

Diaspora Mobilization for Truth-Seeking

The Case of the Colombian
Diaspora in Switzerland

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Diaspora Mobilization for Truth-Seeking: The Case of the Colombian Diaspora in Switzerland

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List of Acronyms

CEV	Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition)
CVNJ	Commission Nationale de Vérité et de Justice du Haiti
ICIP	International Catalan Institute for Peace
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz/ Special Jurisdiction for Peace
LTRC	Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SIVJRNR	Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición; Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition
UBPD	Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas dadas por Desaparecidas en el marco y en razón del Conflicto Armado (Special Missing Persons Unit for Finding People Disappeared in the Context of and Because of the Armed Conflict) UN United Nations

Abstract

The paper examines the role of conflict-generated diasporas and their agency in state-sanctioned truth-seeking processes by asking how such a process impacts the diaspora community in the country of residence and what purpose the process serves the diaspora. It builds on the case study of the Colombian diaspora in Switzerland as the Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición; CEV) from 2018-2022 was the first truth commission to officially have a mandate to include diaspora communities in their truth-seeking. This working paper investigates this under-examined scholarly field of diaspora inclusion in truth-seeking based on diaspora mobilization theory, which suggests that the official truth-seeking process serves as an opportunity for the diaspora community to mobilize their networks and therefore, directly leads to increased mobilization in the diaspora community.

1 Introduction

"There is a truth that left Colombia with the people who went into exile. This truth lives in the diaspora. The Colombians who stayed in the country do not know. They must know. They must know how the exiled arrived [in the new country], what happened to them, how their children grew up, and what happened to their parents in Colombia. (...) We must tell this truth of the people outside of Colombia."¹

When people leave their country of origin due to a conflict, a part of the society's history and truth leaves with them. In most cases, this truth does not return but stays in the diaspora (Young & Park 2009: 360).² But not in all cases. The Colombian Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-repetition (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición*; CEV) is the first truth commission which was officially mandated to conduct extra-territorial truth-seeking in the diaspora during their 4-year mandate from 2018- 2022.³ A question observers and readers may ask is, how did the diaspora community experience their involvement in this official truth-seeking process? This paper focuses on this question by analyzing the CEV's work with the Colombian diaspora community in Switzerland. The paper refers to *diasporas* as specifically *conflict-generated diasporas*, which is understood to be a community, namely individuals and families who have left their countries of origin involuntarily due to serious human rights violations and violence and have spread to different countries, initially seeking refuge and asylum (Haider 2014).

Literature on the migration-peace nexus increasingly recognizes that diaspora communities as transnational actors not only play an important economic role by contributing to development through remittances but can

1 Excerpt of Interview with Colombian Conflict-Generated Diaspora Member in Switzerland (Interview with diaspora member "Carlos", December 2019, Switzerland). All interviews with members of the Colombian diaspora community in Switzerland were conducted in French and translated by the author.

2 Also due to the fact that most truth commissions have limited resources, additionally the feasibility to reach out to diasporas is a challenge (Young & Park 2009: 360).

3 Description of the mandate based on Decree 588 of 2017: <https://comisiondelaverdad.co/la-comision/mandato-y-funciones> (15.12.2022)

also act as important stakeholders in post-conflict peacebuilding, including in transitional justice processes⁴ (Hasić 2018, Hoerler Perrinet et al. 2018). However, the agency of diasporas in transitional justice processes remains underexplored (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). This paper seeks to contribute to this field by exploring the agency of diaspora specifically in truth-seeking. The right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law in a post-conflict society is one of four pillars of transitional justice as laid out in the Joinet-Orentlicher Principles (E/CN.4/2005/102),⁵ and is a right of individual victims and survivors as well as of society at large. It is recognized by international customary law (Sisson 2010). Truth-seeking processes, including various efforts such as official truth commissions, are important mechanisms for implementing this right to know (ICTJ 2020). Even though rarely included in the past, members of diasporas are oftentimes victims of the human rights violations which truth-seeking mechanisms are mandated to investigate and therefore need to be considered in truth-seeking processes. (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016; Van der Auweraert 2012; Haider 2014).

The scholarly literature on truth-seeking and diaspora discusses a few prominent examples, such as the diaspora project of the Liberian Truth Commission (Young & Park 2009) or the diaspora's involvement in truth-seeking in Haiti (Quinn 2019). This research paper aims to contribute to this underexplored field of study and aims to discuss the involvement of a diaspora community in a truth-seeking process from the diaspora's perspective. The analysis builds on diaspora mobilization theories, which suggest that transitional justice processes can serve as political or legal opportunities for diaspora communities to mobilize (Koinova 2017, Orjuela 2018). Diaspora mobilization is understood to have two key aspects; (1) the *organization/preparation* of the diaspora community; with the organization/preparation serving (2) a *specific purpose*. In the case of transitional justice processes serving as political or legal opportunities, diaspora mobilization theories suggest that a

4 The United Nations Security Council describes transitional justice as "the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation" (S/2004/616 2004: 4).

5 The Joinet-Orentlicher Principles (E/CN.4/2005/102) allocate transitional justice into the four pillars "right to know", "right to justice", "right to reparation" and "guarantee of non-recurrence".

diaspora community is increasingly *organizing themselves for the specific purpose to deal with a violent past in the country of origin, and the experience of forced migration*. Based on this, this paper asks the following research question: **How does the inclusion of a diaspora community in an official truth-seeking process impact the community in its country of residence and what purpose does the extra-territorial truth-seeking process serve the diaspora?**

As the first truth commission officially mandated to conduct extra-territorial truth-seeking,⁶ the CEV started its work with diaspora communities in November 2018 (CEV 2018a) and concluded its four-year mandate in August 2022. During this time, the Commission collected over 2100 victims' and witnesses' testimonials which refer specifically to exile in 23 destination countries across the world (CEV 2022). This includes 60 testimonies from diaspora members residing in Switzerland (Franco & Ott 2023).

