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**Disability and Ableism in the Falsos Positivos in
Colombia.
A Biopolitics Circuitry Approach**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment for examination.
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master in Disability and Inclusion Studies.
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Etilvia Cristina Munera



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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that the erasure of disabled people from official discourse during and after the Colombian Army's *Falsos positivos* scandal results from intersecting ableist and biopolitical powers. In the early 2000s, the Colombian Army presented thousands of civilian victims as positive results in staged military operations. This scandal stands as a horrific chapter in Colombia's contemporary history. While the scale of these crimes has been documented, disability and the intersecting identities of the victims have often been overlooked as a secondary characteristic, concealing how the Colombian state's power targeted particular bodies.

Employing a qualitative methodology that integrates elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Narrative analysis (NA). I apply this approach to the testimonial stories of two victims, Camilo and Roger, whose cases exemplify the intersections between the *Falsos Positivos* and disabilities in Colombia. I also triangulate these testimonies with press and official discourses from the conflict period and the subsequent Transitional Justice process.

The analysis reveals a systematic erasure of disabled people from official discourses, both during the time the scandal emerged and throughout the post-conflict (post 2016) period and its transitional justice mechanisms. I argue that this erasure is produced by the interlocking operation of the three theoretical concepts that comprise the biopolitics circuitry. The stories of Camilo and Roger demonstrate that their legibility as targets of *Falsos Positivos* by the military was based on a hierarchy of worth, founded in ableist values of productivity, capacity, and conformity to an idealised normative body (Goodley, 2014; Mitchell & Snyder, 2018).

This thesis thus contributes to the growing field of Disability Studies in the Global South while simultaneously offering a critical approach to understanding state violence against disabled bodies and Transitional Justice systems.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Disability occupies a paradoxical space within regimes of state violence. It is everywhere and nowhere at once: materially present in the lives of those most exposed to harm, yet largely absent from the analytic frameworks through which that harm is interpreted (Erevelles, 2011; Mitchell & Snyder, 2018; Rivas, 2019)

In contexts of militarisation and security governance, disability is rarely named as such, it operates through euphemism, silence, and displacement mostly (Satizabal et al., 2021). Disability thus constitutes a space of governance in which lives are differentially valued, managed, or exposed to death (Puar, 2017; Tremain, 2006). This is a space which through social and political arrangements can determine populations persistently vulnerable to neglect and violence (Puar, 2017). Limited access to education, healthcare, stable employment, and social recognition generates conditions of impairment and debility that exceed individual pathologies (Erevelles, 2011; Grech, 2011; ONU Mujeres & UN ICEF, 2022). Within this terrain, disability is then a biopolitical threshold in which life is sustained only minimally, survival is tolerated but not invested in, and death can occur without demanding immediate moral or political reckoning (Butler, 2016; Davis, 2002).

Within the New Zealand and broader international scholarly landscape, Critical Disability Studies has increasingly engaged with questions of power, coloniality, and biopolitics (Grech, 2015; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011; Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). However, its integration into analyses of militarised violence and transitional justice remains limited (Erevelles, 2011; Grech, 2015; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). Conversely, scholarship on political violence in the Global South—has hardly engaged disability beyond humanitarian or rehabilitative frames (Gill & Schlund-Vials, 2014; Grech, 2012; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). This separation has resulted in an analytical blind spot that obscure how ableist logics shape which lives are protected, which deaths demand accountability, and whose suffering remains politically manageable (Butler, 2016; Henao, 2021; Puar, 2017).

In Colombia, disability was historically constructed within patterns of inequality, displacement, and state abandonment produced populations living at the margins of citizenship, often marked by cognitive impairment, psychosocial distress, or social dependency that position individuals outside dominant ideals of productivity and autonomy (Campos, 2019; Yarza et al., 2019). At the same time these conditions shape the field in which violence becomes intelligible situating certain bodies where disappearance, misrecognition, and death can be absorbed into administrative rationality.

This phenomenon offers a critical site through which to address the epistemological gap (Munévar et al., 2019). Existing analysis have focused on military incentives, institutional corruption and failures of oversight (CEV, 2022; HRW, 2015). While these accounts are essential, they do not fully explain why certain populations were available for violence without immediate moral or political outrage (Henao, 2021), and particularly, how disabled people became the object of such violence.

1.2 A CRITICAL DISABILITIES STUDIES APPROACH TO THE FALSOS POSITIVOS.

Without yet expanding on the possibilities and limitations of different disability models, it is useful that I establish here where I stand within this work. The models of disability have been useful frameworks to explain the characteristics of each approach to disabilities, yet they carry specific genealogies that cannot be assumed universal. Most of them have been developed in the global north and based in economies of welfare as a product of the industrial revolution (Goodley et al., 2012; Shakespeare, 2017).

The analysis I develop here requires a framework complex enough to accommodate aspects these models may not capture; not because the models are “wrong”, but because they are designed to answer different questions in different contexts. I aim to contribute to what Kafer (2013b) calls *“Imagining new Futures”* for disabled people in the margins, recognising that futures will look different depending on where one stands.

Following Beaudry (2016), the attempts to define disability objectively inevitably fail because the concept is loaded with normative assumptions. As the Figure 1 below shows, the medical model assumes disability is a problem located in individuals’ bodies requiring expert intervention and feeding into the binary (Able/disabled).

The social model assumes that disability is social oppression requiring political transformation (Oliver, 2013; S. L. Tremain, 2018). Both build their causal commitments into the definition itself, meaning that if in the case of the medical model impairment is “fixed” disability disappears and in the social model if social barriers and oppression are eliminated disability will also disappear. As Beaudry argues, a conceptual definition of disability is a debate that has persisted for decades without resolution. Drawing on Beaudry’s point of view, there is no correct definition of disability; there are only more or less useful ways of using the term for purposes (Beaudry, 2016).

Models of Disability

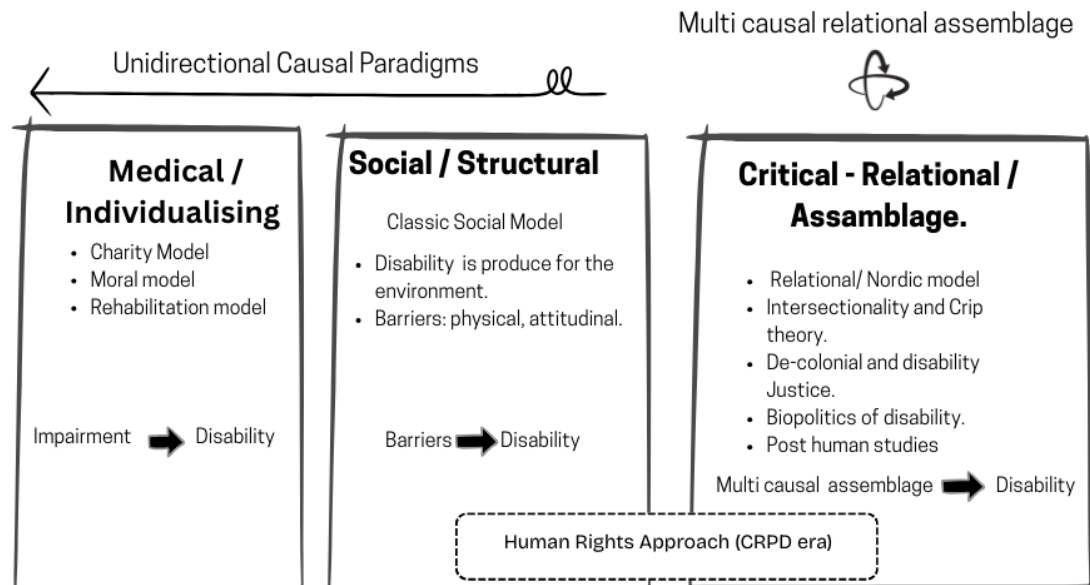


Figure 1 Models of Disability: A heuristic map.

