

piezas • faltantes

---

**MISSING PIECES**

DAVID ROJAS LEÓN - DSI 2016

#faltan45000



Queridos desaparecidos regresen a sus hogares.

Montes

# INTRODUCTION

I read the following statement on a website dedicated to peacebuilding in Colombia some years ago, then I heard it as the opening line for a TED talk, once again in some other couple pieces of media later on, every time resounding harder in my mind and my heart:

**“We are part of a generation that hasn’t lived a single day without war in our country.”**

Since 1958, the conflict has directly affected millions of Colombians, including civilians, combatants and political leaders. During the last five decades thousands of Colombians have suffered from crimes resulting from an endless and senseless war, including:

- Death during combats
- Terrorist attacks
- Kidnapping
- Enforced disappearance
- Massacres
- Sexual violence
- Internal forced displacement

Although the conflict has not directly affected 100% of the population in Colombia, we are all victims. And everyone knows someone who has been directly impacted. Direct victims are not only suffering from the pain caused by their traumatic experiences, but also by the stigma around their situations.

The victimization dynamics generate a vicious circle where some victims can’t overcome their bad experiences, whereas other become perpetrators as part of the negative feedback loop. The combination of these factors depicts a very bleak and hopeless landscape, the most accurate illustration of a wicked problem.



## WHY VICTIMS?

There are several approaches and definitions for the category of victims coming from various fields of knowledge: the anthropological approach, the sociological framework, the legal understanding, the psychological and psychiatric proposal, among others. Nonetheless, my experience presenting the category of victim in the Colombian context was permanently bringing up questions around that category. The core factor of the troubling understanding coming across was the aspect of condemnation that being a victim supposes.

In addition, the policy around the treatment of victims in Colombia has been focused on the economic reparation over some other essential aspects to restore the human side of victims. As a result of this political stance, a phenomenon called for some authors and experts the "professionalization of the victims" has been taking place in the context of the Colombian conflict. Victims are relying on their condition to get an economical benefit, reducing a human tragedy to a matter of profit. The discussion around this circumstance creates a problematic field questioning the definition of reparation and its translation into monetary language. How much does it cost a human life? How much does it cost the suffering experienced by their families? What is the line dividing reparation and profiting?

**More or less, those questions have been addressed, or at least considered by the Colombian State during the last decade in an effort to solve the claims of almost 8,000,000 direct and indirect victims looking for responses among uncertainty. Despite those efforts, the amount of victims of violence and social injustice increases day by day, adding layers of complexity.**

Confronting this perspective versus the landscape of war and violence in Colombia, where a cycle -or even a fractal system- of sustained victimization ensuring a renewed generation of perpetrators, sparked a question facing my role as designer: what is the role of design in the resolution of victimization cycles? Or how design can be incorporated to help a victim overcoming such an undesirable classification?

This very broad but unsettling question was a foundational inquiry that drove my pathway to the field of Design for Social Innovation. Addressing that inquiry also led to explore an even broader but crucial question: How could design contribute in overcoming a 60 years old armed conflict in Colombia and create a pathway to peace?

# PEACE AND CONFLICT

Diana Uribe, a renowned Colombian historian, states a point that illustrates a big hurdle for transforming the current landscape of violence and victimization in the country:

**“Colombians are unable of imagining a country in peace, because we don’t have any recent reference of how it looks like”**

Said this, a role for design emerges as the discipline that would facilitate the creation of that image, and making it possible. Peace in Colombia depends on a creative process where communities envision a better and brighter future, and enable the mechanisms, resources, conditions, spaces, experiences, images, words, sounds, flavors and smells to make it real, tangible and enjoyable.

However, the connection between these dots doesn't come across because imagination depends on an exercise that inhabits uncertainty, and uncertainty in the context of war is directly related to fear. Therefore, the first step to introduce design and other creative disciplines in the resolution of violent conflicts is to enable imagination, and make it relevant and elevate its humanizing aspect.

But addressing such a big word as peace, or such a dreadful one as war will discourage fearful intentions, even when those intentions are good. In order to make a big impact it is necessary to break those concepts down into smaller pieces. A number of initiatives around this principle were already happening across Colombia, becoming another focus of interest.

This created a first thesis proposition based on this particular interest, intended to identify commonalities between those peacebuilding experiences in order to create a toolkit which could be used within the classrooms to solve conflict in the school context, being tested in parallel in New York City schools and Bogota schools, evaluating its effect. Nonetheless, this first approach was very abstract and it quickly changed.

Although this approach pivoted over time, it served as the foundation of my exploration and understanding of big concepts that surrounded and shaped the framework of my thesis process. To find a starting point it was required to go back to the place where all this issues live. During my journey to Colombia I discovered the potential of various initiatives and approaches that have been taking place in the country, preparing it to an emerging and troublesome concept: the post conflict period. After starting conversation with 12 experts from the fields of design and peacebuilding, heard more than 15 national and international experiences and approached the concept of peace, conflict and postconflict based on the context of the Colombian conflict. This experienced only helped to increase the range of possibilities, something good for a curious mind but dangerous for a thesis project.

