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# Responsibility to Reconcile: Adopting New Terms to Foster Recognition*

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## Abstract

The present article is the second of a three-series collection of articles that analyze the power of language to introduce a new set of concepts in contexts where societies can foster peacebuilding in post-conflict scenarios. I build up on Hannah Arendt's moral responsibility work to understand the need to analyze responsibility in transitional justice frameworks while landing it on peacebuilding discussions. The article advances in how this concept can contribute to fostering recognition, the role it plays in [re]building civic trust and, ultimately, promoting reconciliation. This study is motivated to find a way to engage civil society in the process where social grounds are rethought on respect as a basis. I present a proposal to use the concept of responsibility while suggesting a definition circumscribed to the context of peacebuilding during transition processes.

**Keywords**: responsibility; reconciliation; civic trust; moral responsibility; transitional justice.

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## Responsabilidad de reconciliar: adoptando nuevos términos para fomentar el reconocimiento

### Resumen

El presente artículo es el segundo de una serie de tres artículos que analizan el poder del lenguaje para implementar un nuevo conjunto de conceptos en contextos en los que las sociedades pueden fomentar la construcción de paz en escenarios post-conflicto. Me baso en el trabajo sobre la responsabilidad moral de Hannah Arendt para entender la necesidad de analizar la responsabilidad en los marcos de la justicia transicional y aterrizarla en los debates sobre la construcción de paz. El artículo avanza en cómo este concepto puede contribuir a fomentar el reconocimiento, el papel que desempeña en la [re]construcción de la confianza cívica y, en última instancia, en la promoción de la reconciliación. Este estudio está motivado por encontrar una forma de involucrar a la sociedad civil en el proceso en el que se replantean los fundamentos sociales sobre la base del respeto. Presento una propuesta para utilizar el concepto de responsabilidad y sugiero una definición circunscrita al contexto de la construcción de paz durante procesos de transición.

**Palabras clave:** responsabilidad; reconciliación; confianza cívica; responsabilidad moral; justicia transicional.

## Responsabilidade de reconciliar: adopção de novos termos para promover o reconhecimento

### Resumo

O presente artigo é o segundo de uma série de três artigos que analisam o poder da linguagem para implementar um novo conjunto de conceitos em contextos nos quais as sociedades podem promover a construção da paz em cenários pós-conflito. Baseio-me no trabalho sobre a responsabilidade moral de Hannah Arendt para entender a necessidade de analisar a responsabilidade nos marcos da justiça transicional e aterrá-la nos debates sobre a construção da paz. O artigo avança em como este conceito pode contribuir para promover o reconhecimento, o papel que efetua na [re]construção da confiança cívica e, em última instância, na promoção da reconciliação. Este estudo é motivado por encontrar uma forma de envolver a sociedade civil no processo em que os fundamentos sociais sejam repensados com base no respeito. Apresento uma proposta para utilizar o conceito de responsabilidade e sugiro uma definição limitada ao contexto da construção da paz durante os processos de transição.

**Palavras-chave:** responsabilidade; reconciliação; confiança cívica; responsabilidade moral; justiça transicional.

## Introduction

This article is a theoretical revision that analyzes options to foster peacebuilding and reconciliation in countries experiencing post-conflict scenarios. The need to explore proposals to foster reconciliation, simplify it, and land expectations to make it more attainable is the focus of the present article. This is the second article of a three-series collection that attempts to search for reconciliation a more attainable goal. In the first article "*Victimizers no more: the risk of addressing conflict's actors from binary readings*" (Espejo, 2021), I discuss the challenges of binary readings and apprehensions made upon victims and victimizers charged with moral judgement. I review how that impacts collective violence and serves as evidence of the need to engage in a much more inclusive language capable of introducing new social values desired in post-conflict scenarios. In the present study, I will elaborate on the possibilities of using new terms and how these can foster reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The problem of summarizing an individual's identity to one specific moment can jeopardize reaching transitional justice objectives since it limits the individual identity of former combatants as if identity was somehow static during the transition process when, in fact, identity is expected to be Kinect, since they are supposed to transition to civilians. As Espejo (2020) points out there is a need to look for alternatives capable of fostering reconciliation, recognition and a change in a language that allows citizens to acknowledge their role in society. Therefore, the first step is realizing that concepts used to refer to some actors during conflict are not as useful in post-conflict scenarios. The second, use the information as a starting point to look for alternatives that broaden the comprehension of both reconciliation and recognition.

Most armed structures are hierarchical. That allows them to organize and act coordinated with the different cells, fronts, or squads from their group. Consequently, depending on their range, most private —low range— combatants' acts are the result of rule compliance rather than personal decisions, especially those related to systematic human rights violations. Literature has been sometimes focused solely on maximum responsible individuals, but the ones returning to villages where victims live are the private combatants (Linde, 2018; Hauge, 2020). They are not just perpetrators, nor are they the only actors capable of exercising violence. Then, it is also pertinent to expand the range of responsible parties - as is the case with many unarmed parties who benefit from conflicts existence and endurance (Sooka, 2006) such as companies, businessmen, or politicians (Atterberry, 2018; Umukoro, 2018; Wheeler, 2018). It is important to clarify, that even if the article focuses on former combatants, victimizers are understood as all of those responsible for systematic human rights violations, that

include a wide range and types of armed and unarmed actors in congruence with visible and invisible violence. A weapon is not the only way to execute harm to others. The goal then is to present this alternative language to involve civil society from a moral perspective that analyses, or at least considers, the reach of responsibility to society as a whole, as citizens, as opposed to legality and the bureaucratic and institutional accountability processes followed by States. As Arendt (1963) suggests, it is pertinent for society to review its actions and omissions while the violent events took place within its political collective (Arendt, 1963), which allows extending its role in socio-political changes during post-conflict.