Note. This diagram synthesises disability studies scholarship on the major paradigms: unidirectional causal models (medical and social), multi- causal relational frameworks, and the Human rights approach as intercepting in between social and relational. By author.

So, the question is which of these models helps us understand and address the phenomenon of *Falsos Positivos* in Colombia from a disability's perspective?

What I have learned from this debate so far is that the context and the problem determine a model choice or models choices. One phenomenon like *Falsos Positivos* can situate the analysis within the Medical Model, Social model and the later models that in the graphic are called relational models which include the Human Rights model that will focus on reparation for victims and is particularly strong in scenarios like the Transitional Justice. To analysing disability in the global south in a context like Colombia, multicausal models have significant advantages as they will offer to accommodate a wider scope to interpret determined situation. Yet unidirectional model is useful in specific situations as well. The approach is not to choose one and argue against the others but to deploy appropriate tools for the work at hand.

While concepts like ableism (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2019; Scuro et al., 2019), biopolitics (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018; S. Tremain, 2006), or necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019) offer partial explanations of bodily hierarchy and state violence, none of them alone is sufficient to apprehend the magnitude and normalisation of *Falsos Positivos* and the violence against people with disabilities in Colombia. In other words what remains insufficiently examined is how disability is simultaneously present and erased in the narratives through which the state violence is justified or made routine.

This thesis adopts a plural analytic structure that brings key concepts like ableism into dialogue with Grievability and Debility. They are complementary conceptual tools that illuminate different dimensions of what has been silenced from the point of view of disability. Critical discourse analysis and Narrative analysis are employed in Chapter three and four as methodological strategies precisely because they allow these conceptual elements to be traced across state policy, military practice, and media representation.

The following are the interrelated research questions:

1. How did ableist logics within Colombian society construct certain lives as expendable, enabling their targeting in *Falsos Positivos*?
2. How did ableism intersect with economic, racial, and gendered hierarchies to normalise state violence against populations positioned as disabled or debilitated in Colombia during the *Falsos Positivos*?
3. How does biopolitics of debility, capacity, disability extend beyond traditional studies in ableism to explain the systemic production of killable bodies during *Falsos Positivos in Colombia*?
4. How does Butler's concept of *grievability* help explain why the deaths of certain populations did not produce moral, political, or social outrage within the context of *Falsos Positivos*?
5. How did Colombian state policy, military practice, and media discourse reflect and reinforce a biopolitics of debility that differentially values life?

1.3 CONTEXT AND POSITIONALITY

This study is theoretical and interpretative in scope. It does not involve fieldwork, interviews, or direct engagement with victims or state institutions. Therefore, I employ principles of genealogy (Del Monte, 2015) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010)—methods to examine media reporting, official statements, judicial documentation, human rights reports and transitional Justice (JEP) hearings. The approach defined here reflects the questions, which are concerned with the production of meaning, legitimacy, bodily valuation — instead of focusing on the reconstruction of the events or questions of justice.

The absence of fieldwork limits the study's engagement with first-hand accounts of this violence; however, this limitation reflects a deliberate methodological and ethical position. Although I am from Colombia and my life has been shaped by the broader social and historical conditions of violence and lived experience of disability — that are examined in this thesis —this positionality is not considered as a source of epistemic authority or as a substitute for the lived experiences of those most directly affected by disappearance and extrajudicial killings. Differences in education, social mobility, and relative safety in which I produce this thesis, away from my homeland, preclude any claims of equivalence or intentions to represent those voices. However, this thesis engages substantively with the voices of victim's families through judicial hearings and public testimonies in which those families articulate their own accounts of loss, injustice, and demand for recognition. Chapter four treats these hearings as sites of narrative and epistemic production, analysing them through a critical conceptual framework attentive to biopolitics of disability (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018), debility (Puar, 2017), and grievability (Butler, 2016).

1.4 COLOMBIA AND THE CONFLICT AS A CONTEXT.

1.4.1 TEMPORAL SCOPE OF CORPUS.

Drawing on "*Stages of the armed conflict in Colombia towards post-conflict*" by Jonathan Rojas and the historical account of the National Centre of Historic Memory -CNMH

(2013), I will briefly provide context on the Colombian armed conflict, aiming to situate the emergence of *Falsos Positivos* within the material and historical conditions that gave rise to this phenomenon.

According to Rojas (2016) the Colombian armed conflict can be analysed into three stages: Initial, intermediate and final. Simultaneously, the National Centre of Historical Memory (CNMH, 2013) propose four periods that I will align with Rojas (2016) model.

Stage 1: Intensity and Escalation corresponding to the Period 1 (1958-1982) and Period 2 (1982-1996) (CNMH, 2013).

The origins of the conflict can be traced to the period known as “violence”, a bipartisan conflict between liberals as conservative parties sparked resistance, mainly in rural areas of Colombia (CNMH, 2013). According to the CNMH (2013) this is the first period of the conflict (1958-1982): the transformation of bipartisan violence into subversive violence in the context of the Cold war, and unresolved agrarian disputes fuelled the emergence of new guerrillas. FARC- EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army and ELN (National Liberation Army) are the main actors during this period. There are several small cells that do not get to solidify a project like these two groups in the national sphere.

Stage 2. Intermediate Stage. Negotiation amidst war. Period 3 (1996-2005). Humanitarian Crisis.

According to the CNMH, in this period, the relationship of the armed groups changed, and the conflict reached extreme violence and victimisation of civilians (CNMH, 2013, p. 156). This was the most intense and devastating period of war. The state lost territorial control, and a bloody dispute over land and local power ensued, while the guerrillas continued to expand and the paramilitary force achieved its consolidated (CNMH, 2013).

A precedent was set during this period, an attempt at peace negotiations between government and FARC failed, while the government conceded important land extensions called “*distention zone*” to facilitate the negotiations (CEV, 2022). The peace negotiations where a failure and this area became a dispute zone between guerrilla and

paramilitary, resulting in the most violent times of the conflict (CEV, 2022; CNMH, 2013). The failure of the peace negotiations discredited a negotiated solution and bolstered the case for a hardline military response, which Alvaro Uribe's presidency (2002-2010) would execute through Plan Patriota (a US-funded security initiative) and his internal doctrine of *Seguridad Democrática* (Democratic Security) (CEV, 2022; Iturralde, 2025).

This plan strengthened Colombia's military response and managed to push FARC back to the peripheries while at the same time negotiating the demobilisation of the paramilitary groups (AUC), which became controversial as it rearmed in new fragmented criminal groups deeply involved in drug trafficking and intimately linked with high-ranking politicians (CEV, 2022; Romero et al., 2007).

Stage 3. Final Stage. Post-conflict challenges. Period 4 (2005-2012) Rearrangement of conflict.

This stage begins after the conflict's peak and involves a military configuration and a new peace process. It aligns with the fourth period described by the CNMH. Despite the debilitating FARC, Alvaro Uribe's government did not achieve a military victory, and the human cost was high. The *Falsos Positivos* occurred mainly during this stage and will become an important event in the post-conflict period and the reconstruction of collective memory.

It is also in this stage that the opportunity for a new circle of peace negotiations arises when Juan Manuel Santos is elected president of Colombia.

1.4.2 THE PEACE ACCORD WITH FARC-EP.

In November 2016, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos signed a peace Accord with the biggest guerrilla group of Colombia. The negotiations took place in Havana - Cuba rather than Colombian national territory. This marks an important milestone for the nation, especially after enduring the recent decades of high intensity and humanitarian crisis in the territories. It is after this accord begins to take effect that Colombia enters the post- conflict stage (Rojas-Calderón, 2016).

1.4.3 TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

The first attempt at transitional justice in Colombia was enacted through the law 975 of 2005, called the law of Justice and Peace, after a peace deal with paramilitary groups (García-Godos & Lid, 2010). It is perhaps one of the elements that make TJ in Colombia quite different from other transition processes, including cases in Latin America such as Chile, Argentina, or Guatemala, where systems were created to facilitate the transition of dictatorial regimes to democracies (Lessa, 2021).