# NARROWING DOWN

In retrospective I started from two huge interests, the first one in regards of involving design into a process to overcome the condition of victim within the Colombian Armed Conflict and the second one related to highlight the crucial role of design in the processes of peacebuilding based on the experiences of grassroots initiatives in Colombia. Both attractive and intended to contribute to a even bigger goal, involving design in the process of creating peace in Colombia, but broad enough to make them impossible to grasp.

After my visit to Colombia, I had to find a way to work with the existing resources, being mindful of distance and access. I needed to find a more narrowed down and specific frame to operate my interests, but I was trying to empty an ocean by using a spoon. As way to find a better framework to work on, I started conversations with Colombians in the New York City, not being sure of what was the driver of my exploration.

During my exploration I met Oscar. My conversation with Oscar was related to his journey as a Colombian immigrant in NYC, his stance towards Colombia and the armed conflict, the possibility of peace in the country and his role in that scenario. Before Oscar there were more participants who delivered interesting stories and depicted insightful statements around the Colombian migration, but nothing clear enough to create a problem statement around, hence a solution. However, it was something that Oscar didn't want to talk about given the conditions and terms of our first encounter, the reason of his migration to New York City. I was before one actual victim of the conflict in Colombia. He only briefly mentioned that his father was victim of enforced disappearance due to his role as political activist and human rights advocator in Colombia. The story that wasn't told led the exploration of a more specific area, the cases of victims of enforced disappearance, those Colombians that went missing due to the armed conflict.

# DEFINING AUDIENCES THROUGH A PROBLEM STATEMENT

Oscar is my age, he is 32 years old. He is from Bogotá as well, and now he also lives in New York City, going back and forth to our country. When Oscar was 7 years old, back in 1990, his father vanished. Oscar being a kid already knew that his father could be in risk of disappearing. At the age of 7 he was facing a major pain due to the political circumstances in Colombia. 25 years later Oscar and his family still don't know what happened to his father, if he is dead or alive, if he was tortured or exiled.

Through Oscar I had the chance to talk with Shaira, who never thought she could lose her father overnight. When Shaira was 19 years old, back in 2008, his father went jogging as he did every morning. After an unusual delay she and her family realized that something was wrong. Her father's friends and coworkers let her and her family know that he could be taken by undercover members of the army and was probably vanished.

Oscar and Shaira's fathers were political activists and civil rights advocates, along with them an important amount of Colombians disappeared due to their actions, being targeted as military objects, whereas many others found themselves in the middle of war factions and conflicted interests. They are part of thousands of Colombian women and men who one day vanished because of their political stances, sometimes even by mistake or simple presumption. The actual number of cases is as uncertain as their location and state. Various reports talk about more than 250,000 cases occurred during the years of violence in the country, whereas other sources debate in their figures going from figures starting from 25,000 registered victims to more than 50,000 reported cases during the last 25 years. Either way, the amount of cases is astonishing enough to be a major concern in the country, but it has been overlooked and disregarded over years. Each one of these cases have been impacting households of 3 to 8 members, impacting also friends and relatives, and expanding to local communities, creating as the resulting effect a very damaged social fabric.

But those women and men who went missing are not only the victims of these awful cases. Their families have been living with an indescribable pain for years. Ultimately, their family members, as survivors, are the ones who experience the torture of their disappearance, in addition to the painful process to get access to institutional responses, social supporting and justice administration. Oscar, Shaira and many other Colombian families suffer the constant pain caused, not only by the fact of not knowing what happened to their loved ones but also caused by the fact of being questioned, discredited, disregarded and stigmatized both by the Colombian State, which in most of the cases is the perpetrator itself, but also by the Colombian society that easily draw a quick and unfair conclusion: These people were vanished because they represented a risk for the country... **"They did something wrong"... "They probably deserved it."**




¿DÓNDE ESTÁN NUESTROS RECIDOS?  
¿Los estamos esperando?

Among a list of needs, families of victims, who are also victims by extension, have these needs:

**Closure: A milestone to move on, not by forgetting the situation but by addressing it from a difference stance. Closure enables a starting point to rebuild their lives.**

**Keep their loved ones alive —symbolically—: Families need to keep their loved ones alive in a symbolic way by making their presence visible and conveying their legacy to society.**

**Social and political vindication: Victims' disappearing is commonly branded as a result of a presumed subversive activity —somehow—justifying their sad destiny. Families need their loved ones' cases be treated as legitimate crimes, and dignify their loved ones' defamed memory.**

During a second visit to Colombia I had the chance to visit an organizations formed primarily by mothers of Colombians who went missing in Medellin, expanded to Antioquia and surrounded areas. This area located in the North West of Colombia has been historically impacted by recurrent violence in the hands of drug dealing cartels, and his biggest exponent, Pablo Escobar, to violence performed by rebels groups and even the national army.