The proposal to address former combatants as well as inviting society to join the long way of peacebuilding from recognition and reconciliation as desired goals will be developed based on the concept of responsibility. Mainly as an invitation to acknowledge the active role each one plays in the democratic arena, and during transition periods. The word *responsibility* has been typically circumscribed to accountability on an individual level. It has been a vehicle to address justice, but it has lacked flexibility; it has been used to refer to a certain action in a specific place and time. What would happen if the term "responsibility" were extrapolated from the legal to the social sphere? The main objective of this article is to develop a proposal to minimize the use of the term "victimizers" to better understand them as one of the conflicts' primary actors. To analyze whether using the concept of responsibility is a way to foster reconciliation from language —and from all parts of society, not governments and special organisms only— or not. If this were not possible, the second objective is to at least raise key points about the power of language to foster violence, visible and invisible, and social [re]construction.

To realize the importance of breaking these readings, I will explain why is it important to adopt more appropriate terms —from a moral view— to refer to primary actors in conflict during post-conflict contexts, and why categories loaded with judgmental values, such as *victimizers*, can become an obstacle to reconciliation. First, I will present the concept of reconciliation in a transitional justice context. Then, I will present the concept of responsibility and the definition I propose to adopt in the aforementioned contexts. The above will serve as a framework for my proposal of responsibility as an alternative to the obstacles that arise from moral-loaded categories, or terms that oversimplify complex identity processes to good or bad individuals. Finally, the proposal will be outlined from trust and morals, to conclude whether the adoption of responsibility as a term can, or cannot, contribute to reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

## Methodology

This article employs the same methodology used in the two former articles of the series. A hermeneutical approach supports the discussion from concept appropriation, which allows thinking over individual actions and how they impact society. The methodological design is taken from Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which represents interpretation's mediation to recover an interpretation of the world itself. The literature used for this theoretical proposal covers a period starting in 1969 to include the bases of conflict resolution through the second half of the 2010s, mainly because the existing examples of conflicts and transitional processes have taken place during this period. Articles and book chapters from 2003 to 2021 provide a broader idea of how some concepts have been understood and illustrate the need for a re-evaluation. This article is part of a trilogy. This is the introductory, background setting for a broader proposal on the power of language as a tool to prevent future conflict and resentment in transitioning societies.

## Responsibility: The Concept

Before developing the concept of responsibility, I want to start by highlighting the difference between guilt —which can be moral and/or legal— (Arendt, 1968, p. 28), and responsibility. It is extremely important to clarify that at no time this research attempts to reduce — or minimize— the guilt of those who participated in systematic violations of human rights. On the contrary, it aims to open a door for those who were involved in violent actions to be their best version once their debts have been settled with both victims and society, in social and/or legal arena(s). I use this differentiation because it is intended to talk about collective responsibility, and it is vital to start from this caveat since although the proposal refers to a broader understanding of responsibility, it is not within the interests of the article to make it vague or irrelevant. In line with the provisions of Arendt "where everyone is guilty, nobody is. Guilt, unlike responsibility, is always strictly personal" (Arendt, 1968, p. 18). Furthermore, the research focuses on exploring responsibility as an alternative to name and recognizing victimizers, as a way to welcome those who embrace the reintegration process and successfully leave their armed lives behind. While contributing to preparing society to receive them as fellow citizens, rather than anchoring them to whatever reasons led them and kept them in war.

However, the analytical approach to the concept of responsibility is an arduous task, as it contains multiple facets: subjective, intersubjective, objective, direct and indirect, individual and collective, as established by Guerra (2003) in her article "Extended Responsibility and Moral Judgment", where she explores moral judgement based on logic,

facts, and on sound defensible moral principles. According to Arendt, she points out, mankind is responsible for the world, thus generating a responsibility towards others, which is based on the importance of the "political judgment" that consists in the use of representative thinking and imagination to put oneself in the place of others, to avoid one's own and another people's evil (Guerra, 2003, p. 36). This approach suggests that individuals are responsible for themselves, their actions, omissions and their link with others as they are part of the same social group for which they should tend to seek the good.

Arendt's proposal to understand responsibility is tempting because it puts the world at the center, not the individual while giving centrality to the eradication of evil and the duty to prevent it. What is very much in line with this article's proposal, is appealing to conscience to try to prevent suffering (Arendt, 1968). A skill that every sane man is supposed to possess, which, within the framework of violence traumas in victims and victimizers, gives civil society a privileged place for contributing to a more inclusive and welcoming environment. Therefore, the proposed definition promised for this article is to understand responsibility as: the recognition of the effects and consequences that fall on society due to the actions – and omissions, of member citizens of a political collective in their free development of social thought and decision-making.