In Colombia, the TJ was created as a legal mechanism to manage the demobilisation process, first with the paramilitary (2005) and the later with the oldest and most significant guerilla group in Colombian territory. However, the war was still going on with great intensity (CNMH, 2013). This element also reveals how complex can be an analysis of Colombian conflict when so many actors involved, and how its evolution can degrade into atrocities that, as a country, will take many years to overcome.

The system created by the 2016 peace accord is a comprehensive, grounded in the principles of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR) (Téllez-Navarro et al., 2021). This system is based on three institutions that oversee different aspects—the Commission for the search of truth (CEV) as an extrajudicial temporary body, the Unity for the search of the disappeared (UBPD) as a humanitarian mission and the Especial Justice for the Peace (JEP) as the judicial body (Court) to investigate and prosecute those who committed crimes during the conflict (Military, FARC, paramilitary and third parties that participated). One of the main differences with the ordinary justice system is that here the sentences are more focused on the reparations for the victims and on finding the truth for the victims and their families. So, restorative actions are part of the remedy this special tribunal will impose.

This last unit of the TJ system, JEP, is key to this project, as the analysis will focus on the discourse and narratives that emerge from the hearings while tracking how is disability constructed in this space. I acknowledge that there are interesting discussions about the efficiency of the TJ and the challenge of uncovering the truth about the conflict. It is a tension that will become more evident when victims talk during the hearings.

The JEP also has distinct categories for the cases they investigate. *Falsos Positivos* is what they call the Macro Case 003, and from there, it has subdivisions by regions (JEP, 2018). The two cases presented here belong to the subcase of the Casanare region (Roger Acero) and the Subcase of the Antioquia region (Camilo Azure).

While it is important to understand the dimension of the TJ in Colombia, what I develop here is far from an evaluation of the TJ as a policy field. Rather, it uses the TJ moment in Colombia (post-2016) as a discursive vantage point from which to track what Jasbir Puar calls the *debility/capacity/disability* (Puar, 2017) circuit and what Judith Butler terms *differential grievability* (Butler, 2016).

The main argument here is that ableism operates as a “quiet metronome” of Colombian biopolitics—ticking steadily beneath both the *Falsos Positivos* killings (2002-2008) and the later peace-process and post-conflict.

To demonstrate this continuity, the corpus is organised into two analytically linked tiers:

1. **Conflict-era anchor set (2002-2016).** A purposive sample of press reports on the *Falsos Positivos* provides the baseline discursive material to analyse how disabled people are portrayed as outside the zone of legitimate life. These texts illuminate the function of media discourse in categorising individuals.
2. **Postaccord window (2016-present).** Press coverage, JEP audiences, and CEV documents are examined to observe how ableist attitudes—now couched in the languages of humanitarian resilience, labour activation, or inclusive peace—re-enter public discourse. The TJ period functions as an analytic for tracing the operations of the biopolitics of disability, debility and grievability in Colombia’s post-conflict settings.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured across five chapters, each contributing to a critical examination of the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon through the lenses of Critical Disability Studies and disability biopolitics.

Chapter Two. Literature Review and Conceptual framework.

In this chapter, I draw on Michel Foucault's genealogical approach (Dwivedi, 2025), to examine a series of historical and discursive formations that could have potentially contributed to the emergence of *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon in Colombia. The chapter traces multiple moments and logics—starting from colonial forms of domination in Latin America to later practices of *social cleansing*—that have shaped the contemporary levels of structural violence. This genealogical reading seeks to illuminate how these elements coalesce to make certain bodies intelligible as expendable within state and militarised projects.

The second part of this chapter develops the theoretical approach and introduces the key concepts that guide the analysis in the subsequent chapters. Drawing primarily from Critical Disability Studies, Biopolitics and key concepts like Ableism, debility, and grievability, the chapter establishes the conceptual structure through which disability is the central analytic for examining state violence, victimhood and transitional justice.

Furthermore, these concepts provide the analytical tools to track the empirical material that will be interpreted in Chapter four and five.

Chapter three. Methodological Framework.

While in chapter two I employ a genealogical approach to situate the *Falsos Positivos* and disability *within* a context of historical and discursive conditions that enabled its emergence, it is not an exhaustive genealogy and neither the methodology I utilise for this study. Chapter three therefore, positions discourse and narrative analysis as the core methodological frameworks, guiding how the empirical material is read, coded, and interpreted in the analysis chapter (Chapter 4).

Chapter Four and Five. Analysis/Interpretation and Conclusions.

This analysis condensed the conceptual framework and methodology tools to examine the stories of Camilo and Roger as their families bring them to the Transitional Justice tribunal, JEP. The hearings are the main data source from where the analysis is conducted, and from there a review of press and other data sources is integrated into the main narrative source of the case and finally the conclusions in Chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The term "*Falsos Positivos*" became part of Colombia's public discourse in the late 2000s, referring to the disturbing trend of the extrajudicial execution of civilians by state forces who then falsely presented these individuals as combat enemy deaths (CNMH, 2025; JEP, 2018; Vivanco, 2018). In this context, a *Falso Positivo* is a civilian who has been misreported as a combat kill to enhance the army's operational success rates. This study employs this term, acknowledging its origins as a euphemism that may have initially served to obscure the brutality of the underlying acts. Nevertheless, it is the term most widely adopted in academic literature, judicial documents, and movement of victims like Mothers of Soacha or ¹ (MAFAPO)—a collective of women, mothers, sisters and daughters of victims who reclaim the term to challenge the media narratives and denial by government agencies.

Analysis of *Falsos Positivos* in Colombia varies considerably depending on the disciplinary lens applied, with perspectives ranging from international law and Human Rights to Sociology and socio political (Gordon & Evans, 2020; Rojas B, 2020; Roperio Santiago, 2024). However, most of this scholarship is situated within the country's Transitional Justice process. Therefore, the phenomenon is predominantly studied through legal paradigms, drawing on both domestic legislation and international instruments, most notably the Rome Statute (Consejo de Estado, 2024; HRW, 2015; Rueda Salas, 12 C.E.).

¹ Madres de los *Falsos Positivos* MAFAPPO, (Mothers of *Falsos Positivos*). In 2008 this group of women revealed what became the *Falsos Positivos* scandal after their children start disappearing from Soacha neighbourhood in Bogotá city. Their persistence in the search of their loved ones and the unapologetic activism for the truth has been paramount to at least publicly made the perpetrators accountable.

Despite Colombia's progress toward transitional justice, the legacy of ableist violence remains conspicuously absent from scholarly and institutional scrutiny. Literature published since the 2016 peace agreement with FARC indicates that people with disabilities were specifically targeted during the army's *Falsos Positivos* campaign— a pattern that I will further explore in the analysis chapter 4. Former military personnel testifying before the JEP frequently explain that these individuals were selected because they were perceived as easy targets whose disappearances would not prompt investigation (Bustamante Reyes, 2020; JEPColombia, 2023b, 2024; Palma, 2016).

Compounding this violence, disabled people were systematically excluded from the peace negotiations themselves. As Biel Portero and Bolaños (2018) argue, neither did persons with disabilities participate in the negotiations in an organised capacity. No disability rights organisations or representatives were included in the formal talks, and their perspectives were absent from the discussions that shaped the transitional justice framework. As a result, the very institutions designed to address victim's rights — including JEP, CEV—were established without input from those most vulnerable to this specific form of violence, leaving intact the ableist logic that enabled *Falsos Positivos* (Biel-Portero & Bolaños Enríquez, 2018).