This case study does not claim to be representative due to its modest sample size of diaspora interviewees.⁷ Yet, its results suggest that the truth-seeking process is indeed leading to increased diaspora mobilization through an *expansion of networks, a bridge-building effect, and the start of an organized second and third generation*. Regarding the purpose of mobilization, three key elements were identified: *Establishing peace, prevention and contributing to non-recurrence*, as well as *individual and collective visibility*. Follow-up research in the domain of diaspora mobilization for official truth-seeking processes to further confirm and complement these suggestions would be fruitful.

6 Description of the mandate based on Decree 588 of 2017: <https://comisiondelaverdad.co/la-comision/mandato-y-funciones>

7 The data used for the analysis of the case study consists of 3 interviews with 4 Colombian diaspora members in Switzerland, who are involved in the truth-seeking process, as well as two expert interviews. All interviews were conducted in Switzerland in November – December 2019.

2 Methodology and Case Selection: The Extra-Territorial Mandate of the CEV

This exploratory study is qualitative and a single case study, it makes, therefore, no claims to be representative but rather allows the discussion of previously unavailable views and insights (Streb 2010). The CEV's process was selected as a case study for this research for several reasons: First, the CEV in total collected over 2100 testimonies between 2018 and 2022 from diaspora members who had to flee from Colombia due to the armed conflict, including 60 testimonies from diaspora members residing in Switzerland. The collection of testimonies in Switzerland and other destination countries was complemented by various processes of awareness-raising and memorialization (Franco & Ott 2023). The large number of testimonies from diaspora members suggests that the diaspora communities successfully mobilized for this undertaking and provides an interesting starting point for research on diaspora mobilization for transitional justice processes. Second, given the recency of the process, the experience of the Colombian diaspora provides the possibility to gain new insights into diaspora mobilization and truth-seeking. The following provides a brief background on the selected case.

In 2016, as a result of the peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), three transitional justice mechanisms were created by Item 5 of the peace agreement (Colombian Peace Agreement). The Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJNR;⁸ the Comprehensive System) is constituted of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP),⁹ the CEV and the Special Unit on the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing in the Context of and due to the Armed Conflict (UBPD)¹⁰ (Colombian Peace Agreement; Nichols 2019). After the peace agreement, the CEV, an institution of constitutional rank, extrajudicial and independent from the government, was officially created by President Santos through Decree 588 of April 5, 2017. Its primary objective was to

8 Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición

9 Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz.

10 Unidad de Búsqueda de Personas dadas por Desaparecidas en el marco y en razón del Conflicto Armado

investigate how eight million Colombians were victimized over the 60-plus-year conflict (Alsema 2017). The CEV began its four-year mandate in November 2018 (IACHR 2018).

Forced displacement has been recognized as one of the largest consequences of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, recognizing that unaddressed displacement holds potential for future conflict. This led to the Commission's mandate to include truth-seeking in the diaspora. 7.5 million victims had to leave their homes during the conflict, many of which had been internally displaced (Nichols 2019). The exact number of persons who sought safety abroad remains challenging to determine, among others due to under-reporting (CEV 2022). However, according to the data of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the final report of the CEV, over one million people have had to cross borders to escape the armed conflict (CEV 2022). Despite this large number, the visibility of the exile experience, apart from economic and financial influence, has remained quite small in the country of origin (Deeming 2017). Rather, the group of exiled Colombians has been historically silenced (Bedoya 2019). It is thus remarkable that the diaspora has been included in the truth-seeking process, and this is also due to demands raised by Colombians in exile during the peace process in Havana, Cuba.ⁱ

The main objective of the truth commission's work with the diaspora was to collect testimonies of victims and include the voices of those living in exile to make visible the conflict's impact on the population forced to leave the country and make them active agents in the process. The commission defined eleven territories, each of which was assigned to one of the eleven commissioners (Peace Brigades Colombia 2017). The international space counts as one of these eleven territories and was ascribed to Commissioner Carlos Martin Beristain. For the CEV to organize interviews with diaspora members, it used a collaborative model working with various networks, organizations, (donor) institutions, and individuals in the diaspora communities with experience related to Colombian exile (CEV 2022). These networks became a system of self-managed "nodes" (nodos), which existed in most of the 23 destination countries as the core structure of the extra-territorial truth-seeking process. They were composed of various diaspora associations, local civil society organizations with ties to Colombia and individuals who are interested in supporting the work

of the [CEV](#).ⁱⁱ In Europe, the Barcelona-based Catalan International Institute for Peace (ICIP) functioned as the technical secretariat for the CEV's work (ICIP 2019). In Switzerland, the node was facilitated by the Swiss Peace Foundation *swisspeace* and co-funded by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) (Franco&Ott 2023). In some cases, like the Swiss node, the main team of the node consisted of interviewers who are trained by the CEV to collect testimonies.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, the CEV used the embassies in the countries of residence to disseminate information, but as a non-economical, non-judicial independent institution is not directly connected to them. Most of the work in the nodes took place voluntarily,^{iv} except for the collection of testimonies. The Commission concluded its four-year mandate in August 2022 with the publication of its final report.¹¹