## Reconciliation

To frame the proposal, I will start by delimiting the context to appreciate the benefits or potential it has to foster reconciliation, or at least discourage the renewal of violence cycles. In the case of responsibility as an alternative to promote and reinforce recognition of conflict's actors such as victimizers, and as an attempt to engage citizens in the transition and peacebuilding process during post-conflict, lies an inescapable call to expose reconciliation and the debates around it.

Reconciliation is a complex concept because it varies depending on the factors considered for its understanding. The authors Rettberg and Ugarriza (2016) propose seven dimensions under which reconciliation is understood, namely: perspectives —religious, historical, etc.—; axis —horizontal - spatial, vertical – temporal—; levels —national, intergroup, etc.—; contexts —postwar, post-conflict, etc.—; depth —supplements such as recognition, tolerance, coexistence, etc.—; mechanisms —requirements or minimums such as forgiveness, trust, memory, peace, regret, etc.—; and evaluation —such as hope, skepticism or pessimism— (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, p. 521). These dimensions pose a framework for empirical analysis, but in turn, they also serve to expose the differences between the multiple understandings of reconciliation and respective readings. Consequently, these vary according to the discipline the authors come from, the focus and case particularities, and also answer to temporal scopes of the concept analysis.

In general terms, the way reconciliation has been understood in countries with armed conflict history, post-conflict, or post-war processes, usually varies. Since in all cases this definition has been a political commitment to what has happened in each country, subject to society's particular reaction. Cases such as South Africa, Northern Ireland and Argentina show that the word reconciliation is perceived in very different ways (Baloyi, 2018; Jelin, 2002; Little, 2012; Sooka 2006; Tropp et al., 2017; Vaisman & Barrera, 2020). In fact, for many people, this concept refers to a political moment rather than a social process. Moreover, in the exercise developed by Little (2012), it is evident that there are occasions when talking about reconciliation constitutes a conflict in itself, specifically, in scenarios in which the opposing parties, under their logic Us v. Them, call themselves victims.

Thus, the decision to grant recognition to victims in favor of reconciliation becomes problematic and politically strategic for some administrations depending on political parties' —or leaders'— interests. Since, beyond giving true meaning to the concept to ensure the process' success, there are actors with decision-making power that use central categories and post-conflict concepts as discursive tools to promote ideologies or political projects to support specific social structures or power hierarchies. For example, the campaign and victory of "No" during the Plebiscite of the Peace Agreement in Colombia (Suárez & Lizama-Mué, 2021) or, the victory of the Yes campaign in Chile.

The difficulty within the discussion about reconciliation emanates, primarily, from the frequency in which different actors label different types of activities as synonyms, or conducive, to reconciliation (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, p. 518). This makes the concept and its apprehension even more heterogeneous. Conversely, it ends up being difficult to achieve the desired "peace", since different interpretations made by a variety of actors, societies, and policymakers who have a specific set of beliefs, interests, and power, make it more challenging. An example of the previous statement is the case where certain sectors of society, or groups, link reconciliation —and by default peace- with forgiveness, and forgiveness with a religion; making it much more chaotic and challenging to find consensus, at the same time it allows binary positions to stand out and reproduce Us V. Them logics. Moreover, when a variety of definitions surface creating multiple vectors of unequal forces going in different directions, that disseminates the general peace-building efforts where the general good of the world is at the center, as aforementioned was developed when reviewing responsibility.

It is worthwhile to frame the preceding interest in armed, ethnic and genocide conflicts after the events of Cambodia, former Yugoslavia —Bosnia and Herzegovina— and Rwanda at the end of the Twentieth Century. As well as the growing interest of organizations such as the United Nations to take effective action in cases of massive

human rights violations. For example, the special report "The Agenda for Peace" from the then Secretary-General Boutros –Ghali in 1992, the studies of Theo van Boven in 1993 and its guidelines from 1996 and 1997, and Louis Joinet's guidelines in 1997– all of them related to armed conflicts and victim's rights. In this context, studies on reconciliation began to take hold, especially since the Truth Commission of South Africa in the mid-1990s (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016). Interest in this new exercise impacted the scientific community, leading it to increase written production referring to research for peace and post-conflict from different disciplines and areas of knowledge. Which led to higher today's standards for what is acceptable in terms of transitional justice processes around justice, truth, reparation and non-repetition, as well as for the strengthening of victim's rights legal frameworks.

The academic debate around the concepts arose from not only interest but also the eagerness to act in these contexts, which are as diverse as the types of conflicts —ethnic, religious, cultural, guerrillas, dictatorships, resources… or a combination of them—. In several conflicts, differences between definitions and concepts surrounding "reconciliation" are nested for procuring fidelity to the contexts for which they are formulated. With regards to the variety of formulations Sartori (1970) proposes the elaboration of a careful definition of the relationship between the concepts in question and others that are broader and more abstract, as well as those that are more specific. While, on the other hand, authors such as Gerring and Barresi (2003) suggest a differentiation between minimal definitions - which capture the essence of the concepts and apply to a greater number of cases - and, maximum definitions, which describe the types of cases and their attributes in more detail (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, p. 519). Which demonstrates different possibilities for "evaluating" one definition or another, as well as how many interpretations are available.