This organization called Caminos de Esperanza, Madres de la Candelaria (Roads of Hope, Mothers of La Candelaria) gathers more than 800 grieving mothers. Most of them having hideous cases of violence, besides the cases of their children or spouses who went missing as result of the reigning violence. The conversations with some of these mothers depicted some common factors:

- **Families are going through economic difficulties and need responses from the Government**
- **They expect to see their loved ones dead body, assuming that most of the times their loved ones were murdered**
- **Their goal is to convey the truth about their cases as a way to prevent new cases: this can't happen never again.**

Adding the cases of these mothers depicted a bigger landscape of the issue, where every faction of the war is involved, and not only people involved in political activism of human rights advocacy, in the context of war everyone could be targeted.





# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISSUE, A NEW AUDIENCE

## Colombia is a country of victims:

Both, those who had directly suffered the scourge of the conflict and those who had not, But had witnessed a country in war, every day of their lives, with the constant fear of being reached by its repercussion. And also experiencing the fear of being associated and involved with the cases, increasing the division.

Everyone try their best to avoid being targeted by the outcomes of war or violence, but there is very low acknowledge of enforced disappearance in Colombia, creating an unbalanced landscape for those victims and their families. Victims that embrace from political and social leaders, to human rights advocates to everyday Colombians trapped in the middle of war factions.

Factions that include:

- **Rebel groups from the left wing**
- **Rebel groups from the right wing**
- **Drug dealing cartels**
- **The National Police**
- **The National Army**
- **The Colombian State.**

The role of the Colombian State increases the complexity of these crimes, increasing the barriers for families of missing ones and creating the conditions for everyone to be targeted as victim, highlighting the importance of shining a light on these crimes, in order to prevent new cases and as a way to claim responses and ensure accountability from the perpetrators. Due to the nature of this crime, there is an additional audience that must be brought up to the scenario, those who has not being reached by this crime.

There is a common cause of disconnection between families of victims and the general public in Colombia. Although victims have been impacted for various reasons, interests and circumstances, all their families are united in a common unfinished grief and also, all of them face a common hurdle: indifference. Indifference is a prevailing expression of the divided experience of violence in the country. Even when the amount of cases occurred in Colombia are significantly numerous, these cases are not in the hearts and minds of most Colombians, in special those in the big cities where oblivion and silence towards these cases, easily take place. Indifference is not only caused by lack of information, but mostly by fear.

The sum of these factors establish the conditions that are summarized in the problem statement:

**In addition to the pain and uncertainty, families of missing ones are questioned, discredited and disregarded by both, the Colombian State and the Colombian society.**

Based on these factors, it was required to develop a solution that **enables the connection between families and the general public in order to preserve and bring to life the memory of those missing ones, due to the political armed conflict in Colombia, as a way to dignify their lives claiming institutional response and preventing new cases.**



# PROCESS

Once having a better understanding of the problem I started exploring concepts and ideas to translate a solution into a tangible intervention. Two rough approaches illustrated components of a future platform which would encompass both sides. One **first concept** was related to generate a toolkit for families of victims which was intended to facilitate healing conversations between family members as way to address and face the absence of their loved ones and restore their relations.

The rapid prototype included elements that enabled conversations by using the memory of their loved one, from the celebration and contemplation of their life as a foundation. In addition, this approach included a component that was intended to connect with other families going through a similar situation, generating a supporting network, based on sharing experiences to defy the feeling of loneliness and impotence present in the experiences of these families. This concept operated within a private sphere, in the intimacy of the households only opening to connect with other families.

The **second approach** was based on a series of symbolic and artistic demonstrations that used the shadows of those who went missing as a metaphor of their lack of presence, but also a permanent reflection of their memory buried under the burden of uncertainty and mystery.

This approach envisaged an intervention which includes a correlated offline and online impact campaign:

A series of cutouts human silhouettes appear in Bogota, Medellin or even NYC, they represented the shadow of actual people who disappeared in Colombia. Every cutout is present in a point of public affluence: a subway train car, a bench in the park, next to a bus stop, etc.

Each silhouette contained a short introduction: **"My name is \*NAME\*, and I disappeared in August 18th 1990"**...

Along with this brief message there was a QR code inviting people to scan it. Once people scan it they can access a website where the actual face of the victims appear, in the way their families would like them to be remembered.

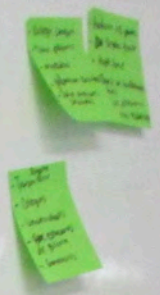
Besides their actual face, the persona is completed by insights from their legacy, experiences and stories. The platform would serve as a space to unearth a number of cases buried under the burden of institutional power.