What has been broadly proven by CEV² (Commission of Truth) and during JEP hearings is that military units systematically targeted marginalised populations, those whom its very logic had labelled as “useless”—unemployed, homeless, disabled, or with mental illness (CNMH, 2017a; Montoya, 2023). The disability rights movement and researchers have demonstrated that such labels have framed certain bodies as disposable (Bustamante Reyes, 2020; Á. Henao, 2021). In JEP (2021), Auto 033³ confirmed that these populations were chosen precisely because their absence would provoke minimal scrutiny. Performance based incentives within the Army—promotions, holidays, and

² CEV: Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. In English: Commission for the clarification of truth.

³ Auto033 is a decree in Colombian legislature through which is made public the strategy that JEP adopts to investigate the cases of *Falsos Positivos* or Case 03. https://www.coljuristas.org/observatorio_jep/documentos/documento.php?id=212.

bonuses linked to body counts—translated this disposability into a managerial metric of success (Consejo de Estado, 2024; HRW, 2019, 2015).

Human Rights organisations had been documenting cases from the late 80s. Despite the sub-registry of victims from earlier, the commission of truth (CEV in Spanish)⁵ has estimated that from 1978 to 2016, the number of victims identified within this pattern is 8208. Of which, 78% (6402) occurred during 2002-2008 (peak of cases) (CEV, 2022; Vorágine, 2022). The JEP⁴ 6,402 victim's data is called the “provisional universe of victims” and reflects a necessary methodological effort to make this atrocity legible within a legal framework (JEP, 2018; Vorágine, 2022). The Commission of Truth (CEV in Spanish) placed a question in their report “*No Matarás*” (Thou Shalt Not Kill) (CEV, 2022) that prompts a reflection relevant to this review. It calls for an analysis of the issue that goes beyond military logic and legal frameworks.

What explains that an army winning the war would need to falsify its results? What explains that Armed Forces with all the country's military, economic, political, and social support would commit atrocious crimes such as extrajudicial executions? (CEV, 2022, p. 525).

As outlined in the report, the answer lies in the moral and ethical frameworks that shaped the armed forces' actions and the acquiescence of a large part of Colombian society.

Attending to this call, this work aims to approach *Falsos Positivos* genealogically, mapping the struggles over power, discourse, and normativity that would enable the emergence of such phenomena (Del Monte, 2015; Kretsedemas, 2017). This chapter specifically draws upon the Foucauldian genealogical framework examining the literature concerning the phenomenon of false positives and its association with disability (Del Monte, 2015; Dwivedi, 2025). The objective is to analyse the emergence of certain categories and institutional rationalities regarding bodies and threats that have arisen and solidified over time. This framing facilitates a Disabilities Biopolitics interpretation of *Falsos Positivos*, emphasising the utilisation of ableist logics of capacity,

⁴ JEP: jurisdicción Especial para la Paz. In English: Special Jurisdiction for the Peace.

deviance, and disposability (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018) under militarised governments (Erevelles, 2011; Grech, 2012).

In this sense, practices known in Colombia as *limpieza social* and the *Falsos Positivos* can be interpreted as modern enactments of these colonial technologies of purification—mechanisms that measure worth through productivity, civility, and bodily conformity (Esposito, 2006; Grech, 2015; Mignolo, 2011). The *Falsos Positivos* thus represent the bureaucratised continuation of a moral technology of purification: a transformation of social stigma into military performance, where killing the “unfit” becomes a measure of institutional efficiency and national renewal (Puar, 2017).

Therefore, this chapter approaches the *Falsos Positivos* as the convergence of *constitutive, enabling, and compounding* conditions that made this form of violence thinkable, possible, and ultimately operational. Following Critical disability studies scholars such as Butler (2016), Goodley (2014), and Puar (2017), I argue that these killings cannot be fully understood without interrogating the historical, ideological, and biopolitical logics that shaped the classificatory regimes through which disabled bodies/minds became disposable.

Falsos Positivos in the context of Colombia’s armed conflict has indeed been documented through judicial rulings (Consejo de Estado, 2024; JEP, 2021), historiographic studies (CEV, 2022), transitional justice mechanisms (CEV, 2022; CNMH, 2025, 2013; JEP, 2021).⁵⁶⁷ Yet this body of literature is profoundly uneven in its representational scope. The lives, deaths, and political meanings of disabled people, particularly those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, remain conspicuously under-theorised and under-recognised (Biel-Portero & Bolaños Enríquez, 2018). Equally marginal is the incorporation of disability studies theory as a lens through which to analyse state violence in Colombia (Satizabal et al., 2021).

⁵ For detailed cases of *Falsos Positivos* in between 1988-2011. Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz (CINEP/PPP, 2018), Colombia: Deuda con la humanidad 2: 23 años de *Falsos Positivos* (1988-2011).

⁶ See The historical account in Comisión para el esclarecimiento de la verdad (CEV): No Matarás. Relato histórico del conflicto armado interno en Colombia (CEV2022

⁷ for analysis of command responsibility, see Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2015), *On their watch: Evidence of senior army officers’ responsibility for false positive killings in Colombia*.

To clarify this argument, this section is organised into four interconnected sections:

1. **Constitutive colonial-ableist logics**, showing how coloniality *constituted* the categories that later allowed disabled, poor, or racialised subjects to be read as disposable.
2. **Enabling militarised doctrines**, examining how Cold War militarism and U.S. doctrine facilitated the operationalisation of those colonial hierarchies.
3. **Compounding logics of elimination**, focusing on the logic of *Limpieza Social*, which intensified and legitimised the fusion of colonial ableism with militarised threat-classification, rendering the elimination of disabled, poor, or marginalised civilians morally intelligible.
4. **The biopolitical circuit**: This section articulates the concept of a biopolitical circuit through which these conditions converge. Drawing on Puar's (2017) notion of debility, Goodley (2014) theorisation of disablism and ableism, and Butler's (2016) concept of ungrievability, this section conceptualises how systemic precarity is produced (debility), how body-minds are interpreted as deviant or threatening (ableism), and how certain lives become socially unrecognised as losses (ungrievability). Collectively, these frameworks position disability as central to understanding the logics that made civilians killable in the context of *Falsos Positivos*.

2.1.1 CONSTITUTIVE CONDITIONS

THE CONSTITUTION OF AN ABLEIST LOGIC: COLONIAL LINEAGES AND CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES OF ELIMINATION.

To begin, the ordering of bodies and lives under the Spanish colonial regime in Latin America established a moral taxonomy of humanity grounded in Christianity; human worth was linked to purity, labour, and obedience (Campos, 2019; Quijano, 2014a).

As Quijano explains, through his concept of *coloniality*⁸, the colonial power used race, labour, and morality to produce hierarchies that distinguish the fully human from those

⁸ Coloniality (Matriz Colonial del Poder in Spanish) is a concept developed by Anibal Quijano and used broadly for anticolonial scholars. See more, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina." (Quijano, 2014b).

occupying inferior places within the civilisational order (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2014a, 2020).

The civilisatory project did not simply impose administrative power or geopolitical control; it installed a moral order through which entire populations were evaluated, corrected, and often annihilated based on hierarchies of worth. As Maria Lugones reminds us, “The civilizing mission, including conversion to Christianity, was present in the ideological conception of conquest and colonisation. Judging the colonised for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilising mission justified enormous cruelty” (Lugones, 2010, p. 744).

The moral regimen of the *coloniality* power matrix did not disappear within the independence processes, on the contrary the Latin American republics inherited and reconfigured this colonial criterion in modern governance systems that insisted on measuring the citizens according to productivity, normality and capacity to contribute to the national project (Castro-Alzate et al., 2021; Grech, 2012; Mignolo, 2011). It is within this historical continuity that it is possible to read the transition from Colonial dispositive of correction toward republican technologies of normalisation that sustain a dominant ableist logic over the body, minds and ultimately life (Erevelles, 2011; Meekosha, 2011).

To summarise, the logics of racialisation, ableism, productivity, and moral worth that structured colonial rule continue to organise Colombia’s political and social life today. Furthermore, to fully understand how these colonial structures were operationalised in the concrete mechanics of *Falsos Positivos*, it is necessary to trace how they were re-engineered through U.S. military and economic interventionism in Colombia, particularly since the Cold War (Iturralde, 2025).

