have a deep, transformative power in the lives of people and their environments.

3.4 Silence as a way of expression: Dancing and Theater

Dancing, singing, storytelling, and silence
are the four universal healing salves.
Gabrielle Roth

The dancer and teacher Gabrielle Roth explained how silence can be included in artistic expressions and is a way to heal. The importance of dancing, singing, silence and storytelling in different cultures and social settings connects these four expressions and explains behaviors. It is also useful for transforming lives and surroundings.

There are multiple expressions of silence in literature, music, and dance, but I want to focus my attention on some of them. First of all, I found the approach to silence in dancing expressed by the artist Gabrielle Roth to be stimulating. Roth, just as meditation teachers, found that breath and silence are key aspects in knowing ourselves and our surroundings. She expressed the power and impact of breath stating, “The first time that I experienced stillness in my dance was after the lyrical trance/dance. Each breath was like a giant wave rolling through me and crashing against the imaginary boundaries of my body” (Roth 1998, 177).

With this giant wave, she introduces for me to a new aspect of meditation, a moving meditation, explaining that, “The mystery revealed me to myself as simply moving meditation: I had to move to find the stillness, I had to stop dancing to feel the dance. For the first time, I understood the difference between the power of being and the power of doing” (Ibid, 177). These words show me how silent movement is full of mysteries and discoveries



eager to come to light, and how silence can change not only one moment but also our whole life.

Moving meditation got origin to the practice of Five Rhythms, this method is a “dynamic movement practice—a practice of being in your body—that ignites creativity, connection, and community, it facilitates deep and unending explorations, moving the dancer beyond self-imposed limitations and isolation into new depths of creativity and connection” (5RHYTHMS 2016). The creator of five rhythms, Gabrielle Roth, is like an open door for entering into the process of stillness, in which the body feels the supremacy of compassion, and it passes through a process of healing, where the spirit feels calmness and the dancer can meet himself/herself. She spoke about the stillness process,

Move in super slow motion. Gather your energy inward. Sink into the emptiness. Disappear in the dance. Occasionally stop and feel your shape. Watch your breath. If your mind is chattering, do some quick moves between stops [...] And in this womb of stillness, in this song of silence, embrace the mystery that is you. It’s all a prayer (Roth 1998, 181).

The sensations described by Roth, encourage using intuition with dance, leading to a disengagement process, a moment of inner silence where worries are forgotten and affections are deleted. It is a moment of disconnection where you reach a mental silence that allows you to be alone with yourself. In my experience, in this state of loneliness and stillness, you have total control of your body and mind and you are able to change the world and to find exits. Even in moments of total darkness, a transformation can be real.

As in meditation, breath plays a central role in dancing. This action lets us follow the rhythm and the flow of energy, as Gabrielle Roth states, “Breath is a promiscuous lover. The breath you just took was in someone else moment ago, and when you let go, it’ll move on and become part of some else. Breath keeps everything moving, without it there can be no dance” (Roth, 1997, quoted by Dietrich 2013, 45).

As I mentioned previously, silence can be part of a melody. In order to open the discussion about methods, I want to relate silence to the idea of stillness exposed by Gabrielle



Roth in the practice of five rhythms, as a daily practice in my life and an expression of a healing process in a conflict. Roth has said,

In many shamanic societies, if you came to a shaman or medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask one of four questions. When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence? Where we have stopped dancing, singing, being enchanted by stories, or finding comfort in silence is where we have experience the loss of soul. Dancing, singing, storytelling, and silence are the four universal healing salves (Roth 1998, 25).

The idea of stillness is used in different approaches that I found in my literature review. In fact, in peace studies, stillness is a central concept for explaining the importance of inner peace (J. Lederach (2005), Lederach and Lederach (2010), Dietrich (2013), Dietrich (2014), Roth (1998), Roth (1998)), and for understanding how silence can contribute to the training of peace workers and their job in different fields, so one of my methods is oriented to show how silence and stillness can reflect in dance and specifically in the practice of five rhythms.