TODAVÍA  
ESTOY  
PRESENTE



Placement

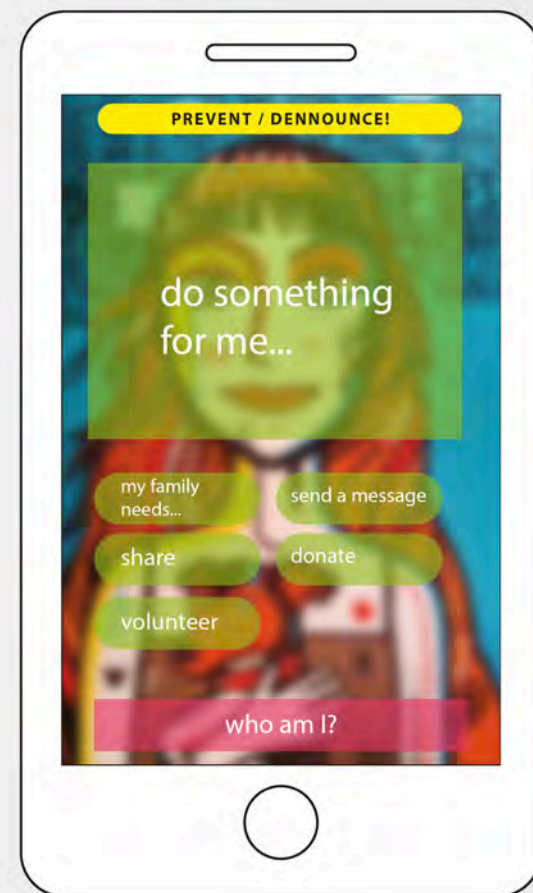
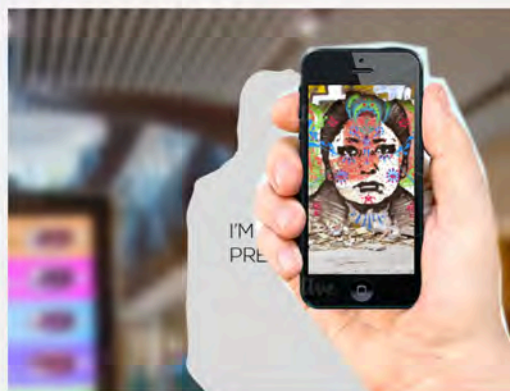


# VARIATION



## FINDERS

CREATIVE POTRAIT  
+  
SHORT STORY



Public could connect with families and victims by learning about their experiences but also take action:

- **They could share the story with their network.**
- **They could donate for a fund devoted to families.**
- **They could sign a political statement to the Colombian government.**
- **In Colombia they can also provide information about missing people if they were related to the case as witnesses or even perpetrators. Most of the times, people with valuable information can't provide it due to security reasons. This could be a way to enable a safe communication channel.**

In this case, the concept operated in the public sphere, where audiences had the opportunity of interacting with interventions in public spaces.

Although both approaches seemed to be different, there was a common factor: storytelling. Storytelling, therefore, should be allocated into the intervention as a common ground for those two audiences.

As a **second iteration** of the concept I made an attempt to make storytelling a conducive factor through the process. For victims' families there was previous stage of action when they get together to put together their loved ones' lives built up from their personal perspectives, memories, archives and stories. Also including additional factors to be mindful of: victims and families' safety.

This concept went back to the idea of using human silhouettes placed into semi public spaces, like shopping malls, schools, museums, churches, etc. where they seem to interact with the space.

In this case, would scan a code on the figures in order to get a creative portrait of the victim and a short story. After knowing the story the user could take action through various ways: donation, sharing, volunteering, signing a petition, prevent, provide information, etc.

Previous to this stage, family members come together to go through a process with the support of a visual artist and a narrative facilitator who help families to navigate their stories and honor the memory of their loved one using resources like archives, photos, personal belongings, etc. The outcomes of this process are the creative portrait and the short story mentioned before.

I decided to test these concepts, so I held prototype test, workshop wise, with a group of Colombian participants. They provided me with their thoughts and reflections.

As a result of this session I could notice a number of gaps and flaws on the idea, mainly categorized into these factors:

- **Access Barriers: It wasn't clear the purpose of the human silhouettes, or what to do with them.**
- **Storytelling approach: The story and the image seemed irrelevant**
- **Safety: Not only figures could be vandalized, but people interacting in front of them could be targeted.**
- **Call to action: The flow to take action wasn't clear**

In addition, this exploration revealed the needs of the general public

- **Need to be informed about this crime, why this is happening, who are the perpetrators**
- **Be able of taking actions from their possibilities**
- **Ensure their safety as participants**
- **Increase empathy as a way to lower barriers created by bias**
- **Being information about prevention**
- **Connect through approachable storytelling forms.**

The needs coming from the families perspective and the general public perspective could be summarized in these factors that should be included as components of the solution:

- **Connecting two audiences**
- **Enabling channels of action and communication**
- **Decreasing indifference**

As a way to evolve the previous concept, I had a quick visit to Colombia intended to get a better understanding of the general public. As a way to address the general public, I divided it into 5 groups including:

- **Population already informed: Human rights advocates and social leaders**
- **High School and College students**
- **Young professionals**
- **Middle age professionals**
- **Seniors**

From this list I identified high school and college students as game changers, a group of Colombians in whose hand relies the transformation of the conditions in the country, immerse in an educational context where their ideas are constantly challenged and having the impetu to make possible actions at large scale.