The following section will focus on developing a reading of American interventionism and its meaning for the *Falsos Positivos*, and on understanding it as the continuity of colonial power over South American territories and bodies through counterinsurgency paradigms and security doctrines.

2.1.2 ENABLING CONDITIONS

AMERICAN INTERVENTIONISM AND THE INTERNAL ENEMY DOCTRINE.

State Violence in Latin America has been studied mainly, and understandably, through the dictatorial processes in Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador), among others (Castañeda-Hernandez, 2016). Ironically, Colombia has been portrayed as the “*oldest*” democracy in the region in part because it has never endured a dictatorship regime as such. However, the nation has experienced an ongoing armed conflict for decades that somehow has served to justify state violence toward its citizens under an apparent democratic order.

The Cold War was a period of global confrontation between two major powers and for Latin America, this meant the emergence of the Truman Doctrine, which aimed to *contain* the threat communism posed to the socio-economic order that the US had envisioned in southern territories (Castañeda-Hernandez, 2016; Leal-Buitrago, 2003)

Latin America was politically and economically directed, through an array of policies, to train military forces in accordance with the *National Security* doctrine (Castañeda-Hernandez, 2016). Thereby, the emergence of the School of Americas (SOA 1963) later named The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), the institution commended by the US for offering military training and support to the development of counterinsurgency strategies, has been applied in most Latin American territories (Haugaard, 2011).

A few historians have investigated the narrow link between American foreign policy and internal conflicts in Latin America; however, it is also significant that the emergence of reports during the peace negotiations as post-conflict organizations developed with civil NGO's archives of memory of the Colombian armed conflict. A compelling link could be found in the report prepared by Colombian historian Vega Cantor who served on the Historical Commission on the Conflict and its Victims. Vega - Cantor delivers a detailed historiographic account that argues that the US has been actively intervening in Colombia at least since 1920 and directly involved in the Colombian Armed conflict including the peace agreement with the guerrilla FARC (Vega Cantor, 2015).

Similarly, the report "*From the beginning to the end: The United States in the Colombian Armed Conflict.*" Prepared by three international NGOs (FORPP et al., 2020) for the CEV (Commission of Truth) offers a view of the long-standing relationship between the US and Colombian governments. It exposes the economic interests of the US in the Colombian Conflict, based on the arms industry platform and the internationalisation of the US military doctrine, reflected in strategic plans developed alongside the Colombian military for other countries in Latin-America, such as Honduras and Mexico, among others.

Perhaps one of the matters mentioned in this report that deserves be looked at carefully in this work is the data published by SOA-Watch on the seven manuals declassified by the CIA in 1996. The pedagogy that formed thousands of Latin American military officers included the characterisation of the enemy, intelligence tasks and torture (FORPP et al., 2020).

A telling example is in the manual N 4, *Terrorism and Urban Guerrilla*, produced by the School of the Americas (SOA) in 1983. This study manual characterises the different types of *terrorists*, incorporating Psychiatric and behavioural classification categories. It describes one category of terrorist as the "*Psychopath (loco) Terrorist*" (SOA, 1989, pp. 4–5) as the most *dangerous* category of subversives because of their alleged unpredictability. The document openly uses the term "*loco*" (crazy in English) and "Psychopath" interchangeably to refer to this type of *terrorist*. This aspect is particularly relevant to this work because it links the military doctrine to the biopolitics of disability (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018), in the Colombian armed Conflict, and more specifically to the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon.

In this convergence of biomedical knowledge and military duty exists a mutual reinforcement in which many people with disabilities have been trapped. On one hand, US military doctrine systematically draws from biomedical and psychological knowledge⁹ (Mccoy, 2006), such as sensory deprivation research, and psychiatric categorisation, to develop interrogation techniques, surveillance and

⁹ Operation Paperclip facilitated the transfer of German wartime scientists, into U.S. defence and intelligence programmes, influencing the uprising of behavioural science of Cold War security doctrine. See: Mccoy, Alfred. (2006). A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, From the Cold War to the War on Terror.

counterinsurgency techniques, many times experimenting on disabled bodies and minds (Heath-Kelly, 2022; Williams, 2020). On the other hand, the same doctrine and technologies framed individuals with disabilities and mental health issues as threats to neutralise (Czech et al., 2023). Instilling a logic that situates impairment with deviance, as perceived through military lenses, characterises the enemy.

For decades, this Manual has trained Colombian military personnel within a doctrine that fused political dissidence with biomedical pathology. To get an idea of the scale of this doctrine's implementation in Colombia, we can refer to the number of officials who have graduated from this school since its foundation as SOA and later as WHINSEC. (Acemoglu, 2016; Haugaard, 2011). As Figure 2 below illustrates, according to data compiled by SOA Watch, Colombia accounted for nearly 40% of all Latin American graduates from the School of the Americas between 1999 and 2012—an unparalleled concentration that signals how deeply U.S.



Figure 2. SOA/WHINSEC Trainees (1998-2012).

Note: Comparison of the percentage of Colombian trainees from 1999 to 2012 to the total in the rest of Latin American countries. Data adapted from FORPP, SICSAL, & SOA Watch. (2020). *Desde el inicio hasta el final: Estados Unidos en el conflicto armado colombiano*. (Informe para La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición) [Technical Report]. FORPP. <https://soaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/InformeCEV.pdf>

National security doctrine penetrated Colombia's military institutions (FORPP et al., 2020). The extensive and sustained level of training helped normalise classificatory systems in which clinical or behavioural terms migrated into security language (Heath-Kelly, 2022; Williams, 2020). Over time, diagnostic descriptors in military manuals became operational categories used to populate kill lists, converting medicalised labels into criteria for lethal targeting (Castrodale, 2019; FORPP et al., 2020; SOA, 1989).

The Colombian state's war on terror and war on drugs introduced through the Plan Patriota (Patriot Plan) and Colombian internal doctrine of *Seguridad Democrática* (Democratic Security) converge into a global security structure that justifies internal conflict against its own citizens (Iturralde, 2025). Furthermore, Ortiz (2009), observes that these epistemologies will extend beyond the military domain and permeate civilian life. Colombian culture progressively began to perceive various social challenges as military threats necessitating armed "solutions" (Ortiz, 2009).

On the other hand, Acemoglu et al, (2016) in the empirical analysis *The Perils of High-Powered Incentives: Evidence from Colombia's False Positives*, demonstrate that the surge in *Falsos Positivos* cases is significantly correlated with especial units led by Colonels and functioning in regions with inadequate oversight or accountability (Acemoglu et al., 2016). The study highlights the conversion of US mandates into internal and military policy through instrument such as the confidential Ministerial order 029 of 2005 and the BOINA of 2006 (Bonuses for Operations of National Importance). These directives established a reward system for military officers, law enforcement personnel, DAS officials, and civilians who assist with military initiatives of national security significance (Acemoglu et al., 2016; Infoabe, 2021; Vivanco, 2018). Acemoglu et al (2016) observed that bonuses could reach up to 12 times their wages, contingent upon the officer's participation in these actions to bring up the quote on positive military results. The combination of numerous prizes and no control proved catastrophic for thousands of young individuals in Colombia who were not involved in the armed conflict. Not surprisingly, the statistics revealed by the CNMH and the Observatory of Memory and Conflict (MOE in Spanish) (2025), have shown that the highest peak of *Falsos Positivos* cases occurred during 2003 and 2008, precisely during the implementation of these directives in the Uribe's government, whose focus was an intensified pressure to

demonstrate military results in the state war against narcotraffic and guerrillas (CNMH, 2025).