The second artistic practice that I find interesting to mention to understand the role of silence is theater, which combines breath, voice, and movement. In this practice, silence is used as means of expression, source of inspiration, and as a pause for thinking. Precisely, following the contribution of theater and silence into the field of social transformation, the author James Thompson states:

Social theater should be searching for examples of practice that are alternatives to the rhetoric of the trauma relief programs –programs that forget that telling is not always the best solution to people’s suffering. Social theater repertoires should include projects that respect silence and speaking out as different actions made necessary for different circumstances (Thompson 2009, 60).

In line with the purpose of silence in theater, it is necessary to highlight the expression of pantomimes, such as the ones of the French mime Marcel Marceau (1923-2007), who defined the pantomime as “the art of the silent actor” (El sonido del silencio 2007).

Marceau gave life to the BIP mime, “A being marked by sensitivity and poetry that allowed him to explore modern society focusing on its tragic dimension” (El mundo 2007).



Mime plays different situations on stage, showing distinct thoughts and emotions and also confronting codes of conduct in the society with his own body.

Marceau perfectly exemplifies that criticism of society, which became a key element in pantomime. Without uttering words during the performance, he managed to depict situations of rejection within society, moral dilemmas, and comical moments in everyday life. I recommend seeing some of his performances (Marceau s.f) in order to understand that the pantomime is not only a language of physical expression, but it also challenges the cultural norms that determine social relationships.

Now, about my experience with theater, I want to share my experience with Theater for Living, inspired by the Canadian David Diamond, who developed this technique from the teachings of Augusto Boal, founder of Theater of the Oppressed.

Theatre for Living is a “worldwide leading example of theater for social change; theater for dialogue creation and conflict resolution; theater for community healing and empowerment” (Theatre for Living 1981). This initiative is promoted through special training that work on “techniques of mainstream theater, interdisciplinary work, environmental action, education, counseling, conflict transformation and mediation training as well as community cultural development” (Ibid).

The philosophy of Theater for Living “seeks to employ theater as an energetic driving power in community work [in this case] human communities are considered independent living organisms, albeit comprised of individuals” (Dietrich 2013, 148). Within the plays of Theater for Living, conflict is always present. Real conflicts are staged by the community involved in the process. One of the conditions is that the conflicts reflect real situations of the community. The innovative element of Diamond’s method is that these real conflicts can be exposed and workout within a safe setting. In this process, players and communities become aware of their conflicts and they can see new alternatives for action.



In pantomime and theater for living, corporal expression is the key to transmitting the message; with these techniques a peace facilitator works with herself or himself and also with the communities where he or she is engaged with and also, as in the case of the silence as social mobilizer, uses silence as a mechanism of resistance. As James Thompson points out, “[Theater] validates silence as a possible form of resistance that accepts numerous artistic forms as appropriate responses to horror and the respects multiple context, specific modes of dealing and living with the appalling” (Thompson 2009, 48-49).

Understanding silence and stillness within the practice of theater is important. Silence is often forgotten in theater, but when performing solo performances or monologs, silence draws the audience in, resulting in a tightly focused image of a sole actor. Add stage lighting and the visual picture can be impressive, as John Cash, the North American drama teacher mentions,

Often accompanying silence in performance is stillness. These two elements sometimes go hand in hand and complement each other. Stillness and silence can create effective dramatic tension in performance. The silence can be continued just long enough to increase the tension, but if you draw it out too long your intentions may fail. Like stretching a rubber band until the second before it breaks, stillness and silence in performance need to be carefully calculated to create the required mood and tension. Of course, silence does not necessarily need to occur at the beginning of the drama. It can be anywhere the actor or director wants it. Stillness and silence occurring suddenly, or soon after scenes full of activity and noise, can result in effective contrast in performance. It is this example of light and shade that can turn good drama into great drama (Cash 2008).

We all love it when a moment of silence is so ‘loud’ in performance, you can hear a pin dropping in the house. These are moments of magic when the audience is entirely focused on the stage action, completely immersed in the events occurring before them.

Given that in dancing and theater arts the body is the main instrument, in the following paragraphs, using my experience, I explain two techniques that link the power of the body as a means of expression, and where silence provides elements that contribute to these forms of individual and collective expression.