To get insights on their interests and means of engagement I conducted 20 decision making activities where every interviewee provided information about the way they would walk into the experience of being engaged with the story of a victim. Using cards that contained options for 5 stages of the experience, the participants completed a journey going through:

- **ENTRY POINT:** How they would approach the story.
- **DISTRIBUTION:** Where and how they would get to know about the story.
- **LEARN MORE:** Where and how they would get additional information about the story and the context around it.
- **MAIN ACTION:** What would be the way they react to the story expressed in an action.
- **ADDITIONAL ACTIONS:** What further actions they would take as a result of their awareness.

Based on their most common responses, a basic journey map was described as the following:

**The story should be placed in a public space as part of a space intervention. In addition to the space intervention there should be a social media strategy that spread the story. A website should contain further information about the story and its context. In response to the public intervention a physical demonstration would be the most accurate response, along with sending a message to the sender of the message and following up with volunteer work that supports the victims.**



# FOLLOWING CONCEPT

In response to these findings, a new concept was developed, with the intention of generation a platform which could encompass the factors identified as required. In this case the metaphor of making appear the invisible was the foundation.

This concept included the creation of a micro story and an illustration that represented the case of the missing one in the hands of a writer and a visual artist who receive resources from the family. Both, illustration and micro story come together into a canvas, but they can't be seen at plain sight. They appear by the action of collective and collaborative work. At a public installation, college students come together to intervene the canvas, painting it to see the illustration and the micro story emerge before their eyes. Along with the illustration and the micro story, a piece of information appears providing context.

## **A collaborative artwork that conveys the story of the family and their love one.**

Along with the artwork collaborative action, the easel structure enables another in situ collaborative intervention. Students could intervene the Action Wall. Each message board holds a -wearable- button that participants can take with them, and wear it in a visible area in order to show support. In exchange, the participant leaves a contribution in three different ways.

## **Be supportive: In this category the participant send a message to the family who delivered the content for that particular intervention.**

## **Be there: the participant makes a public commitment of destining an amount of hours to work with organizations involved in the issue.**

## **In addition to this pledge, the participant is invited to submit their application through a website**

## **Be creative: In this case the participant is encouraged to provide project ideas to work in the future, or the ones he or she has been already working on.**

In addition to this pledge, the participant is invited to submit their application through a website

Once the student fills out the board, he/she must hang their message back in the spot it was taken from. Students could show their stance by carrying or wearing the button.

This proposal was intended to be part of a crucial date. The UN observes International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on August 30th each year. In Bogota, organizations and families come together to Bolivar Square to perform demonstrations before Government and public. In preparation to that celebration 30 interventions would take place in 30 universities across Bogota, holding a Week for Memory and Dignity.

During the previous week each university would hold a commemorative day, including academic and cultural events. The intervention is placed as the element to celebrate the central activity.

On the 30th the 30 collaborative interventions come together into Bolivar Square to demonstrate the response of students to this situation. Families and organizations come together to see the evidence.

The artworks could be either delivered to the author families, or delivered to the CNMH to preserve them and create future exhibitions with them. On the other hand, organizations will be in charge of reaching out and enable the active and continued participation of students based on their proposals.

However, this approach was very complicated to be tested. In addition, projecting an estimated budget demonstrated that it would be an expensive intervention, in terms of costs, time and resources needed. Based on that understanding, a question about economic feasibility came across, unfolding an aspect not considered before. Was it worth investing a big amount of money to make this intervention happen instead of investing that amount in direct support to the families?

A possible response to that question was to provide a way in which the amount invested was not only recovered but increased, as a way to incorporate funding to the solution, contributing in solving a common issue for families of victims: financial difficulties. Nonetheless, relying on the possibility of adding a layer of profitability as a core factor would easily divert the purpose of the intervention.





DEFY UNCERTAINTY BY ADDING COLOR TO THIS CANVAS, OUR ACTIONS ALTOGETHER TRANSFORM REALITIES

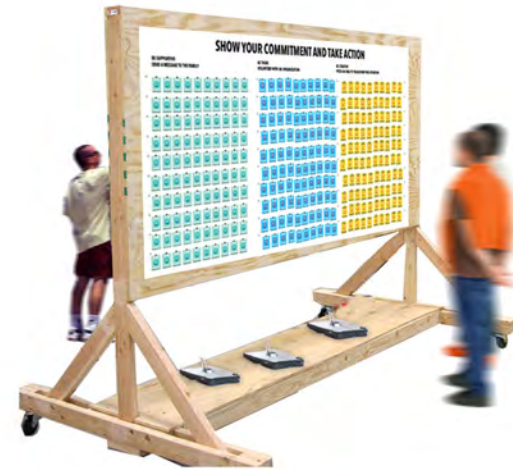


AURELIO, MY GRANDP

is a very short h  
Aurelio in his wor  
(I cannot stretch

...ket where it wa  
...at were forbidden  
...was only forbidden to  
...an I smoked. He read m  
...remember less and less ab  
...ation and full of lion

MORE T EXPECT ONES WWW .E.ORG



# A NEW METAPHOR

Facing the urgency of testing a compelling a feasible intervention, a new concept came across as a way to increase the component of taking out there the stories of the victims from the perspective of their families. The idea of using parts that together could deliver a story led to use a well known artifact as the driver of the messages.

