

Caminos de paz / Pilgrims for Peace

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Walking and listening attentively, like fallible pilgrims, eager to correct errors of faith, leads to discoveries. For example, you may discover that forgiveness has been overrated by official culture, including legal authorities. The magistrates of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) were surprised by the resistance of victims to forgive their victimizers. The farmers who live in a Bogotá municipality notoriously harmed by the war and called, by an act of faith, Sumapaz [Highest Peace] refuse to forgive. Anticipating forgiveness as the first step of restorative justice burdens violated people with an additional ethical and emotional cost, instead of acknowledging the need to express rage and unburdening themselves. Absolving inhuman abuse is humanly impossible, and requiring it aggravates the damage rather than mitigate it. Nevertheless, the farmers of Sumapaz distinguish this unacceptable step of apologizing from the perfectly legitimate offer of collaboration. The difference dawned on the JEP and lit the path forward. The magistrates listened carefully and allowed themselves to be guided.

Why would anyone want to collaborate with people who don't know each other? Well, by walking together with other pilgrims and depending on the knowledge and hospitality of inhabitants in areas that had been unattractive or difficult to access. More than a space, a path is an activity, a verb rather than a noun. It means movement more than goal. One *does* the Camino de Santiago, for example. The pilgrimage is valued not so much for its predictable endpoint but for the discoveries that occur along the way. To walk on the path is to undertake a spiritual adventure, to set out on “a dark night of the soul,” in the words of Saint John of the Cross, and make a mortal leap into a world made invisible by sin and insecurity. Embarrassed and perplexed, the pilgrim spends many days on the long and eventful journey, tired and sore, before clearing up doubts and reaching enlightenment. Walking means persevering, practicing, resuming the healing adventure day after day.

Inspired by the pilgrims who for centuries have traveled the Camino de Santiago to achieve a spiritual goal, we propose to launch *Caminos de Paz, Paths for Peace*. It will be a practice and a gradual process to lay the foundations for sustainable peace. Both in Colombia and in other countries violated by so much war and misery, peace has been misinterpreted as a goal, an objective, a purpose, when it should be redefined as a continuous and vital activity. Peace building does not end with political agreements, nor with conventional reparations -- money never suffices; legislation depends on often reluctant and sometimes sabotaged implementation; and symbolic reparation hardly helps when it amounts to monuments and plaques. These conventional measures may be necessary, but they are insufficient, band-aids that cover a wound that does not heal. The cover hides damaged land and lives; it protects the delicate vision of more fortunate fellow citizens who consider the matter of peace settled. Achieving lasting peace means changing the point of view, still focused away from territories kept hidden by off-limits signs, where violence keeps outsiders out. While we can still enter, before the zones become red again, pilgrims can walk together and discover the will to work in collaboration with survivors. contribute.

A change of view happened for the JEP in 2021 during the fifth and last session of Pre-Texts, an interpretive activity that submits texts to creative practices to promote active citizenship. Both magistrates and peasant victims of war participated. In the first session, we had tackled an essay on transitional justice by asking the text questions. The doctors of law heard good questions from the farmers; and the farmers realized that the lawyers also had questions. Horizontal complicity began there, and it developed through creative activities until it generated accords to set out on Paths of Peace, to continue talking. We understood that peace is forged on the way, that the path is a verb akin to walking. Peace is not established all at once by laws and sanctions, but is earned daily, as nutrition is gained by eating. These are vital and precarious activities, renewable and potentially sustainable, if we continue to honor them.

Caminos de Paz is also a response to the rise of tourism in Colombia. (Mikhail Bakhtin astutely remarked that every speech act is a response.) The entrepreneurs of new tourism companies are often ex-combatants who had for years restricted the same roads they now use to circulate resources, including tourists. Attracting the curious, perhaps morbid visitors, deserves a more ethical and interesting alternative, the *Paths of Peace*. It is an invitation to meet territories and inhabitants, to fall in love with the country and its people so that we care for each other in the double sense of feeling affection and taking responsibility. Pilgrims connect; they don't snoop. Walking with others is a practice that is repeated and transmitted. Pilgrims depend on local people who may be reluctant to forgive, but are willing to work with us.

The *Caminos* will probably begin with the JEP's program "Restoring Us." It allows identified victimizers to reduce their sentences by working in ecological projects, clearing land and planting trees. The first sites are Usme and Ciudad Bolívar, difficult districts in the outskirts of Bogotá. Adding *Caminos* to the restorative project – for teachers trained in Pre-Texts to facilitate interpretation sessions with their students, residents, and ex-combatants of Restoring Us -- will sow lasting collaborations. The National Library takes note of the plans and prepares to walk along with the JEP. Possibly, the first steps of the *Caminos* will be in Antioquia, thanks to the leadership of EAFIT University. There, paths are being planned both for the metropolitan area of Medellín and for remote areas of the State.

Put on the path by distinguished guides of civic culture, Antanas Mockus from Bogotá and Sergio Fajardo from Medellín, we propose a way to know and love a land as active citizens. The first stage will be to listen. The second is to respond with contributions of resources or services, whether it is to help build schools, clinics, and cultural centers, or whether we develop new practices for work and for education. The routes await us! Colombia -- like Peru, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, among other countries of Latin America -- is fragmented between safe – mostly white -- metropolitan areas and outlying areas of Afro-descendant and indigenous people, ignored by institutions and lacking services. Healing the divide and the damage already done will mean taking a bus to an off-limits part of the city, or a long-distance bus to some unknown place, to travel in heterogeneous groups (students, professionals, community leaders, shopkeepers, industrialists, public officials, and others) who share a desire to listen and to respond. 2024 is a crucial year to establish sustainable foundations for peace. Our *Caminos de paz* raise a question for the reader: Which route will you take?