My experience...

I smiled and suffered moving in silence in five rhythms and theater for living sessions. Music and movement led me to enter to unexpected corners of my mind and heart where the refuge of silence allowed me to see my potential and ability to discover new things about myself.

Experiencing the idea of inner peace and silence, in middle of dancing, theater or music, are amazing sensations, which I learned by practicing five rhythms and theater for living. I do not pretend to explore each one of these practices because it goes beyond the objectives of my study. My purpose with this section is to show how silence plays an essential role in artistic expression, linking the mind and body and encouraging a profound transformation.

Dancing is an activity based on movement, for which physical body plays a fundamental role. The way that I experienced the power of silence in dancing was through a technique called five rhythms.

Within the spectrum of conflict transformation, the technique of five rhythms has multiple elements to offer. On the one hand, dancing is an evocative process with movement and body serve as a medium for experiencing and a path to see the own conflicts. This experience makes us aware of the situation of the 'here and now'. Practicing in a large group provides a consistent process of resonance and empathy with others. In the same session, the practitioner can experience conflict and peace and see the transformation through the dancing energy.

Accordingly, dancing invites meditation in an alternative way, a meditation that implies movement, breath, and passion, and a meditation that connects my body with my spirit. Dancing requires a deep transformation because I have to forget my worries and physical limitations to enjoy and achieve a connection with myself.



As in mindfulness meditation, for the practice of Theater for Living, individuals are considered as a piece of a whole, where each action has effects over the community. Theater for Living's training taught me how silence is an amazing tool to express my feelings, the body language become a tool for expressing traumas and conflicts when words are useless.

Now, about the contribution of silence to dancing and theater oriented to conflict transformation, it is important to say that in both cases presented, are methods in which elicitive action is predominant, multiple choices are exposed in both techniques, and silence acts as a catalyst of movement and reactions. Also, it is interesting how Five Rhythms practice as well as Theatre for Living manage to link the artistic experience with the practical experience of conflict transformation where the protagonist of the transformation is the one who goes through a process of individual transformation, full of questions and detachments. These methods highlight the importance to understand my inner self for building peace and help me to understand I have inside me all the tools and capacities to find inner peace, as I remarked about the energetic and transrational approaches to peace.

3.5 Some conclusions about the practices

People think I'm unhappy, but I'm not,
I just appreciate silence in a world that never stops talking.
Unknown

The previous sentence shows the power of silence in the current world, where the exercise of listening and being quiet are weird activities. Appreciating the simple things in life and enjoying the company of yourself is something strange. However, with the opportunities that I found for identifying and experiencing the practice of silence, I can say that the possibilities of changing through it are multiple and it opens thousands of doors. The description of different methods related to silence as a medium for conflict transformation allows



understanding the infinity alternatives that exist within different philosophies and cultures to transform conflicts using silence as the main tool.

In this chapter, I described different practices that use silence as the cornerstone. These practices came from an exploration of different senses and conscious states of a person. Active listening shows the power of silence related to hearing sense; to remain silent in a conversation demonstrates respect and acceptance to the other person and also it produces empathy, a key aspect of the elicitive conflict transformation. In this practice, the person is totally conscious of the expressions and signs of the interlocutor, in the conscious states movements, facial expressions and tone of voices take on a special meaning, because all of them express different feelings and moments of the conversation, I can say that silence into the active listening practice is a medium to understand the real meaning of the messages and also a necessary element for assertive communication.

The practice of meditation shows the power of silence in connection with the spirituality. Independent of religious beliefs, I could understand how mindfulness and vipassana allow to connect myself with my higher self; these practices go beyond to physical aspect toward mental and spiritual aspects. With vipassana practice, silence manifests its power, through bringing our consciousness closer to the deepest idea of us. Silence within this technique allows me to find concentration, compassion, and love for myself and everything in my surrounding.