To examine the diaspora community's involvement in the truth-seeking process, this study combined several research methods. The author first conducted a literature review on the prior involvement of diaspora communities in official truth-seeking processes (Chapter 3) and subsequently a secondary data analysis (of prior literature) on the case of the Colombian CEV and its engagement with the Colombian population abroad. As a second step, the author conducted two expert interviews in November 2019. Both interviewed experts worked closely in the CEV diaspora project in Europe. Additionally, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the Colombian diaspora who participated in the CEV's work in Switzerland. In total, three interviews with four members of the Colombian diaspora were conducted in December 2019. Since the research for this paper was carried out in 2019/2020, it does not consider challenges which unfolded in the last two years of the CEV's work, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the publication of the CEV's final report in 2022. All respondents chose to answer anonymously and are direct victims of the internal conflict in Colombia. Due to the risk of re-traumatization during the interviews, the author chose not to discuss the respondents' individual migration experiences and their reasons for migrating. These were also considered irrelevant to this specific research. The interview data was analyzed through Qualitative Content Analysis and with the use of a coding frame (Schreier 2012).

11 For a detailed overview of the process in Switzerland, refer to the *swisspeace Essential Franco&Ott 2023: "Participation of Victims in Exile: Reflections Based on Support in Switzerland of The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition in Colombia"*. *Swisspeace Essential 2/2023*.

3 Conceptual and Contextual Frameworks

3.1 TRUTH-SEEKING PROCESSES

Why is knowing the truth about past gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law assumed to be an essential aspect of post-conflict transition? Scholarly literature mentions the importance of establishing the truth and responsibilities for gross human rights violations to help communities grasp the causes of past atrocities. Furthermore, to prevent the repetition of gross crimes and combat impunity, a society must be actively aware of the violations' causes. (Gonzalez & Varney 2013). The right to know is important for the individual victims since knowledge of the patterns of violence can assist victims in the healing process (Bleeker 2010). Awareness of past violations can also help restore "personal dignity, often after years of stigmatization; and safeguard against impunity and negationist views" (Gonzalez & Varney 2013: 4). Further, the creation of a common narrative makes up a crucial aspect of starting to rebuild social solidarity after conflict (Sooka 2006). The "right to know" features several dimensions (E/CN.4/2005/102): It involves the right of the individual victims and their families to learn the truth about the violations of what they have suffered from, as well as of society at large to know the truth about the causes and circumstances that led to grave human rights violations to prevent a repetition (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/20; Sisson 2010). In addition, the right to know comprises an obligation of the state to guarantee measures to preserve collective memory. It relates to a state's "duty to remember" and directly obliges the state to protect the collective memory against revisionism and negationist views by preserving documentary evidence (Sisson 2010; Gonzalez & Varney 2013) and is qualified as international customary law (ICRC 2005). The right to know requires states to create institutions and mechanisms that lead to the revelation of the truth through seeking information about what has taken place, to contribute to fighting impunity, the reinstalment of the rule of law and ultimately to reconciliation (A/HRC/24/42). For this, judicial as well as non-judicial initiatives are recommended (Bleeker 2010). There are several possible limitations of the judicial establishment of the truth, such as a state's unavailability to hold trials, inadequacy to acknowledge the personal and psychological

experiences of victims (Gonzalez&Varney 2013), or a focus on perpetrators and a specific kind of truth, namely the judicial or legal truth (Hayner 2011). Due to these limitations, additional, non-judicial mechanisms are required to establish the right to truth. These non-judicial measures include the establishment of truth commissions (Gonzalez and Varney 2013). The creation of a common narrative through a truth commission makes up a crucial aspect of starting to rebuild social solidarity after conflict (Sooka 2006). A truth commission is a temporary, non-judicial body which is established through a governmental or parliamentary decree and normally has a specific mandate to analyze the nature of violations committed over a certain period (Hayner 2006). Apart from this fact-finding objective, another aim is to allow victims to break their silence and speak out, which can be understood as the victim-centred social legitimization and social healing aspect of a truth commission (Bleeker 2010). The aspect of participation plays a crucial role in a truth-seeking process: in the end, which victims and who in society participates in a truth-seeking process impacts the outcome of the process, what truth is told, how possible reparations are framed, who receives reparations and who is brought to justice (Young and Park 2009). It is thus important to include all victims of violent conflict and human rights violations in the truth-seeking process. This means also including the diaspora living outside of the country of origin, particularly when considering that many members of the diaspora are victims of the human rights violations which truth-seeking mechanisms are mandated to investigate (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016, Van der Auweraert 2012; Haider 2014).

3.2 DIASPORA MOBILIZATION FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND TRUTH-SEEKING

Identities of diasporas are shaped by experiences of violence and conflict as well as by multiple memberships in the society in the country of origin, in the country of destination and potentially in countries of transit (Faist 2010). On the one hand, the memory of a 'collective trauma' (Haider 2014), such as serious human rights violations, can lead to a new sense of collective identity within a diaspora community (Haider 2014). This new sense of a collective identity, on the other hand, leads to the preservation of collective trauma. Maintaining a cultural memory and distinct local identities can form the root of diasporic identity, social networks across

borders and a connection to the country of origin (Halilovich 2015). However, diasporas can by no means be understood as uniform groups, since they might be of quite diverse constellation (Haider 2014). The present research understands *diaspora* in a consolidated sense (Cohen 2008) which combines positivist and constructivist elements and understands diaspora as:

"(...) a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to (1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland and (2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links" (Adamson & Demetriou 2007: 497).