**Piezas Faltantes, which means -Missing pieces-, is an intervention that brings to life the memory of people in Colombia who went missing due to the political armed conflict, by making visible their stories, connecting their families with public opinion to claim institutional response and preventing new cases.**

# HOW DOES IT WORK?

Audiences in big cities discover the story of a missing one by working collaboratively in putting together the artifact that displays the message: a puzzle. In a puzzle a micro story of a missing one, told from one of their relatives perspective, converges with a visual artwork that symbolizes their memory. In this case the artwork and the micro story was based on the experience of Dolores, one of the mothers who is part of Mothers of la Candelaria Association in Medellin. She lost her son Rodrigo in 1990.

Unsuspecting participants are engaged through an activity that drives an empathetic activity, as a metaphor of the actions that families of missing ones have to perform to find their loved ones. Their mission during the activity is to reveal a message, unknown for them, by finding the pieces that make up the puzzle.

Once they come together, participants experience a rewarding sense of collaborative work, an important foundation to take a time to read the story and contemplate the artwork, discovering the message behind the activity. Along with the story, the puzzle presents a piece of context that introduces the social issue addressed through the artifact and the activity.



After learning from the assembled puzzle, participants reflect on the story unfolded. Some new curious participants join the original group. During the testing events, participants shared their thoughts on

## THE RESOUNDING IMPACT OF THESE CRIMES

*"What this actually shows is the pain of a whole country expressed in the words of a mother... that multiplied by 45,000 times is a giant grief, and that is not less than horrifying"*

## EMPATHY AND PREVENTING NEW CASES

*"We experience for a while the distress of missing a piece and we were very concerned, because that one completed the message.... Our country and our society got used to leave the task of searching just to the family, and one by one we ended up losing 45,000 people... We must be doing our best to find them and prevent that more people disappear"*

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RECONCILIATION

*"When this mother tells how she found her son's eyes in the eyes of the perpetrator... It is not only an impactful story of grief but also a story of forgiveness, that is very powerful"*



#faltan45000

## I didn't know Rodrigo until he was gone

**M**y son Rodrigo left home to find brighter horizons after living among the reigning gloom in Medellín over those bleak years. He knew that he could get ahead with the courage I imparted to my children, despite losing his brother at the hands of violence. I still wonder why such a luminous heart lost its brightness and became unreachable. I still wonder so many things that the pain of uncertainty brings tears to my eyes. When seeking answers from those who should have had them, I faced the suffering of looking into the eyes of those who might have vanished my son. By looking into those eyes I found my son's eyes.

Dolores and family

In Colombia there are more than **45,000** stories like Dolores' story – **45,000** families expecting their missing loved ones to be back home.

[www.piezasfaltantes.org](http://www.piezasfaltantes.org)

📷 🐦 [piezasfaltantes](https://www.instagram.com/piezasfaltantes)

Participants defeat indifference and shine a light on these cases, commonly overlooked and stigmatized, by:

- **SENDING A MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY TO THE FAMILIES**
- **CLAIMING DILIGENT ACTIONS TO THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT**
- **SPREADING THE WORD THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND WORD OF MOUTH OUTREACH**
- **REPLICATING THE ACTIVITY WITH A NEW GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS**

During the testing events, two logistic methods were utilized:

For the first one, participants were invited to meet to be part of an activity with very few details. They only knew they were about to be engaged in an activity intended to contribute in peace building. In this case families and young professionals took part of the event.

The second approach involved spontaneous participants who were invited to participate on the go. In this case the activity was facilitated and developed by Contextos Collective in Cartagena, a performative arts collective working on social causes in the north of Colombia. Contextos held the activity with a crucial audience: college students. They visited 6 colleges and universities in Cartagena, attracting the attention and presence of over 60 students.

Based on these experiences, the public intervention using both, the puzzle and the searching activity would be described by this framework:

Organizations and collectives working on social issues and human rights advocacy use the public intervention as a tool to engage with communities, addressing two major audiences:

*COLLEGE STUDENTS, in whose hands lie an important role on the transformation of our country from an active and sustained contribution*

*FAMILIES, who develop an empathetic lens understanding the distress experienced by other families, to increase a sense of solidarity.*

By engaging both audiences the social fabric starts a recovering process. But this process starts beforehand, during the creative stage when the content present in the puzzle is developed.