Silence finds one of the most interesting experiences linking hearing, sight, and touch with the artistic or physical expressions of yoga, dancing and theater. The exploration of the physical body is a fundamental element of these practices, is precisely an opportunity to rediscover again and again that stillness is not dependent on anything. In fact, is in middle of the silence of the mind, is when I can see that my moments and life have not ended for a while. Silence, in relation to these practices, acts like a channel that links my inner self and



my surrounding and also it helps me to understand the aspects that I feel to improve or the aspects that make me feel uncomfortable, silence here reaches to describe empty spaces between experience and verbal communication.

Now, as I mentioned before and related to my experience, each method that I described has a different expression of silence. Each one fits different in determined situations, when I really focus my attention on somebody else and the message that he or she transmits, active listening is a suitable method, as in relationships with a partner, classmates or co-workers active listening helps to develop a fluent conversation and to demonstrate the importance of the different perspectives or opinions.

When I want to find myself in the middle of a mental confusion or a stress situation, meditation with the techniques of mindfulness, vipassana or yoga help me to find mental clarity and multiple paths to solve my personal stuff, I experienced also that to reach the best results with these practices is necessary to be disciplined and constant.

In situations in which I want to let go the control over myself and everything around me, methods as Five Rhythms and Theatre for Living result interesting and even necessities to transcend the reality of everyday life. These methods, allow being conscious but in a different way, a way in which my problems are not the only ones, nor the most important ones. Furthermore, these methods help me to connect mi body and mind with a large group which together we can walk a path to find answers and lights for our worries.

When I think in silence as a social mobilizer, I see how silence transcends from the personal aspect to the social one. Silence within a society represents a way to express its deepest feeling in different situations related to violence, peace, and nonconformity. To join in silence with the community expresses a high level of commitment, as well as respect for disagreements. It is like that moment where we all understand that the purpose is achieved not by the one who speaks harder but by the one who really knows how to listen.



As a peace worker, I understand that we need to contemplate distinct alternatives, in one situation, for achieving conflict transformation. Creativity, passion, consciousness, patience and love are some of the requirements for understanding how silence can be applied to conflict transformation at personal, social, cultural and structural levels. It is important to mention that all methods that I described have positive features that help to transform the conflicts and to propose different alternatives to see them.

The lessons from silence in the practices of active listening, meditation, vipassana, mindfulness and yoga show me how silence can be used as powerful tool to connect the physical and spiritual body and understand that we are all part of a complex system, where every action has a direct effect on the rest of the universe. Also, with the description of these practices, I became aware of the importance of the basic function like breathing. Breathe, breathe, breathe it seems to be a simple task, but managing to breathe consciously brings me to reality. It proves I am alive and that I am aware of my surroundings.

When I described silence as a social mobilizer and a way of artistic expression, I saw how silence can become a channel for ideas, proposals and changes, at personal and social levels. Silence as a motor of social change is an enormous discovery, I found experiences in communities affected by armed conflict and in difficult contexts where silence became a way to change the harsh reality and find ways to transform it.

Regarding the role silence plays in arts, it was really interesting to discover how silence as a creative process is a protagonist, because it allows moments of inspiration, and finding himself/herself in the process. I could discover that silence allows reaching a state of meditation in movement, showing that it is not necessarily motionlessness in the path to tranquility and peacefulness. Both theater and dance provide elements to explore inner and outer spheres, practicing empathy or rejection within individual and collective level and feeling the transformation of the conflict during the process.



Also with these lines I learned that capacities of human beings for starting over are extraordinary, conflicts are transformed by human beings for human beings. As a consequence, recognizing our abilities and plurality are basics in the process. The current context of my country obliges me to think of viable options to transform conflict, not only the armed conflict, also the personal and cultural conflict in a country that has been marked by war for over half a century.



4. Conclusions: About Silences and Empty Spaces

My path and experience with silence has been full of surprises and discoveries. When I started this study almost one year ago, many were confused about the results of my research topic. When I talked about my intentions, people looked at me with distrust. Today, however, I can proudly show them the interesting advances I have made through a qualitative framework and with the different methods I used in this analysis.