In addition to internal cohesion and the critical component of continued attachment to the country of origin (Haider 2014), this consolidated definition emphasizes a diaspora's ability to express collective interests through its internal organizational structure and transnational links. Unlike a state, a diaspora's organizational structure can be described as network-based and deterritorialized, while a state is territorialized and structured in various institutions (Adamson & Demetriou 2007). Due to this deterritorialized formation of a diaspora community, transnational networks as personal channels are remarkably more influential regarding the dissemination of political ideas and projects in today's global society (Koinova 2018). These networks also play a fundamental role in diaspora mobilization. Mobilization is understood as the "act of organizing or preparing a group of people for a purpose" (Cambridge Dictionary: Mobilization). Given this, diaspora mobilization includes two key aspects: (1) the increased organization of the diaspora community and (2) for a specific purpose. The basis of this network-based process is the interconnectedness of the individual diaspora actors and their capability to disseminate information through these networks. Thus, diaspora networks exist only when being mobilized by social entrepreneurs (Koinova&Karabegović 2019). Transnational research suggests that these diasporic networks in a globalized world do not exist in isolation. Rather, transnational activities by a diasporic group are influenced by opportunities in the country of residence, by their bonds to the country of origin and also by donors (Haider 2014). However, it must be kept in mind that not all parts of the network have equal abilities to disseminate information, nor are they equally exposed to interven-

tions by the country of origin. Some networks remain rather autonomous from outside influence, including from the country of origin (Koinova 2012).

Diaspora mobilization for transitional justice processes, a rather new field of study, is currently being discussed by several scholars (e.g. Haider 2014; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016; Orjuela 2018 and 2022; Koinova&Karabegović 2019), mostly on a case-by-case basis.¹² These studies have shown that the experiences of forced migration and living in a country of destination can evoke additional desires for transitional justice mechanisms in a diaspora network and sometimes do not align completely with transitional justice preferences by the community in the home country¹³ (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016, Quinn 2019, Koinova 2018, Karabegovic 2019). Additionally, the experience of involuntary migration and the trauma of conflict and violence provide numerous grievances to mobilize upon (Koinova& Karabegovic 2019). Addressing past atrocities, therefore, became an important arena for diaspora mobilization and diaspora engagement (Haider 2014). Diaspora mobilization for transitional justice is an increasingly relevant field for research since it contributes not only to discover new dynamics of diaspora mobilization but also makes it possible to "see how the power relations that shape transitional justice efforts within countries that have experienced mass atrocities play out differently in diasporic spaces" (Orjuela 2018: 1358).

Regarding the developing diaspora mobilization theory (Adamson 2005; Koinova 2017), the importance of the opening of a political opportunity to generate new demands and resources was recognized as a key moment of mobilization (Nieswand 2018; Koinova 2017). Political opportunities as a concept are used to explain which aspects of the "external world" impact the development of a social movement (Meyer&Minkhoff 2004). These political opportunities enable diasporas to make claims about transitional justice and are understood as "consistent - but not necessarily formal or permanent - dimensions of the political environment that provide

12 The discussed transitional justice measure which are discussed in literature include reparations for displaced persons (Bala 2015), criminal prosecutions (Duthie 2011), participation in tribunals as victims and witnesses or the role of diasporas when advocating for universal jurisdiction in countries of residence (Roht-Arriaza 2006). The role of diasporas in truth-seeking processes, the focus of this research paper, has been considered only sporadically (see Chapter 3.3).

13 See for example Wiebelhaus-Brahm (2016) who discusses Latin American diasporas as drivers for justice due to their expertise and ability to forge relationships with activists and policymakers from their exile in the mid-1990s, among others in host country courts. Whereas diaspora networks eagerly engaged for accountability of gross human rights violations, communities in the home country worried that the diaspora's promotion of retributive justice could disrupt the fragile political transition. Wiebelhaus-Brahm (2016) identifies four important factors shaping diaspora's interests and influence with respect to transitional justice: (1) the nature of the violence, (2) the current status of the violence, (3) the characteristics of the diaspora, (4) the interests of the international community and donors.

incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1994: 85). In the case of diaspora mobilization for transitional justice, geographical distance from the conflict may in cases provide a degree of safety to make transitional justice claims (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016) and can therefore be seen as an opportunity. Additionally, being outside the home country often creates opportunities to link with activists and host country organizations (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). This is shown through the example of Montreal's Haitian diaspora, which was closely involved in the establishment of the Haiti National Truth and Justice Commission with the support of a Canadian NGO, the International Center for Human Rights. Quinn (2019) in her work on this case further emphasizes the diaspora's ability to link with actors in the host country by introducing the concept of *thin sympathetic response*. She uses the term 'thin sympathy' to describe the most basic acknowledgement of the traumatic experiences of the other, explaining the diaspora's influence on stakeholders who are not directly affected by the past human rights violations but are nevertheless mobilized for transitional justice mechanisms. Quinn (2019) sees the diaspora's ability to trigger a *thin sympathetic response* among actors of the host country as a fundamental precondition for transitional justice engagement in a host country, as the example of the Haitian diaspora in Montreal showed.

Among other scholars, Orjuela (2018) thus argues that addressing past gross human rights violations and atrocities has emerged as an essential area for diaspora mobilization. She states that transitional justice as a globalized discourse which has grown exponentially over the past decades creates an overflow of opportunities for mobilization (Koinova 2018). Transitional justice, including its global norms and practices such as truth-seeking, can be viewed as a provider of political, legal and discursive opportunities for the diaspora to mobilize in and across their social networks.