In the study conducted by Rettberg and Ugarriza (2016), the authors find five common approaches to the concept of reconciliation after examining 162 scientific articles, books and reports published between 1997 and 2014, namely: as a rhetorical resource without any definite meaning; as a synonym for some term "neighbor" such as peace, harmony, etc.; multivocal term, with authors refrain from using an existing definition previously used by others; as a goal, where reconciliation is described as the endpoint of every peacebuilding effort; and as a process that does not necessarily lead to a concrete result (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, p. 520). This is also due to a variety of scientific production from different disciplines and perspectives that print their analysis of the definition and scope of the concept, which invites to study peace from a transdisciplinary perspective.

Some examples are religious, where the reconciliation, as mentioned before, is linked to other concepts such as forgiveness, repentance, or atonement; more often found in Catholicism and Christianity with worldwide acclaimed authors like Desmond Tutu. In psychology, where it is most associated with a process of attitudinal and emotional change, or personal healing. In philosophy, for example, it is associated with the logical definition of the outline of the concept itself. In law studies, it is related to justice, truth, reparation and memory. While in history it is associated with the temporality of the concept and how much time it covers. In comparison, the economy field presupposes a need for more inclusive context changes and interrelates with the development agenda (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, pp. 520-521). Lastly, the studies of political reconciliation, inform on the need for an inter-group dialogue, the construction of a common future, and the transformation of ideologies, beliefs, narratives and identities to be more connected with the post-conflict scenario (Dormer & Woelk, 2018; Harrowell, 2018; Johnson, 2018). The previous attest hate, resentment, peace, and tolerance can be taught and learned; hence they can be modified.

After reviewing the spectrum of the word reconciliation, and in the need to use the concept, and for the purposes of the article, I will understand it as wide as possible. Therefore, as explained above, within the range of possibilities, the political reconciliation studies approach is closer to the article's interest. Primarily, the discipline approaches the term from a perspective which is relevant to seeking dialogue between different apprehensions, actors and contexts in which the concept is used. As a result, reconciliation will be understood henceforth as a political and psychological process, in which "attempts are made to achieve coexistence and acceptance; that relates to levels of inter-group and interpersonal conflict; that must precede the cessation of violence, dialogue, goodwill, and emotional and attitudinal change" (Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016, p. 519).

Additionally, the present article acknowledges the existence of actions favorable for reconciliation, such as: losing the fear of living together —in the case of an inter-group logic, Us v. Them—, taking on the blame for the conflict —need for recognition of responsibility for actions that violate others rights as unfair harm—, allow new narratives to enter social discussions in different spaces —recognize others from their place of enunciation—, mutual respect —minimum agreements with maximum respect—, the construction of a different future —perceiving the need for change— (Little 2012; Sooka 2006) and the adoption of new forms of non-violent disagreements (Acevedo, 2018; Little, 2012, p. 86). In the end, it comprises an effort to, somehow, ease its' reach to promote opening space to voices, experiences, stories and identities that had no place during armed confrontation periods to make reconciliation an attainable possibility.

At last, it means celebrating small victories to promote further initiatives that advance toward the wider goal of national reconciliation. In other words, it means accepting transition is a long process made up of thousands of individual and collective actions that pay off in the long run, not the short term.

In this context, the concept of responsibility contributes to the extent that it expands the range of those responsible, not only to repair the victims but to build peace. It is clear that transitional justice's formula depends on each country and its Government (Espejo, 2020), but adopting the term of *responsibility* as proposed previously means to set the focus on moving from a guilty ex-combatants discourse to a larger picture one where society, and everyone in it, plays a role, not just as victims or former armed actors, but as citizens that, despite being heterogenous, together make up the national political collective. Moreover, when those responsible for atrocities can be companies, public officials or members of the Armed Forces, among others (Atteberry, 2019; Wheeler, 2018). Such an approach can benefit organizations like truth commissions or special courts to ensure truth, justice, and non-repetition. Especially, considering that reconciliation as an objective involves civil society as a receptor of those who complete DDR processes. Therefore, adopting the proposed reading aims to change the logic of social relations to benefit a reconciliation atmosphere, under the idea that every individual has the power to contribute to or hinder the process.

On the other hand, the adoption of the concept of responsibility in terms of reconciliation would be convenient in contexts of transitional justice because it recognizes and acknowledges the existence of the numerous debates, and multiple positions regarding reconciliation. The decision to link the proposed definition of responsibility to a flexible definition of reconciliation seeks to make it broader to increase its adaptability to multiple contexts. Especially, because the differences between actors, positions, interests, and values in the post-conflict scenarios differ from case to case. Hence, it is an opportunity to make totalizing categories more flexible and work towards one of the intermediate objectives of transitional justice: recognition and civic trust. While approximating the long-term objectives: reconciliation and democracy, as proposed by Professor De Greiff and Rangel-Suárez (2009).

## Responsibility: Unanchoring the Victimizer

Some other dimensions of responsibility will be developed in light of elements and arguments drawn from transitional justice, identity, collective violence and characteristics of victims and victimizers. The previous will allow determining if a reading of responsibility contributes to post-conflict reconciliation.

## Morality and Trust

I will develop the concept of moral reparation to determine whether the adoption of responsibility as a concept is appropriate for promoting reconciliation, recognition, and mutual respect in post-conflict societies. Additionally, I will make this exercise from the underlying moral duty for citizens to contribute to [re]build the social tissue, not to tie, or limit other fellow citizens with predetermined categories limiting their identities. I will focus on what they can do together taking language as a starting point and identifying its capacity to build or hinder the process. It is worth noting that the enunciation of self-designation (identity) is considered an architect of reality. I mean that the way we perceived ourselves is linked to how we present to the world, and at the same time, that fellow citizens recognize our self-designation impacts our relationship to the collective; and how we interact or not with it, including emotional responses belonging from which feelings of collective responsibility emerge.