The first step was to approach my own perspective of silence from my cultural context, seeking to understand its power for conflict transformation. My primary conclusions enabled me to reach a holistic idea of silence; within this panorama I described silence from distinct considerations. First, I understood silence as a cultural expression on an individual and collective level. Within this framework, silence becomes a conscious decision to express empty spaces between experience and communication.

When silence is a form of communication, it converts into a medium to transmit and listen to messages. It became an important source of connection within myself, with nature and with others. It is a way to find our essence, discover our fears, and obtain new knowledge about ourselves. These characteristics give to silence a strong power to transform ideas and heal people and even entire societies.

This power that I described has multiple expressions in my life; I was able to note some of them through dancing, literature, theater, meditation, social movement, communication, shamanism, and even the most basic functions such as breathing, listening and writing.

With the goal to present these different expressions of silence I began a second step. I went further, seeking the relationship between these silent manifestations and conflict transformation and even the idea of peace. Silence took on a new mental dimension for me, and my head was full of information, authors and academic approaches. Then, situations in my daily life and political events in my country forced me to experience new alternatives to



transform conflicts with silence as my main tool. Subsequently, I found the five approaches to peace, inspired by the academic and practice training that I learned in my Master of Peace in Innsbruck University.

During this journey, my analysis was from energetic views where silence led to understanding the constant flow of energy in the universe within ancient and indigenous traditions, and where shamanism and the mystic power of silence take a new perspective in showing the capacity to heal and an opportunity to reach an inner change.

Energetic silence led me to the path of silence seen from the moral perspective, where I discovered silence as a way of spiritual revelation, which is used as social claim to find justice within violent situations of political, religious or social character.

From moral silence, I began to analyze silence from a modern perspective, and the modernity showed me how silence can become a tool to determine public opinion. Within my map of silences, I learned of silence related to fear, oppression and lack of freedom.

In contrast, the approach to peace from postmodernity seeks to compare ideas where silence is seen as a mechanism of coercion. Postmodernists wonder how silence is seen from different angles. How do humans interpret their meanings in different situations? In such situations, silence is a complex object of study that not only questions the personal realities but also social realities and stands as a sign of revolution and social demands.

The sum of these silences led me to think of a transrational silence where multiple versions and ideas can be represented and are equally valid and validated by academic and social experience. I reaffirmed with this the idea that there are multiple silences in my reality.

With all of these insights, I set forth on my third task: to think of silence as a medium for conflict transformation. With the academic framework, I could find how my own experiences with silence could become practices for conflict transformation; from the basic function of breath to the practice of yoga or vipassana and mindfulness meditation, I



understood that silence means a personal change. Seeing silence as social practice, I could comprehend that silence is a motor for change, and that its expression is more powerful than thousands of words. In the field of art, with expressions such as dancing and theater, I realized that silence manages to fill those empty spaces with stillness and awareness.

In spite of my advances within the analysis of silence as topic of study within peace studies, I believe that I still have many questions around silence as a medium for conflict transformation. Some of them are related to other practices where silence can be a useful tool, such as traditional ceremonies, education, painting, music, martial arts and other kinds of meditation.

When considering the role of silence in conflict transformation, I was interested in learning more about experiences with silence in jails and classrooms, where adults and children can feel the power of silence in conflicting environments.

Finally, I cannot leave behind the situation of my country, where peace became a subject of discussion and even a fight between political forces in Colombia. Right now my country hurts me, and I feel a deep pain to see that we have lost out on opportunities to reach an agreement with the FARC-EP guerrilla and advance the search for peace. However, it is precisely in this moment when I have to be aware of the contribution of transrational peace studies. This requires numerous psychological and communication skills, and also understanding the idea of peace and conflict as a natural phenomenon of human beings. In these situations, silence can be useful to move forward and apply this meditative exploration, and to analyze its impact on my life as way of expression and revelation.



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Affidavit

I hereby declare that I have written the presented Master thesis/Masterarbeit by myself and independently and that I have used no other than the referenced sources and materials.

In addition, I declare that I have not previously submitted this Master thesis/Masterarbeit as examination paper in any form, either in Austria or abroad.

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