3.3 PAST ENGAGEMENT OF DIASPORAS IN TRUTH-SEEKING

Diasporas have been involved in various transitional justice mechanisms regarding the right to know and right to justice in the past (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016), for example by bringing perpetrators to justice in the country of residence, based on the principle of universality, or by participating in trials as witnesses (Roht-Arriaza 2006). Yet, regarding participation in official truth-seeking processes, the literature and available data are quite scarce and focus on a few prominent examples such as the Liberian Truth Commission's diaspora project (Young & Park 2009; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2013) or the involvement of the Haitian diaspora in the establishment of the truth commission (Haider 2014).¹⁴

The Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) engaged their diaspora with the help of the US-based NGO The Advocates for Human Rights (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). Established in 2006, the LTRC soon decided that it wished to engage Liberians living outside of Liberia in the process (Advocates for Human Rights 2009). Important witnesses, perpetrators and other actors involved in the conflict were known to be living in the diaspora, particularly in the USA, Europe and West Africa. Additionally, there was a prevailing belief in Liberian society that the diaspora had played a critical role in funding and sustaining the conflict (Steinberg 2010; Young and Park 2009). For these reasons, the LTRC sought additional legitimation by engaging with their diaspora. A final aspect of diaspora involvement in the truth-seeking process was the LTRC's hope that the involvement of diaspora members could bring additional financial resources for the post-war reconstruction (Hayner 2011). The project included the gathering of individual testimonies as well as public hearings in US cities, in the United Kingdom and the Buduburam refuge settlement in Ghana (Advocates for Human Rights 2009). However, the LTRC was not officially mandated for working outside of Liberia, which led to some legal issues (Advocates for Human Rights 2009). There are mixed opinions regarding the Liberian Diaspora Project's success. Some observers consider the diaspora's participation in the process relatively limited due to their limited willingness to engage connected to security concerns (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). However, as the first truth commission to include diaspora communities extensively, the LTRC Diaspora Project showed that systematic engagement of diaspora in a truth commission process is feasible and important (Young&Park 2009). Diasporas have also

mobilized themselves and directly engaged in the establishment of official truth-seeking initiatives (Haider 2014; Hayner 2011). The case most often discussed in the literature with this regard is the diaspora's engagement in establishing the Haitian Truth Commission (Commission Nationale de Vérité et de Justice du Haiti; CNVJ), which was inaugurated after President Aristide regained power in 1994 (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016; Quinn 2019). The Haitian diaspora, particularly in Montréal, included many human rights activists, educated and professional classes who were pushed out by the Duvaliers' repression (McCalpin 2012). It began mobilizing to return President Aristide to office. Subsequently, supported by the Canadian government agency International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the community constituted The International Tribunal on Rights in Haiti in Montreal in October 1994. This was intended as a model for a possible Haitian truth commission (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). The diaspora's proposal, which they submitted to Aristide while he was still in exile, was later used by him as a basis for the decree establishing the CNVJ (McCalpin 2012). Two diaspora members officially functioned as commissioners in the CNVJ and the diaspora community continued to be strongly involved in the CNVJ, for example by providing testimonies (Quinn 2019). However, even though the CNVJ aimed to establish truth inside and outside of Haiti, they could conduct only very limited investigations in the diaspora, partly due to a lack of US authorities' cooperation (McCalpin 2012). In the end, the "CNVJ proved too closely tied to Aristide and the diaspora community and has not proven very consequential for Haiti's subsequent political development." (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016: 31).

Apart from the most prominently discussed cases, several additional truth commissions included statements from diaspora members in their final report: the Truth Commission of Sierra Leone collected 175 statements from refugees (Haider 2014); East Timor established programs to involve refugees in neighbouring countries in the truth-seeking process; in 2011 the Kenyan Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission conducted interviews in refugee camps in Uganda to consider their participation in the transitional justice process (Lyodu 2019); and the Zimbabwean Human Rights NGO Forum approached the diaspora in Europe for input on the transitional justice and truth-seeking process in Zimbabwe (Chatham 2012). Diasporas have also participated in truth commissions in Argentina, Chile and Guatemala. However,

these cases were on a much smaller scale and diaspora members were able to participate only through their embassies instead of directly engaging with the truth commission (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). Finally, in November 2018, the Colombian CEV embarked on their task to engage the diaspora community and Colombians living in exile (CEV 2018a). The CEV is the first truth commission to officially hold a mandate regarding the diaspora community. Considering that over forty truth commissions existed up to today, the number of commissions who actively engaged their diaspora communities remains very limited and is under-explored in literature (Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016).

4 Diaspora Mobilization for Truth-Seeking: The Case of the CEV in Switzerland (Case Study Findings)

Diaspora mobilization as a theoretical approach illustrates that an open political or legal opportunity is a crucial requirement for diaspora mobilization and is understood as the increased organization of a diaspora community for a specific purpose. This leads to the hypothesis that the official truth-seeking process serves as an opportunity through which the Colombian diaspora in Switzerland can increasingly mobilize their networks for a specific purpose (Koinova 2017; Orjuela 2018). To this understanding of diaspora mobilization theory, two key questions are asked in the analysis of the case study: (1) How does the engagement in an extra-territorial truth-seeking process impact the organization of the Colombian diaspora community in Switzerland? (Chapter 5.1) and (2) What specific purposes does the extra-territorial truth-seeking process serve the diaspora community, for which they are mobilizing? (Chapter 5.2)