The academic Margaret Urban-Walker (2006) develops the concept of moral repair, in her book with the same title, referring to this type of reparation as the most difficult to achieve, while being the most appropriate at the same time. Moral repair seeks to compensate victims to the point of reversing all kinds of damage —physical, economic, psychological, etc.— including, of course, moral. Particularly, it recognizes the difficulty in achieving this type of reparation in the face of obstacles such as the mere existence of memory and establishes that it must be aimed high so that it is achieved to the highest possible standards.

Urban-Walker describes that moral repair has to do with the deterioration that results in a person's confidence when s/he has been attacked, which leads to deep distortions and areas of civic-social distrust (Urban-Walker, 2006, pp. 73-74). The author develops her idea with an emphasis on five events: the reason and focus of trust; predetermined trust; trust transgressions; distortions of responsibility and objectionable attitudes; and the question: is it better, abandonment or guarantee? She describes how to achieve moral reparation, which is born from the harm imparted to an individual's trust, and seeks to compensate for that moral breakdown, not only with victimizers' payment of penalties but also seeks the truth of what and why it happened (Urban-Walker, 2006, pp. 72-73). Both are equally important in the reparation and [re] construction process after armed conflicts, wars, or genocides.

Hence, trust is a belief built from good perceptions, the characteristics, and images of the fellow - citizens (Offe, 1999, pp. 5-6): they are the reason and focus of trust. That means people trust someone when they have a good concept of that individual and there is no reason to fear or think s/he means any bad. As explained by Urban-Walker,

it is the satisfaction of what the individual expects when they trust someone, not as something that passes through time, but as a matter of the expected response (Greeley et al., 2020; Urban-Walker, 2006, p. 75). Trust is when A trusts in B something about C, under the scoop of duty (Urban-Walker, 2006, p. 76). What is called the *normative expectation*, and creates the link between dependence and responsibility.

In consequence, predetermined trust is something truly important for the daily life of every human being. Trust, when broken, presupposes a sense of damage to the stability and security the State is supposed to ensure. From both the individual and the community levels, is presumed an institutional effort to restore trust between individuals and the State (Urban-Walker, 2006, p. 83). Urban-Walker describes the fuzzy predetermined trust as the one that leads to responsibility and works under the assumptions of what is "acceptable or normal" in the behavior of an institution (Urban-Walker, 2006, pp. 85-86). Institutions as a substitute for trust, as explained by Offe (1999) are the simple and easy way out of the lack of trust in others, as they embody the dependence on what is regulated. In theory, it is easier to trust institutions, since they have pre-established statutes, which make individuals believe in operations and their results, without any interference or destruction (Offe, 1999, p. 18); therefore, uncertainty decreases. Properly designed institutions can allow citizens to trust strangers with whom no common or relevant alliances are shared, beyond the knowledge and respect of the rules under which the institution they are both bound to operate.

Based on the foregoing, it is important to bring up the definition of the Former Navy Seal Jocko Willink and Babin (2017) who, after explaining tragic events on the battlefield, states that individuals can generate confidence around them by taking responsibility for their actions. This is an important link to understanding why responsibility is a tool that must be considered when it comes to truth commissions and the joint processes of transitional justice. Since trust is a necessary condition for cooperative activity, and where there is a need for willingness to trust another in certain ways (Williams, 2002, p. 88).

Trust implies recognizing others and granting positive, or at least non-negative values; since there is a common space and an understanding that they are likely to meet again. Hence not only can they be trusted, but it is within their interest to be reliable. This sense of trust starts from not expecting aggression from a third party. To have some peace of mind for the safety and well-being of others. In addition, it should be noted that this type of relationship can evolve to expect from others good intentions or aid (Williams, 2002), leaving non-aggression as a minimum of coexistence for the action of cooperation.

In this area, responsibility is important because, considering the social environment as a whole, as well as its bases and sets of beliefs, the concept allows and invites the reconstruction of civic trust. Which is one of the intermediate objectives of transitional justice. This is significant because if people distrust their fellow citizens, they can hardly identify themselves within the same political collective, as equals. It is also important because it helps rebuild the ties of closeness and cooperation, which is not only necessary for the [re] construction of the social tissue but peacebuilding, reconciliation and democracy as long-term objectives of transitional justice (De Greiff & Rangel-Suárez, 2009).

## Responsibility as an alternative

> *"Revenge does not accrue anything: it adds new violence to the preceding violence; but this addition does not stop the violence, it prepares new outbreaks of it in the future. Violence only breeds violence, it is a pendular movement that expands over time instead of deaden itself"*
> *–Quote to Primo Levi in Todorov (2002, p. 216).*

Next, I will elaborate on a brief account of the elements of analysis before the presentation of the proposal. Having developed the concept of responsibility, the context in which it takes place, transitional justice and what it is supposed to achieve: reconciliation. Elements such as morality and trust have surfaced as essential for the proposed goal of encouraging the employability of responsibility. The previous is considered under the light of identifying the need to find a concept to replace the use of "victimizers", primarily, because they will be addressed during the transition process – either as individuals or collectives- by different agents and parts of society indistinctly on ranks regardless of stages, they are at in the DDR process.