In this process families of the missing ones are paired with a writer and a visual artist, through a direct or an indirect relation, depending on their location and families' willingness.

Those families accepting to share their stories provide relevant information and materials about their loved ones.

The micro story developed by the writer is based on the flash fiction style, a literary form intended to develop short but compelling narratives. Writers work within a framework that shape their creations.

This framework includes the following aspects:

- **The story must be as long as 650 characters**
- **It must include the first name of the missing one**
- **It must express the relationship between the narrator a family member and the missing one**
- **A reference to their victimization event**
- **Some positive and even negative personal traits**
- **A legacy or a message of reconciliation**

Maria Fernanda Garzon, a Colombian writer, tells her experience during her writing process:

*"Going through this exercise is such a different and impactful experience. Understanding the emotions of actual victims is something unspeakable"*

On the other hand, the visual artist creates a symbolic image based on the story and the resources provided by the family, dignifying their memory.

Luis Carlos Cifuentes, one of the most renowned young Colombian visual artists, actively involved in the work with victims of violence in the country, explains why he is compelled to be part of this exercise.

*"I have been working with the scourge of violence and their victims for years. Most of the times those pieces were intended to be part of exhibitions, catalogues and other publications. Adding a layer of public participation takes public engagement to a new level"*



FAMILIES OF MISSING ONES



CONTENT CREATION



PUBLIC INTERVENTION



CONNECTION WITH GENERAL PUBLIC

Families of missing people are the starters, the drivers and the beneficiaries of the intervention.

So far this proposal has sparked the imagination of those who have experienced, envisioning its potential

Some participants and advisors mentioned:

*"I'd love, as participant, to sign the piece that I found on the back side along with a message that says I found this story. That would be very rewarding... then I'll hang the pieces together in the trees of public parks, so more people can come to see the story assembled."*

### Alberto

*"I'd take out one of the pieces, in purpose, and connect that missing one to another story, weaving new cases"*

### Juana

*"I can see this intervention involved entire neighborhoods"*

### German

*"This should include as many participants as possible, let's make it huge"*

### Diego

*"Along with the physical activity, you can create an online activity, gaining much more outreach and diverse audiences, even international audiences"*

### Rinat

## But, what do the families say?

Ulianov Franco, son of a victim and director of the organization "Familiares Colombia" said:

*"Families across the country, specially those who are located in distant areas, should be actively involved in this process. It is crucial for them to know that fellow Colombians care about their situation"*

Oscar, also the child of a victim, and a current Anthropologist and Historian, mentions:

*"This idea is a compelling strategy, it is required to find new and innovative storytelling mechanisms to preserve the memory of the victims and vindicate their political role"*

Teresita Gaviria, founder and director of Mothers of La Candelaria Association in Medellin, and mother of Camilo, who disappeared in 1998, says:

*"It is such a beautiful work, we need the whole country to know the truth, which is the foundation for social justice"*

And **Dolores**, or Lolita as her friends call her, the mother whose story opened served as the foundation for the prototype artifact states:

**"I am deeply moved to see this tribute for my son and see how people are being engaged to know about our cases. It is enlightening"**

The same Lolita who lost three of her children, but found in forgiveness a reason to move forward.

Lolita adopted three of possible perpetrators of these, and other crimes, as their new children in a tremendous gesture of reconciliation.

## Based on this starting point, there are three outcomes happening in the near future

1. Contextos collective is creating a performance based on Piezas Faltantes, which would be part of their repertory and a piece to keep developing their work.

Ali Majul, director of the collective explains:

*"Piezas faltantes served as inspiration to create our new performance. It is critical for us sharing the acknowledgement on these cases. We see piezas faltantes as a complement to our work as performers"*