Tracing this logic and the enabling elements behind, one could understand, even though only partially, why a significant number of young disabled people were targeted by the army during the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon. Even if disaggregated data is not available (CNMH, 2025), this work points to a recognisable pattern that requires further analysis in that field which is not developed here. Nevertheless, as this chapter has argued so far, the vulnerability of disabled people in this context cannot be understood without situating it in a broader colonial matrix of power that long ago installed ableist-racist hierarchies of humanness that the cold War dynamics will reinforce within their national-security doctrines in a form of administrative instruments (directive 029-2005/BOINA 2006). Neither *Falsos Positivos* should be understood as a matter of administrative incentives alone. These elements are part of a broader assemblage that made disabled and marginalised youth especially vulnerable within the *Falsos Positivos* operation logics.

The next section, therefore, turns to *Limpieza Social* as a crucial antecedent. Long before the *FALSOS POSITIVOS* period, these social-extermination practices had already sedimented the epistemic and ontological conditions through which disabled and socially marginalised young people were constituted as *targetable* bodies. In other words, *Limpieza Social* shaped both how these youths were *known* (epistemically) and what kind of beings they were understood to be (ontologically), establishing the moral and classificatory frameworks that later will be perceptible during the *Falsos Positivos* operations (Butler, 2016).

2.1.3 COMPOUNDING CONDITIONS

LIMPIEZA SOCIAL (SOCIAL CLEANSING) AS THE *FALSOS POSITIVOS* ANTECEDENT.

Although operationally distinct from the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon, *limpieza Social* (Social Cleansing in English) is approached in this chapter as a compounding condition that operates as a logic that merges colonial hierarchies of capacity with militarised classifications of threat, as discussed in the previous sections. *Limpieza social* is another

euphemism to cover and soften what is social extermination. It is common that, when attempting to deepen understanding of *Falsos Positivos*, *Limpieza Social* emerges in the discussion. The two phenomena share sociologically noticeable similarities, particularly in the social profile of the victims they target. While *Falsos Positivos* unfolded within the military operational structures, *Limpieza Social* took shape primarily in peri-urban areas, where civilians, small business owners, grassroots community organisations, paramilitary groups, and, at times, state forces, especially police, collaborated in practices presented as community protection (Rojas, 1996).

These dynamics are prevalent in neighbourhoods marked by state abandonment and weak institutional presence. The demand for security created a vacuum in which the *Limpieza Social* practice became a mechanism for imposing order. Its legitimacy, however, is contested, generating fractures between those who viewed it as a necessary defence of the community and those who understood it as a form of unlawful violence (CNMH, 2025), it was more common in peri-urban areas of the main cities of Colombia (Medellín, Bogotá, Calí, Barranquilla). And the dynamic included the strong participation of civilians in collaboration with paramilitary and State forces, mainly the police.

Limpieza Social, observed as a sociological phenomenon, developed a moral classificatory vocabulary—and ontology of “*desechables*,” “*retardados*,” “*locos*,” “*parásitos*”—that later provided the conditions in which *Falsos positivos* were intelligible and often socially tolerable (Campos, 2019; Grenfell, 2014; Wylie, 2014). In this sense, *Limpieza Social* could be considered a cultural intensifier that provided the symbolic infrastructure (Grenfell, 2014) that naturalises the elimination of disabled, poor, homeless, or racialised civilians as part of a wider social endorsement to cleanse, purify, or restore a moral order (Campos, 2019; Wylie, 2014).

Scholarship on *Limpieza Social* and *Falsos Positivos* in Colombia (CNMH-IEPRI, 2015; Montoya, 2023; Rojas, 1996) is scarce; even rarer are accounts from a Critical Disabilities perspective, despite the relevance of ableist classifications of victims in both phenomena (Satizabal et al., 2021).

One of the earliest and most consistent documenters has been the Investigation and Popular Education Centre/ Program for the Peace (CINEP), whose archives since the

early 1980s, with their Human Rights national data bank¹⁰, remain foundational for understanding the scale and endurance of social extermination practices in Colombia.

Most of the evidentiary basis now mobilised in the Transition Justice process relies on this database. In its report—*Colombia: una deuda con la humanidad, 23 años de Falsos Positivos 1988-2011*—CINEP (Colombia: a debt with humanity. 23 years of *Falsos Positivos*) (CINEP/PPP, 2011), exposed 951 cases, although warning that it was not an exhaustive account it is a significant effort that has been key to the investigations in the post-conflict. The report also reveals, the existence of extrajudicial executions as early as the 80s, almost three decades before the scandal of the peak numbers of cases of *Falsos Positivos* during President Uribe Velez's period, 2002-2010 (CNMH, 2025).

In this account, an annexe provides one of the first close-up examinations of the relationship between the *Falsos Positivos* and Social Cleansing. The author argues that *FALSOS POSITIVOS* is deeply rooted in the longstanding practice of LS and the ontology of the subject “*El desechable*” (disposable), a widely used expression in Colombia to refer to those deemed as socially acceptable to exterminate. In this sense, “*El desechable*” then is the “*germ*” that feeds the *Falsos Positivos* appearance (CINEP/PPP, 2011). As depicted here, the system behind the *Falsos Positivos* has deep social roots in what some authors will describe as the social reality of *the disposables* (CNMH-IEPRI, 2015; Gordon & Evans, 2020).

If seen through Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (Agamben, 2015) and Mbembe's necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019), the *desechable* is both *bare life*—existences stripped of political value and confined to mere biological presence—and the object of necropolitical governance—a person stripped of political value yet actively targeted for elimination (Agamben, 2015; Mbembe, 2019).

Limpieza Social, therefore, prefigures the *Falsos Positivos* logic by producing populations whose deaths neither disrupt the moral order nor provoke institutional accountability. Such a worldview clarifies how the *Falsos Positivos* practice could take root in a cultural context where some lives are already considered a surplus (Agamben, 2015).

¹⁰ See https://www.nocheyniebla.org/?page_id=618

CINNEP report further emphasises that this devaluation rests on social hierarchies organised around class, education, respectability, conformity, and proximity to power (CINEP/PPP, 2011)

In the same line, Gordon and Dolan-Evans (2020), use the category of “*desechable*” but add the category of “*gente de bien*” (good citizen) as a symbolic and moral opposite of “*desechables*”. Within this binary a significant part of Colombian society understands the social order. For Gordon and Dolan-Evans (2020) *Falsos Positivos* is a social outcome of entrenched socio-economic inequality and moral stratification.

2.2 THE BIOPOLITICAL CIRCUIT:

DEBILITY → DISABLISM → UNGRIEVABILITY.

FROM NEGATIVE BIOPOLITICS TO DISABILITY BIO POLITICS

2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section now turns to the biopolitical circuit as the conceptual synthesis through which colonial body-sorting logics, Cold War internal-enemy implications, and *Limpieza social* can be connected to the ableist logics that made False Positivos operationally possible and later the subject of institutional recognition. A disability-centred framework is amplified by the genealogy developed in earlier sections. The colonial inheritance of body-sorting established hierarchies of humanness that continue to align worth with capacity, whiteness, productivity, and moral normality. Cold War doctrines of internal enemy formation militarised these hierarchies, while *limpieza social* normalised their everyday moral uptake by casting certain populations as disposable excess. The biopolitical circuit proposed here provides the conceptual bridge linking these historical conditions to the operational mechanics of false positives and the contemporary struggles for recognition within transitional justice.

This section therefore names a *circuit* to emphasise that these logics do not culminate at the moment of killing; it means that the state re-encounters the victim through first the post-humous struggles for acknowledgment and recognition as victims that families

have to in many cases pursue and a second instance the transitional justice procedures that can reinscribe disability as marginal, uncertain, or secondary, while simultaneously placing families into prolonged bureaucratic struggles that generate further exhaustion and precarious living conditions. The result is a posthumous institutional return of debility and ungrievability (Butler, 2016; Das, 2007).

It is worth noting that this exercise is not to suggest that transitional justice in Colombia only reproduces harm; instead, exposing the circuit names the risk of reiteration and, at the same time, the possibility of interruption. As examined later in Chapter 4, victims' families' advocacy can also make disability perceptible and expand the frames of recognition (Butler, 2016).