To begin, I propose to speak of responsibles with the understanding of reconciliation as a moment in which "political rights are implanted through the struggles for recognition" (Tilly, 2007, p. 31).

The struggles that take place within the limits that define the categories, the social phenomena that take place in these contexts —violent and transitional periods—, are not fortuitous, neither the lack of recognition towards others and the attempt to impose a moral binding category or as I call them, binary and reductionist. Failing to acknowledge the limitations brought by the aforementioned struggles would be a terrible mistake and an oversimplification of the networks of individuals and processes involved in advancing the peacebuilding agenda. The proposal of responsibility derives altogether from what Elizabeth Kiss (2000) contemplates regarding justice, who states that justice, like recognition, implies

acknowledging a diversity of identities, the efforts to repair the harm suffered, stigmatization, disrespect, and the inclusion of all the stories in the collective history (Kiss, 2000, p. 73). Which aims to break circles of hate, resentment, revenge and, subsequently, violence.

Another important aspect that serves as a magnifying glass for the review of the victimizer category is to understand both identity and narrative influence the way they are perceived by others and affect the way they present themselves (Espejo, 2021). Part of my proposal to adopt the concept of responsibility as an alternative to this category is the recognition of self-designation and the construction of one's identity beyond existing differences. Fellow citizens' opinions on peace, reconciliation, or even justice, should not limit former combatants' reincorporation into society as civilians.

In a sense, it supports Grossberg's (2003) proposal against the logic of otherness, since it allows identity generation from identity itself, accompanied by positivity, agency, and change; tacitly moving away from static essentialisms. It implies the inclusion of new knowledge and experiences, not only of more actors —including subordinates from the same level— but also of the different narratives in which these new actors are related. This is of great value, especially in a post-conflict context, because it fosters recognition and invites individuals to be citizens who make use of their agency towards a transition from war to peace.

It is relevant to clarify the proposal is specially intended for adopting a more adequate concept for victimizers during post-conflict for one specific reason. As developed in the first article, the use of concepts such as "victim" and "victimizer" is either an imposed, or self-imposed label for the first, and a completely imposed one by others for the second. This is why my proposal focuses on that population, more specifically but not limited to those who were part of the lowest ranks —private combatants—, without recognizing it is as important to let victims [re] build their identity, as it is for former combatants during transitioning periods, especially in contexts where they are persecuted and assassinated for their conditions as reincorporated individuals (Rodríguez-Velásquez, 2017; Valencia-Agudelo, 2021). In sum, I propose to endorse the following comprehension with regards to those who have been labelled as "victimizers".
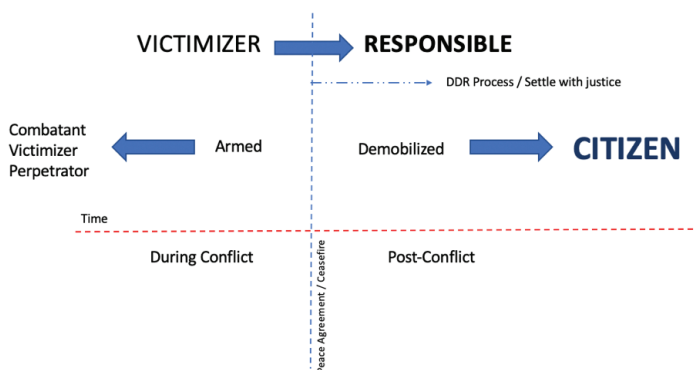
In the first article, I outlined transitional justice, where I established the field studies' change in character during and after a given violent event or period. I criticized the fact that the concepts of victim and victimizer are circumscribed to specific events and I developed the discussion around the concept of identity and how an individual becomes one or the other, as well as the relationship forged by harm where one is the object and the other subject. As a result, it became clear that the concept of perpetrator evokes the changes in character that an individual can express in both moments, during and after that given event —a violent one. Therefore, responsibility constitutes

a concept that I find relevant to consider for being more appropriate in the context of transitional justice and to refer to the primary actors of armed conflicts who change and reinvent their identity during post-conflict (Figure 1). Those actors are typically addressed as victimizers, combatants, and perpetrators.

Nonetheless, it is important to state the proposal does not exempt the need to name the atrocities that took place during the violent period, as well as bring the maximum responsibles to justice —whether under restorative, retributive, ordinary or the agreed type of justice. Ideally, transitional processes should have victims and their reparation at the center, and as a result, measures to repair them need to be taken to successfully discourage vengeance.

Another important clarification is that, for the article's sake, the accountability process takes place, as suggested in Figure 1. at the beginning of the DDR process. The proposal welcomes the victimizers that have an interest in reintegrating into society and settling with justice as well as with victims. To give a broader explanation I would need to select a case study, which, for reasons of space and relevance, I will not develop in this opportunity. However, the proposal suggests differentiating between the level of vulnerability of the low-rank combatants adopting the reintegration process who are complying with justice, truth, reparation and non-repetition requisites, and those who are spoilers or have no intention to cease illegal activities. Plus, another key factor is whether they are found guilty of charges, and/or serving their sentence, victimizers should be allowed the concept of *responsibles* because the focus is on the future, not on dealing with the amount and form of justice to be sought by special or ordinary justice. I acknowledge that given a specific case study this would translate into different obstacles, but the soul of collective responsibility for a better future remains the underlying idea.