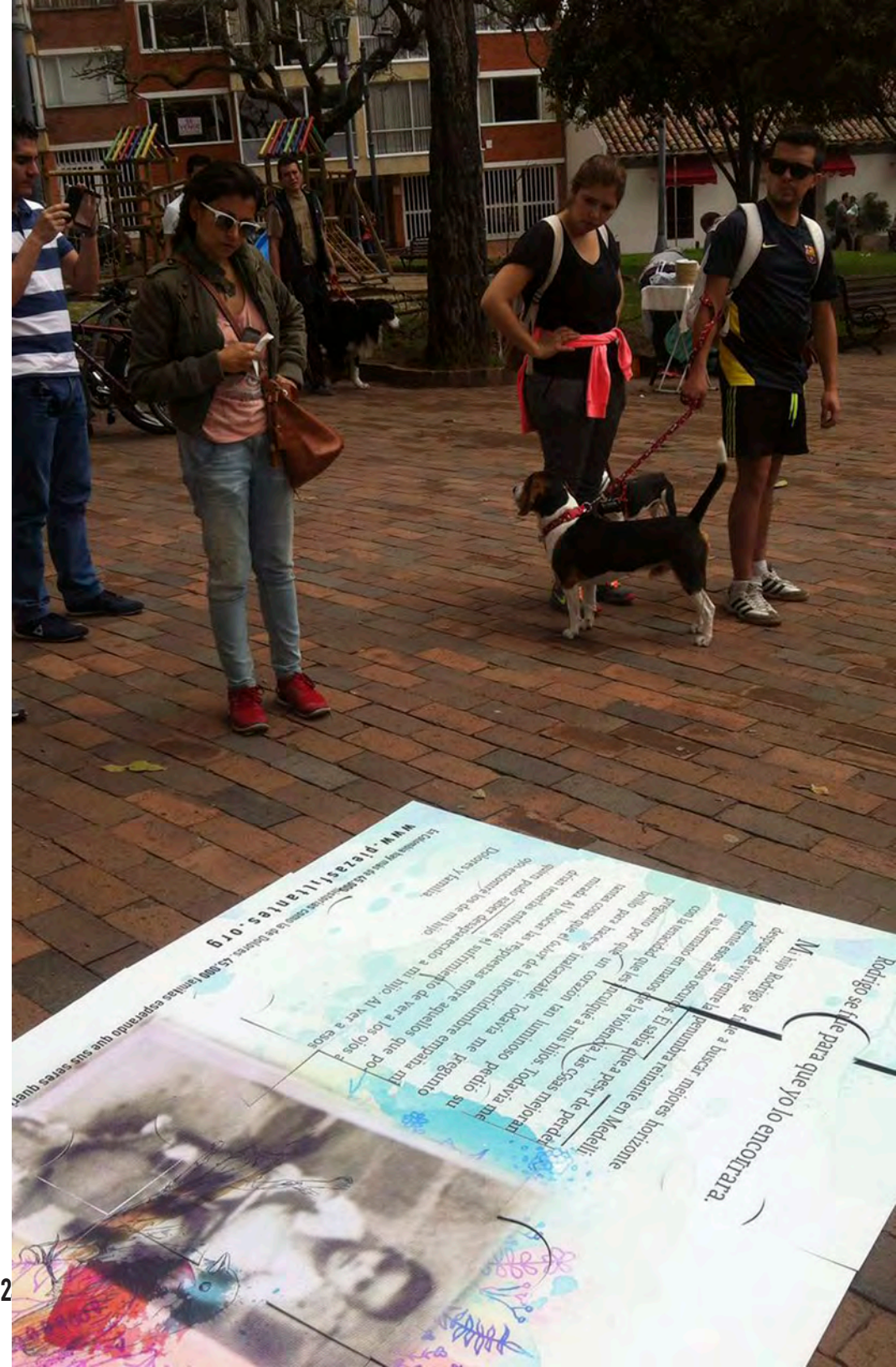
2. The Colombian Consulate, and its program for victims Colombia nos Une (Colombia Joins Us), has extended an invitation to develop this idea expanding its principles to other cases of victimization.

3. Yolanda and David Andersson from the Humanist Movement, and I are already committed to the **FIRST COLOMBIAN FESTIVAL FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**, to be held in the summer of 2016 in Upstate New York, having Piezas Faltantes as the core activity.

Yolanda Andersson mentions:

*"Piezas Faltantes integrates, recognize and repairs victims, leading to close the circle of violence!  
It is art as reconciliation tool!"*

4. An important future step is to be part of the commemoration of the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearance, which is celebrated on August 30th every year. To achieve that goal, it is important to engage influencers, policy makers and advocatos in Colombia.







# RESOURCES

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aulas de Paz. *Ecos de Paz*. Medellín, 2015.

Alexiyevich, Svetlana. *War's Unwomanly Face (Spanish Edition)*. Debate. Barcelona, 2015.

Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. *Informe Desaparición Forzada Tomo 2 and Tomo 3*. Bogotá, 2014.

Fiscalía General de la Nación. *Mujeres que no parieron para la guerra, participación de lideresas en el proceso de Justicia y Paz*. Bogotá, 2013

Morales, Jairo. *¿Qué es el posconflicto?* Colombia después de la guerra. Ediciones B. Bogotá, 2015.

Nussbaum, Martha. C. *Political Emotions*. Belknap Press. New York, NY - 2013.

Various Authors. *1985, la semana que cambió a Colombia*. Semana Libros. Bogotá, 2015

Various Authors. *Reconciliación, El Gran Desafío de Colombia*. Semana Libros, Bogotá 2015.

## WEB RESOURCES

[www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co](http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co)

[www.familiarescolombia.org.co](http://www.familiarescolombia.org.co)

[www.movimientodevictimas.org](http://www.movimientodevictimas.org)

[www.nydia-erika-bautista.org](http://www.nydia-erika-bautista.org)

[www.pacifista.co](http://www.pacifista.co)

[www.reconciliacioncolombia.com](http://www.reconciliacioncolombia.com)

[www.redesmadresdelacance.wix.com](http://www.redesmadresdelacance.wix.com)



DAVID ROJAS LEÓN - DSI 2016

---

[drojas2@sva.edu](mailto:drojas2@sva.edu)