4.1 IMPACTS OF THE TRUTH-SEEKING PROCESS ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE DIASPORA COMMUNITY

The first impact of the truth-seeking process all respondents mentioned is that their already existing network expanded considerably through participating. All four diaspora members stated that the work with the CEV leads to the creation of new ties between different diaspora groups and strengthens already existing ones. The testimony-gathering has an impact on the network of the interviewer as well as of the interviewees^v as the interviewer meets new community members and also connects the interviewees to other Colombians in the diaspora. This **network expansion** also supports the diaspora to organize themselves, as was mentioned by diaspora member Carlos (**name changed by author*): "It has the effect that we build contacts with each other, that we connect with different people. And this is very positive because it is another way of continuing to do what the Colombian community does abroad: to organize themselves."^{vi} However, the

respondents also pointed out that the expansion of the network does not happen automatically. Instead, they feel that it is quite important to take an active role in this process of change and to help the Colombians in Switzerland to bond over this experience. Gabriela (**name changed by author*) particularly emphasized the need to become active agents and make connections across their networks: "I think it helps to connect groups. But I don't think it's going to work on its own. It means that we have to be agents of that change and the connections that are being made."^{vii} This network growth takes place mainly in two ways: On the one hand, the respondents mentioned that the networks grow through the gathering of testimonies. On the other hand, the networks expand through the organization of events connected to truth-seeking in Switzerland.^{viii} This expansion of networks also concerns the diaspora community in Switzerland as a whole and its connection to other Colombian diaspora communities in Europe. Relations to other segments of the transnational Colombian diaspora in Europe that existed before the truth commission's work are strengthened and new ties are built through the CEV, which was adhered to by all interview partners. Due to the diaspora's network-based, de-territorialized structure, the connectedness of the individual diaspora actors and their ability to disseminate information through their networks are at the basis of diaspora mobilization (Koinova 2010). The identified impact of network expansion, particularly the creation of new ties between individual diaspora members through the work with the CEV, clearly indicates an increase in connectedness and, consequently, an increase in diaspora mobilization.

Related to the increasing network, all respondents mention a **bridge-building effect** through working towards a common objective. Gabriela phrases it as the following: "And we begin to work towards the common objective, which is peace. In this sense, before, we were each in our corner (...) And finally, the peace process is about telling the story in our way. It unites us, this interest, this objective. And it makes us start to appreciate each other differently".^{xix} This unifying objective of the official truth-seeking process was also noted as "everyone is working in the same direction" by Juan (**name changed by author*)^x. It builds bridges and helps to diminish the mistrust between different groups in the diaspora community. Both Gabriela and Carlos feel that it is easier to speak objectively about the work of the CEV than to discuss dividing factors in the

community.^{xi} The work of the CEV provides a common objective for exchange, even within the diaspora where mistrust exists, as Gabriela points out: "I had mistrusts with certain people, but we are not talking about these mistrusts, we are talking about the Truth Commission and how to work according to the Truth Commission. So, we can talk and change themes and go beyond the preconceived ideas we had before. And it broadens the field of action that I have now and the number of people I know who are working for the Truth Commission and change in Colombia and for peace in Colombia."^{xii} Thus, the bridge-building effect of engaging in the truth-seeking process also helps to heal the social ties and the social fabric within the community^{xiii}. This is one of the main objectives of the truth-seeking process (Sooka 2006), which also plays out in the diasporic space. According to the consolidated understanding of the diaspora concept's definition, diasporas are constructed as an entity and mobilize extensively through transnational claims, network connections and activities (Haider 2014). Consequently, strengthened transnational relationships, through the CEV's bridge-building impact, strongly increases diaspora mobilization. This bridge-building effect between different diaspora groups indicates an increased connectedness leading to an increase in the organization and mobilization of the diaspora community in Switzerland.

All respondents discerned a third impact on the diaspora community, namely ***the start of an organized second and third-generation community in Switzerland***. These generations had previously been unorganized in Switzerland^{xiv}. Nevertheless, the CEV organized a European event for second-generation participants in Bilbao, Spain in 2019^{xv}. It was attended by two Swiss-Colombian participants, who experienced it very positively. Isabella, a second-generation diaspora member, recounts: "There were very, very strong testimonies and we all recognized each other in each other's stories, even when they are different, but there is a similarity in all of this. (...) It creates a strong link (...). We also have a testimony to give because we are not only Swiss but also Colombian and we also have things to bring to our country. We are lucky that we have dual citizenship and that we can, thanks to this, help the country to progress because we are outside and there are many things that we see that the people there won't necessarily see. So, we organize ourselves to do things, all of us in our [residence] countries, but we all stay in touch."^{xvi} Gabriela additionally adds that this event led

to the aim of the second and third generation being organized in Switzerland to increasingly involve them in the work of the CEV.^{xvii} These three impacts make it apparent that the extra-territorial truth-seeking process of the CEV leads to an increased diaspora organization and mobilization. Of course, the identified impacts must not be considered in isolation, as they are all interrelated. For example, the CEV's bridge-building impact facilitates the building of new ties within the Switzerland-based diaspora, thus leading to a stronger and growing network. Additionally, since the ability to mobilize a diaspora community depends on the connectedness of those involved (Koinova & Karabegović 2019), this progressively better-connected diaspora community is increasingly able to make its claims more visible within their country of residence. Thus, the extra-territorial truth-seeking process has the impact of an increased organization on the diaspora community and serves as an opportunity to mobilize their local and transnational networks.

4.2 PURPOSE OF DIASPORA MOBILIZATION IN RELATION TO THE EXTRA-TERRITORIAL TRUTH-SEEKING PROCESS

Considering the two elements of the diaspora mobilization definition consisting of (1) increased organization for (2) a specific purpose, what is the specific purpose, for which the diaspora is mobilizing? In general, the diaspora is mobilizing for the truth-seeking process. However, from the diaspora's perspective, how is this purpose viewed?