**Figure 1**. Responsibility in Time



*Source*: Elaborated by the author.

Based on the above, my proposal for the current article has two dimensions, a formal and an informal. The first addresses formal bodies such as special courts of transitional justice and/or truth commissions. This is to the extent that it is beneficial for reconciliation and peacebuilding to promote a more inclusive language for the ex-combatant population. This means that, for example, in the case of a Truth Commission's reports, the final documents mention "responsible of facts/actions" either as individuals or groups, rather than victimizers or perpetrators. To make the final report diminish, or discourage, the reactions of resentment and invite active listening open to the different versions of truth among the heterogeneous social landscape, the transitional special bodies must encourage the use of concepts, definitions, words, and overall language, that highlight the importance of acknowledging others the chance to change.

It is fundamental in any transitional context to stop romanticizing and/or demonizing certain roles, mostly when they are life-threatening every day for the individual living up to those specific categories —i.e. victimizers, victims, social leaders, among others. There is no need to pursue an idea of the perfect victim, or the condemned victimizer. Violences —structural, cultural and direct—, and conflict reduce the decision-making capacity, and in times of transition, the responsibility of citizens should be and must be encouraged to be, to acknowledge the human dignity intrinsic to all human beings (Margalit, 1998) and to become, together, a decent society.

Additionally, the proposal stems from recognizing the privileged place from which these special bodies pronounce. Bodies whose mandate is to assure the holistic implementation of the mechanisms of truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition guarantees. The proposal is addressed to these bodies because they attempt to be some sort of reset button for new social logic, especially those that follow and participate in their processes. Which turns them into reception environments for the ex-combatants of illegal groups, and objects of criticism by sectors of the society. Moreover, in the middle of a Digital Age where the language used online on social media platforms influences political and social debates, and ultimately, decision-making (Suárez & Lizama-Mué, 2020).

The language these exceptional bodies use and promote does matter, and directly impacts reality. It is worth clarifying that at no time the proposal seeks to dilute, nor minimize the guilt, or the severity of the violent acts. This is why from the beginning of the article a tacit differentiation was made between individual guilt and social responsibility. In contrast, this formal dimension of the proposal aims to give a chance to ex-combatants to re-create their identities once they have settled with justice. It is about adopting a language that invites understanding, and comprehension of others'

experiences rather than summarizing them upon decisions taken in the past, which could delimit their future and, therefore, become an obstacle for transitioning from arm holders to citizens.

Another edge of the formal dimension of the proposal is the expansion of the range of responsible parties. Since, as has been seen in multiple conflicts, there are more sectors of society involved with mass violations in addition to the State and Armed Forces. As can be enterprises and multinationals that benefit from the continuity of armed conflict hostilities in certain countries, or regions of the world. These actors should be directly involved despite not being weapon bearers, society should demand they are subject to inquiry by the special byproduct organisms created for transitional purposes such as special tribunals and commissions. Not considering these actors could translate into neglecting victims to be acknowledged, or receive guarantees of truth, justice, and/or non-repetition. Also, not involving them could lead to an incapacity to address the root causes of conflict and increase susceptibility to repetition.

Likewise, it means balancing the power load represented by the construction of the official truth. That is, although history is usually told by the "winners", especially in cases where there is no peace agreement, it is important to rescue the political use that is given to the decisions emanating from the transitional justice scenarios —as stated before. This is because if one speaks of "individuals responsible for facts" in these formal spaces, it is possible to contribute to the reduction of stigmas, both of illegal and legal armed combatants. Rejecting their previous decisions and actions, while allowing them to be recognized as themselves within a political and social collective to which they can contribute from their own identity and story. In addition to contributing to the [re]construction of civic trust, and the generation of less resentful social environments.

For its part, the most informal sense of the proposal is addressed to civil society. Throughout the article, and especially in line with what is established by Arendt (1968), this constitutes an invitation to citizens to recognize their role in peacebuilding. Although it is understood and respected that it is not in the interest of many to participate in the process, ordinary citizens have the power to reproduce violence, either physical or psychological, using arms or words as a weapon as portrayed in the third article of the series "Recognizing identities: using language to prevent resentment". As well as to impede social processes by the simple fact of belonging to the social and political collective. This means that, although some do not want to participate, they are supposed to at least be aware of the danger of reproducing dynamics of resentment, exclusive discourses or replication of stigmas and labels about people whose reality is complex and probably, fail to grasp.

Another angle of the informal dimension is directed at the media. Journalists, opinion leaders, politicians, and activists are continuously reporting on the advances or delays of transitional processes implementation. They choose a word set that has the chance to build toward a common future or a distrustful one. Besides, what we reproduce online has an enormous impact on informing others, making them aware of the context and its implications, multiplying fake news – that can potentially endanger complete collectives-, and influencing the political debate as a result. Media can contribute to deepening the differences between citizens in polarized societies, as it sets the tone on what is likely to be reproduced by public opinion in a democracy (Aral & Eckles, 2019). And sets the tone and draws the limit on what is accepted by society in the social and political arenas.