2.2.2 FROM ABLE-NATIONALISM TO ABLE-MILITARISM.

The *false positives* phenomenon exceeds single-theory explanation because it operates across multiple scales: the rationalities of state protection, the cultural-national norms that rank civic worth, the structural production of vulnerability, precarity and debility, and the posthumous politics of recognition. This framework, therefore, treats disability as a biopolitical threshold that connects these scales, rather than as an identity category added to an otherwise complete account.

To anchor this disability-centred biopolitical account, I draw on David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (2018), which provides a sustained conceptualisation of disability as structurally embedded in modern governance and value production (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). Their work explores disability beyond a static category and situates it as a dynamic, relational category through which states and institutions shape population legibility, national imaginaries of productivity, and the boundaries of citizenship.

Mitchell and Snyder's concept of *ablenationalism* is a useful starting point for tracing how ableist norms become woven into national projects of modernity, citizenship, and security (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018) It names the convergence through which citizenship is naturalised as an able-bodied and able-minded ideal, while disability is cast as a

managed exception whose inclusion remains conditional upon proximity to normative embodiments. Furthermore, they extend this conceptual framework to a critique of “inclusionism” as a way disability is tolerated in the neoliberal order. “Inclusionism requires that disability be tolerated as long as it does not demand an excessive degree of change from relatively inflexible institutions, environments and norms.” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018, p. 14)

This concept extends the moral binaries examined in the prior section—such as the distinction between “good citizens” and “desechables”—by showing how national belonging can be calibrated through presumptions about capacity, autonomy, and productivity.

Mitchell and Snyder describe the historical shift of people with disabilities from being modernity’s “defect” susceptible to isolation/eradication to becoming neoliberalism’s “objects of care” in the welfare economies of the West (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). It works as the key to rehabilitation, intervention, service economies, and funding schemes of the global north (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018; Puar, 2017).

Furthermore, they exposed what could be considered the limits of capitalism. In which state that most people with disabilities are unfit for labour, so they are outside of the capitalist worker/producer norms, and their capacity to consume is lower with respect to the market logics and velocity (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). As capitalism needs these two things from subjects, M&S frame this as an “*inherent resistance*” to the system (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). Within this contradiction, M&S exposed the limits of capitalism, that Puar will also discuss in her work.

While M&S theorise the neoliberal incorporation of some disabled bodies as *objects of care* (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018), Puar cautions that claims about disability’s inherent resistance to capitalism risk centring a fetishised figure of the non-productive disabled subject, thereby obscuring populations that are not rehabilitated into care but produced as “*objects of imminent disposability*” (Puar, 2017, p. 79). In a case like the one analysed in this work, the *Falsos Positivos*, there are many who were not even granted the status of *rehabilitable* disability (or dignified marginality), but bodies positioned as disposable, pre-killable.

2.2.3 DEBILITY, CAPACITY AND DISABILITY.

One methodological challenge in analysing *Falsos Positivos* through disability studies is that not all victims were recognised as disabled in a narrow biomedical sense, and many were positioned instead through labels such as addiction, homelessness, delinquency, or social dysfunction, which feed the machinery of murder with disposable bodies (CNMH, 2025).

Puar's concept of debility—defined as the reduction of bodily or social capacity not strictly equivalent to disability but closely linked in relation to public processes of marginalisation—is notably useful for this thesis because it shifts the analytic question from whether a person may fit a fixed disability category to how states and societies distribute capacity, precarity, and expendability (Erevelles, 2011; Puar, 2017).

Puar's perspective addresses a gap left by Foucauldian biopolitics, a gap that is specifically relevant to this analysis. Although Foucault details how modern states manage life through population, norms, and regulation, according to Puar, his framework does not account for forms of settler-colonial violence characterised by abandonment and the slow deterioration of population groups—particularly where militarised logic equates social marginality to security threats (Puar, 2017).

Building on this, Puar further critiques Foucault's definition of disability as rooted in accident or biology. Puar instead proposes an approach to disability as a governance tool—a process that actively produces disability through social and institutional mechanisms (Puar, 2017).

In Colombia, many youths labelled *as social misfits* were systematically marginalised, which led to vulnerability through enforced debilitation. The extent of Camilo's case and deeper analysis will be developed in Chapter 4. For now, it is useful to illustrate how the lenses of Puar's biopolitics of debility offer a perspective from which this phenomenon can be analysed.

Camilo, a young man whose drug addiction, acquired during compulsory conscription, exemplifies this process. Years later, Camilo was killed by the army that contributed to its addiction. His experience reflects the process of debilitation, beginning with limited opportunities to education, and employment, and continuing with addiction and subsequent violent death. Camilo's story repeats itself so many times during this phenomenon in Colombia; however, reading that reality would not be possible without an intersectional and multidisciplinary lens. What Camilo's story will point out is that the debilitation did not stop with his death; it continues with his family and his mother's struggle to find him and then to recover his body and to reinstate his memory in the public national mourning.

This context illustrates how debility manifests as *distributed capacity* loss that aggravates social abandonment and contributes to militarised narratives of social cleansing. Along the same line, Puar draws on global south scholars, to argue that an intersectional lens is necessary in analysing disability in the global south, critical Disability Studies should account for experiences of disability amid marginalisation and militarised societies (Erevelles, 2011; Grech, 2012; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011). The biopolitics of debility builds on that critique, a perspective that enquires into a deeper analysis of the biopolitics of Disabilities in the global south.

It is worth noting that, while in this work I am trying to use the lenses of Puar's biopolitics of debility to analyse the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon, the contexts in which Puar develops this concept are within Israel's occupation of Gaza, framing this as a settler-colonial control over life and death. She draws attention to the space where populations are kept under the weight of injury, deprivation, and infrastructural collapse (Puar, 2017). Even though this is a very different context in which the *Falsos Positivos* in Colombia developed, a similar process can be observed, where thousands of young, homeless individuals became easy targets for the army. While both situations reveal how militarised systems use disadvantaged groups for strategic purposes, the context, scale and form of exploitation differ. In Gaza, the violence is a product of ongoing settler-colonial occupation, maintaining long-term suppression and avoiding international accountability by keeping populations debilitated and avoiding a rise in the death toll. In Colombia, instead, the *Falsos Positivos* were a result of government

forces exploiting and commodifying marginalised individuals to fulfil military quotas of combat enemy deaths, reflecting different state motivations and mechanisms of control. What both may have in common is the place of humaneness imposed by the neoliberal order on certain populations. This means that both regimes benefit from the biopolitics of debility in different ways.

Drawing on Mbembe's account of the *asymmetric "war on life support"* (Mbembe, 2019) Puar notes that while Mbembe frames a "war on life itself" and the state's capacity to preserve life, his formulation of "death-in-life" remains within the life/death binary, leaving injury and debilitation under-theorised as a modality of power (Puar, 2017).

Furthermore, Puar extends this line of thought by developing the biopolitics of debility, arguing that "Maiming functions as slow but simultaneously intensive death-making, as targeting to maim is an accelerated assault on both bodily and infrastructural fronts" (Puar, 2017, p. 139). The restricted access to healthcare, education and basic human needs produces and reproduces debilitation. In the Palestinian case, it is an accelerated process through military destruction of vital infrastructure. In Colombia, the system underfunds vital services and limits access to education and basic human rights through neglect or because of the same armed conflict dynamics, producing the same result: marginalised populations exposed to harm.

With this conceptual framework, debility appears as a political process that keeps populations in a state of attrition. Here, "will not let die" supplants simply "let die," as capacity is systematically diminished. Unlike "let die," where neglect leaves populations to their fate, "will not let die" involves a more active manipulation of life, keeping individuals at the brink of survival, with their injuries and vulnerabilities carefully managed and normalised. This creates a grey zone where lives hover on the edge of survivability. For Puar, this "will not let die" describes a humanitarian threshold where maiming, framed as restraint, becomes an alibi for a regime of *debilitation*, sustained through the language and practice of humanitarian war (Puar, 2017). Thus, to analyse *Falsos Positivos*, the Biopolitics of debility must be engaged in the circuit that moves constantly between the Biopolitics and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019).