A key factor driving their efforts which all interviewed diaspora members mentioned, is that they as victims of the conflict want to take agency in establishing peace. Juan puts it as the following: "Since we are victims of the conflict, we want the truth to come out so that we can contribute to peace. That's the driving force".^{xviii} Diaspora members view engagement in the truth-seeking process as a significant opportunity to become protagonists in the peace movement. This is why they testify in front of the truth commission and engage in the sensibilization efforts of the CEV, as Gabriela's following statement demonstrates: "I think it is very important what has happened. That there have been peace agreements between the state and the FARC (...). After almost fifty years of conflict, they decided to stop and sign a peace agreement that allowed us to have the truth commission. I say that this is a historic moment and that we must be protagonists of this history."^{xiv}

Additionally, all diaspora members stated that they engage in the process to promote the peaceful coexistence of different beliefs in their community. Every respondent refers to their community as characterized by a certain mistrust, as a result of the violence the diaspora members have experienced. Gabriela describes this heterogeneity in the diaspora community in the following way: "Colombians here are divided. Because in Colombia, there is a conflict, there are many sides. (...) So, we are always afraid to speak out, to talk, to associate, so we are in different groups and we don't have much trust even between us. It's normal, if you come from a war, you don't know who the 'enemy' is. I say 'enemy' in quotation marks because we are all Colombians."^{xx} As a result of these characterizations, the interviewees' intention includes actively challenging this lack of trust among the diaspora community and in the country of origin. By this, they aim to contribute to a peaceful coexistence of different views and truths. Juan also emphasizes the impact of the truth-seeking process in terms of overcoming polarization in the community: "This truth also helps us to overcome polarization. Reconciliation. Here in Switzerland, and there in the country. And I think, and I'm very optimistic because we're already starting to see that, even if there is still conflict".^{xxi} The diaspora members thus view their engagement as a contribution to a peaceful society in their community. Through their engagement, they aim to commit to establishing peace in Colombia, as well as in the diaspora. This finding, which may have indications for future peacebuilding work in diasporas, shows how diaspora members can act as agents in promoting reconciliation in the aftermath of gross human rights violations. The agency of diaspora can therefore strengthen transitional justice processes in countries of destination, but also countries of origin. (Nieswand 2018; Haider 2014, Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). This is linked to the above-described impact of the expansion of network and bridge-building within the diaspora community.

A topic also mentioned as a key purpose for the diaspora's engagement is the wish for non-repetition of the endured human rights violations and the prevention of future conflicts. Gabriela feels that telling the truth about her personal experience of hardship can serve this greater purpose: "What I've been through is going to serve a purpose, to pave the way for it not to repeat itself".^{xxii} This purpose is a future-oriented factor: Often the

future generations are named simultaneously, as the statement by second-generation diaspora member Isabella shows: "Our participation in this project is very important for us because we are a second generation, but we know third-generation people like my little cousins who are here, and who are still small. They don't know the history, but it's important that they know it later on and that we transmit it so that there is no repetition of this war. That what's most important is that we can transmit this message to the young people".^{xxiii} Therefore, the diaspora members engage and mobilize for the purpose to contribute to the non-repetition of human rights violations, including their experience of forced migration, and to transmit their experiences to future generations.

A third important purpose for mobilization has been identified as **visibility**. All respondents referred to it as a central aspect driving their engagement. Visibility describes the diaspora members' intention to make their diaspora experience seen by engaging in the extra-territorial truth-seeking process.^{xxiv} It is strongly connected to the fact that the Colombian conflict-generated diaspora did not receive the opportunity to speak out and was silenced in the past (Bedoya 2019). All respondents are distinguishing between individual and collective visibility^{xxv}: **Collective visibility** should be reached in the country of origin. Oftentimes, the diaspora members experience a lack of understanding and invisibility from their own family members or community in Colombia. Therefore, due to the large number of Colombians living in the diaspora, all respondents name the need to make the truth in the diaspora experience part of the national Colombian truth.^{xxvi} Juan adds a further reason why the truth of the diaspora experience must become known in Colombia – to refute any conflict-deniers and to make the exile experience known among segments of society that have never heard of it: "If at least one day the final report states that there are about half a million people who are political refugees, this will have an impact in Colombia as well (...). Because there are still people who say there is no conflict."^{xxvii} Consequently, the diaspora members engage in the extra-territorial truth-seeking process to make their diaspora experience visible in Colombia, the country of origin. The aim for collective visibility has a second aspect. Both Juan and Gabriela also name the intention to make their migration and conflict experience visible in their country of residence as a driving factor of their engagement, aiming to increase awareness of the Colombian exile experience in Switzerland.^{xxviii} This is mostly

done through organizing public events related to the process. Additionally, the CEV's work also was mentioned in newspaper articles in Switzerland, thus contributing to the diaspora's visibility in the country of residence (Bradley 2019). Through these events, the conflict-generated diaspora aims to raise awareness for their engagement, and their experience of living in exile.^{xxix} Considering Quinn's (2019) concept of a *thin sympathetic response* as a fundamental pre-condition for the emergence of a transitional justice engagement in the country of residence for a diaspora to mobilize around, the diaspora thus aims for a thin sympathetic response in the Swiss public. By engaging local NGOs to coordinate the CEV's work in Europe, the process has already partially succeeded in developing "thin sympathetic responses among individuals and groups in their adopted lands" (Quinn 2019: 1833).