Finally, it is worth noting the proposal has limitations. Since this is not a case study of any particular country but a theoretical exercise, to implement this approach on real processes there would be necessary to perform a close examination of the case, the root causes of conflict, the state of civic trust, institution's capacity and credibility, the path that led to a transitional context and the decisions made upon special organisms such as their mandates independence from conflict parties, among others. It is possible that to adopt a critical approach to responsibility there would be a need of engaging citizens in public policy efforts that cover all social spectrums, since matters of political culture, citizenship duties and rights are at the core, and therefore, need to be covered to transform societies' logic from a violent to a peaceful, or at the very least, respectful one.

## Conclusions

In the end, following what was stated by Arendt (1968) about responsibility being strictly personal; men, as individuals, are not in the center but the world is and in consequence have the duty to prevent evil. Hence, individuals can act responsibly when committing to [re]build social standards after conflict. Citizens could contribute to peacebuilding when taking care of their political collective —or fellow citizens—, including recognizing conflict's primary actors' identities and personal narratives.

As it was described when developing reconciliation, even among the different meanings the concept has, it is related to giving space to different voices, stories, and identities to coexist on the base of respect. Then, reconciliation is necessarily linked with recognition and incompatible with binary categories that simplify an individual to a word charged with moral judgment. Social phenomena, or conflicts of any type, are rarely well summarized by binary readings since there are always different actors with particular

interests, backgrounds, beliefs, and a bundle of disciplines and schools to analyze them. It could be argued that reducing ex-combatants to victimizers during post-conflict periods can be problematic for transitional justice processes, especially when pursuing a reconciliation project. To define someone who is transitioning from war to peace with a word that anchors their identity and how they relate to the world as "bad" or "evil" presents a potential risk to create stigma and further segregation from civil society.

In consequence, the proposal on adopting responsibility as a concept to refer to primary actors in conflict instead of former combatants, or victimizers, constitutes an appeal to preventing further violence indistinctly on whether it is physical, verbal or psychological. Accepting both dimensions of the proposal, for formal and informal scenarios, translates to reinforcing civic trust's recovery. If the final goal is reconciliation, then it is inescapable working toward achieving citizens being willing to change their perceptions about others, even those who participated during the conflict. As well as letting them take responsibility for their actions without judging who they can be in the future, after all, that should remain justice's system mandate - either special mechanism or ordinary.

As seen by Kiss (2000) justice as recognition can break cycles of revenge, and if revenge is related to resentment, hate and/or fear; freeing victimizers from imposed categories can break the cycles of segregation, stigma, further trauma and engage other citizens on [re]building civic trust. The last point is highly relevant in the light of collective violence and how easily it can be triggered (Espejo, 2020). Which justifies the importance that special mechanisms such as truth commissions and special justice jurisdictions adopt a proper language that dismisses "Us v. Them" logic to be reproduced in daily life by specialized and non-specialized audiences. This responds to both organisms' high range under transitional contexts, mostly the truth commissions' final report.

In synthesis, it is important to adopt a more appropriate term for victimizers during post-conflict periods because, unlike victims, it is a category typically imposed by others and not self-imposed. Stripping them off of their agency to tell their own story even if they have settled with justice, and leads to limiting the ex-combatants population —and their families— opportunities and jeopardizing their return to civil society. Accordingly, it is a delicate matter as some of them were victims before becoming combatants — complex perpetrators—, which could lead to a systematic violation of their rights, and perpetuate generations of victims and resentful.

The first article explored the harm binary readings can bring to the transitional justice arena, more specifically the terms victim and victimizer were analyzed in the light of identity and collective violence. This second article reviewed how language can impact the collective violence, and analyzed whether adopting a term like *responsibility* to

refer to "victimizers" could be beneficial to fostering reconciliation and peacebuilding. The third article is focused on how the use of language can help prevent resentment under the idea that resentment has the power to trigger and renew violent cycles.

The next step for this line of argument could be researching on identifying key elements in language that could help determine specific benefits of adopting responsibility for reconciliation purposes during a specific post-conflict scenario or case study and evaluate the approach under a particular set of variables. It is important to recognize that every country that has gone through transitioning processes has understood reconciliation in different manners and some have been able to avoid a re-escalation of violence, while others have relapsed into violence. Finally, a cross-method study like the one by Suarez and Lizama Mué (2020), capable of analyzing large amounts of data, could establish the result of introducing the concept of responsibility in different debates, the reception from actors in the formal and informal dimensions, among others.

In conclusion, reconciliation is a concept that is more associated with utopia due to the difficulty to achieve it. Therefore, every step forward contributes to making reconciliation more plausible, especially for civil society. Finally, adopting the concept of responsibility to refer to victimizers or those responsible for systematic human rights violations —weapon bearers or not— means acknowledging their constellation of characteristics, experiences, stories, and projects for the future. It allows them to be kinetic, to change, and adapt to a new life and a new set of rules they share with their fellow citizens. Such an approach recognizes that it is possible to understand that maybe violence sent them to war in the first place. Adopting my proposal is a little step toward opening the scope of accountability whilst respecting its individual sense without setting aside or reducing the relevance of social and moral conscience, or dismissing guilt or severity of systematic human rights violations. The proposal does not make reconciliation more feasible on its own, but it can represent a step forward to reconciliation as it fosters the recognition of human dignity as intrinsic to life itself.

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