In addition to collective visibility, reaching **individual visibility** as an underlying purpose of the engagement could also be identified. Even though it is not the truth commission's goal to portray individual cases, but collective patterns of violence (this seems to be understood well by the respondents), individual visibility appears to play a role in the motivation of the diaspora members to engage. Diaspora members sometimes use the engagement in the extra-territorial truth-seeking process to conclude a period of auto-censorship installed by fear, a period of not talking about their experiences, not even within their close family, as Gabriela describes: "Most of the people who have left Colombia, we've been almost silent. We've had some kind of censorship. And we couldn't talk about what happened in Colombia. Not just because we're afraid of what can happen to us or what can happen to our families there. The biggest problem is that we are afraid of the truth and reality and of what is happening to us, we are afraid of making this reality known. There was self-censorship. We were in silence. And I think that starting from the fact that now there is this peace agreement and peace is possible, people can start to talk and lose their fear, especially".^{xxx} Gabriela continues to emphasize that individual visibility is desirable to leave a trace of their experiences, to get a feeling that they did not survive the human rights violations for nothing: "It can also be something where people say: I did not go through this for nothing. Now I am telling it and my voice will be heard. And what I lived through will serve a purpose, to open the way so that it doesn't repeat itself. And on this side, I think it

can help the person."^{xxxi} Thus, truth-telling from exile serve several dimensions of a self-healing purpose for victims. By participating in the CEV's work, the diaspora member gains the feeling that his/her testimony is leaving a trace. Also through truth-telling, the person contributes to non-repetition of these events and therefore feels that surviving these violations is meaningful. The traumatic events in the past are given a new meaning. This is also strongly linked to the reparation impact of receiving acknowledgement and of the voice of the victims in exile being heard and acknowledged. This healing function of a truth-telling process can support the restoration of personal dignity and legitimize the experience (Gonzalez & Varney 2013). It is, therefore, an important purpose for victims not only in the home country but also in the diaspora. The engagement in the extra-territorial truth-seeking process therefore for all interviewed participants serves the purpose of gaining individual and collective visibility of the migration and exile experience in the country of origin and the country of residence. These three purposes of (1) establishing peace in the home country and diaspora community, (2) contributing to the non-repetition of human rights violations and (3) an increased individual and collective visibility of the diaspora experience drive the engagement and mobilization of the diaspora community in Switzerland. This shows how a transitional justice process is strengthened through the agency of diaspora communities, as the aspect of participation plays a crucial role in a truth-seeking process: in the end, it is important to include all victims in the truth-seeking process, also the ones abroad, since which victims participate in a truth-seeking process impacts the outcome of the process and what truth is told (Young and Park 2009).

Additionally, the extra-territorial truth-seeking process helps the diaspora community to deal with their violent past. This corresponds to allowing victims to break their silence and speak up, which can be understood as the victim-centred social legitimization and social healing aspect of a truth commission (Bleeker 2010).

5 Conclusion and Outlook

This paper aimed to add to the literature on diaspora mobilization for official truth-seeking processes by asking how the involvement of a diaspora community in an official truth-seeking process impacts the community and what purposes the extra-territorial truth-seeking process serves the diaspora. Methodologically, the research question was answered through an exploratory single case study, which examined the engagement of the Colombian diaspora in Switzerland in the CEV's truth-seeking process. Diaspora mobilization theories suggest that the official truth-seeking process serves as an opportunity for the conflict-generated diaspora community to mobilize their networks and therefore directly increases diaspora mobilization in the country of residence.

The identified impacts, i.e. the *expansion of networks*, a *bridge-building effect*, and *the start of an organized second and third generation*, showed that engagement with the CEV increases the organization and mobilization of the diaspora community in Switzerland. Regarding the purpose of mobilization, three key elements were identified: *Establishing peace, prevention and contributing to non-recurrence*, as well as *individual and collective visibility*. This is also connected to a self-healing aspect for the victims living in the diaspora. The case study has shown how important it is to include diaspora voices in an official truth-seeking process, as they can act as critical agents for change in their respective diaspora communities as well as their home country. Finally, one of the main intentions of this research was to understand the field of including the diaspora in official truth-seeking processes from the diaspora's perspective. Thus it is highly appropriate that the interviewed diaspora members not only have the first word of the introduction but also the last word of its conclusion, with the following powerful call for action: "Because it is up to us to write the history, it is not up to the government (...). I think it is up to the civilian population, the academics, the artists and the general public to write the history of Colombia. And the Truth Commission, which represents the voice of the victims, must be able to gather all the information it can so that it can prepare its report of what happened in Colombia. Colombian history, but

the real Colombian history. And in this sense, I think that we, or at least the people now, must participate in any way we can, by giving testimonies, by making other people aware and then being a participant, being active, being, I would say, a protagonist of this historical moment."^{xxxii}

- i Expert Interview 1, 19 November 2019, Switzerland
- ii Expert Interview 1, 19 November 2019, Switzerland
- iii Expert Interview 2, 26 November 2019, virtually
- iv Expert Interview 1, 19 November 2019, Switzerland; Expert Interview 2, 26 November 2019, virtually
- v Interview with Colombian diaspora member “Gabriela”, 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- vi Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Carlos», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- vii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- viii Interview with Colombian diaspora member “Juan”, 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- ix Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- x Interview with Colombian diaspora member “Juan”, 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xi Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland; Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Carlos», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland;
- xiii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Carlos», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xiv Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland;
- xv Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Carlos», 20 December 2019, Switzerland; Interview with Colombian diaspora member “Gabriela”, 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xvi Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Isabella», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xvii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xviii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Juan», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xix Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xx Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxi Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Juan», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxiii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Isabella», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxiv Interviews with Colombian diaspora members, 14 December and 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxv Expert Interview 2, 26 November 2019, virtually
- xxvi Interviews with Colombian diaspora members, 14 December and 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxvii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Juan», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxviii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Juan», 20 December 2019, Switzerland; Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxix Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Carlos», 20 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxx Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxxi Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland
- xxxii Interview with Colombian diaspora member «Gabriela», 14 December 2019, Switzerland

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