Therefore, in the following sections, the biopolitics of debility will guide this enquiry in three ways. First, it will help me to show how debility clarifies the difference between impairment and politically produced capacity-loss, foregrounding abandonment and structural violence as disabling forces. Second, it is the lenses through which I can explain the patterned vulnerability that enabled the *Falsos Positivos*—how some lives were made easier to lure, move, and narrate as disposable. And third, the biopolitics of debility works as a hinge that connects the affirmative biopolitics to the negative biopolitics (Esposito, 2006) or Biopolitics and Necropolitics.

2.2.4 GRIEVABILITY (JUDITH BUTLER)

Butler's conceptual framework poses a question. When is life grievable? From this enquiry, she develops her theory by examining violence, media and governance through the lenses of war. For Butler, a deep division in the way we apprehend life that tells us, "Why it is we might feel horrors in the face of certain losses but indifference or even righteousness in light of others?" (Butler, 2016, p. 56). Furthermore, she points out that this division is political and that governments control who can be publicly mourned and who cannot. As she states, "Whether we are speaking about open grief outrage, we are talking about effective responses that are highly regulated by regimes of power and sometimes to explicitly censorship" (Butler, 2016, p. 55).

Expanding on these ideas in *Frames of War*, Butler argues that life is not self-evident, and this one is mediated through normative frames. Drawing on Hegel, she asserts that it is through these frames that life becomes intelligible and grievable (Butler, 2016). As a result, recognition will happen when a life has been granted the status of grievable life or would count as a loss. This process of recognition is fundamentally relational:

There is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment and non-human forms of life, broadly considered (Butler, 2016, p. 39)

For Butler, we apprehend life through our encounter with the Other—a raw, affective sense of shared vulnerability she terms *precariousness* (Butler, 2016).

Susceptibility to injury and dependency are universal and form the basis for an ethical response, as harming the other ultimately threatens the relational networks that sustain us all, including non-human subjects (Butler, 2016). However, the recognition of this precariousness is always modulated as a governance tool through discourse and media, and the unequal distribution of the material conditions of vulnerability is what Butler theorises as precarity.

For instance, the relevance of Butler's framework becomes clear in examining the *Falsos Positivos* scandal. When news of the scandal began to emerge—specifically, the case of a few young men who disappeared from the same neighbourhood in Bogotá, Soacha—the scheme quickly became unsustainable, as more cases started revealing the pattern and systematicity of it. At this critical moment the then President Alvaro Uribe V, gave a public speech on National TV that became infamous among victim's families:

The Attorney General of the Nation stated that the young people who disappeared from Soacha were killed in combat. They did not go to harvest coffee, they were travelling with criminal intent, and did not die the day after their disappearance, but a month later (Ramiro, 2008).

Here, this work finds one of the most precise applications to Butler's conceptual framework; the government did not deny that the young people were killed by the army, instead, they attempted to re-frame it as a case to withhold grievability; the young men from Soacha were already differentially recognised as precarious lives whose loss would not register national trauma. Uribe's speech did not create their ungrievability but intensified the existing frame of social abandonment.

Part of the systematicity in the *Falsos Positivos* was the stripping of the victim's identity. Most of the victims were registered as NN (nomen Nacio/ no name) and then put on a new postmortem identity to be useful to the army's body count strategy. Hence, many families struggle to find their loved ones. This modus operandi made the victim's death justified, and public mourning not expected or deserved. This connection is underscored in Butler's own words:

Specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehending as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives never lived nor lost in the full sense (Butler, 2016).

Including this, the analysis reinforces the ways in which frames of recognition operate in both theory and practice.

Grievability in this sense functions as an epistemological critique. For Butler, the way we perceive things is framed by epistemic structures that organise knowledge in advance. Life, therefore, exceeds biological fact; it is a socially constituted condition of recognisability (Butler, 2016). She wonders how, within these already determined frames, we apprehend life? In this formulation, epistemological work simultaneously performs ontological work; in other words, it frames the subject categorisation of humanness in a way that also fabricates the disposable subject, then for example, the body of Leonardo— one of the young men with physical and intellectual disabilities victim of the *Falsos Positivos* in Soacha— is material. But its meaning as life is constituted through frames of ableism, colonialism, class, gender and race, which then determine its ontological status, therefore its grievability.

I mobilise the concept of Grievability in this work to track the bounds of recognition as a mournable life within the Colombian context of the *Falsos Positivos*. It is then considered a mechanism of power that allows violence and inequality to proceed by numbing the public's ethical response to the deaths of the marginalised populations.

In sum, read together, Biopolitics of disability, Biopolitics of debility and Grievability, these theorists produce a tightly interlacing framework. Mitchell and Snyder offer a disability-specific biopolitical account that explains how ableist norms of citizenship and value are anchored in national imaginaries through able nationalism and managed through the conditional logic of peripheral embodiment (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). Puar supplies the mechanism of debilitation through which bodies become materially and socially diminished, broadening the analytic scope of disability beyond fixed impairment categories (Puar, 2017). Butler, in turn, offers a lens for understanding how these diminished embodiments inhabit differential frames of public value and mourning (Butler, 2016), that I use mainly in the analysis of the transitional justice scenarios.

The result is a disability-centred theoretical constellation or the biopolitics circuitry capable of tracing how historically sedimented logics of social cleansing and Cold War, security logics converge with contemporary regimes of debilitation, peripheralisation, and grievability.

This framework therefore positions disability not as a supplementary concern but as a crucial analytic element for understanding the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon. It advances a genealogical reading of how some young lives could become simultaneously legible as operational resources for the state and illegible as fully valuable subjects within the moral economy of the nation. In doing so, it also addresses a persistent absence in prior analyses of False Positives: the limited interrogation of disability as a biopolitical infrastructure that shaped who could be killed, how those killings could be justified, and why recognition of these victims' lives required sustained struggle by families against institutional ableism and erasure.

CHAPTER 3

3.0 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this methodological framework, I adopt an analytical and political approach. By analytical, I refer to a focus on how meaning is produced, tracing discursive formations—patterns in the language that shape the understanding, identifying categories of value, and noting silences or absences. The political aspect involves the interrogation of power dynamics and acts of state violence. I engage with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2011), an examination of how language both reflects and shapes power relations, and Narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) to examine how disability, violence, and justice are constructed, justified, and resisted in the context of Colombia's armed conflict, particularly regarding the *Falsos Positivos* scandal. These methods are chosen because CDA allows for a detailed exploration of the language that constructs social reality, particularly regarding power relations and ideologies (van Dijk, 1994). Narrative analysis complements this by examining how these discourses are lived, resisted and narrated personally and collectively.

Through this approach, I examine how the *Falsos Positivos* scandal emerges discursively at the intersection of ableist political economy, militarised security rationalities, racialised poverty, territorial positionality, and gendered labour logics as observed in press coverage and analysis of JEP hearings. With this method, therefore, I do not aim to reconstruct a complete genealogy of the *Falsos Positivos*; however, I aim to analytically trace the discursive conditions—also how material conditions enter discourse and influence it—through which disabled and debilitated bodies were made disposable, and later selectively recognised, within Colombia's transition justice system.

Four analytical threads guide this work; they constitute interwoven interpretative lenses that I applied across all data sources, mainly press and JEP hearings.

1.Ableist framings in news media:

Press coverage often reinforces ableist frames that draw from recognisable patterns of social prejudice. As documented by Nario Redmond et al, these patterns include benevolent, paternalistic framings, where disabled people are seen as pitiable, inspiring, or in need of unrequested help, and hostile, contemptuous framings that depict them as burdens, malignant and unproductive citizens (Garland-Thomson, 2012; Nario-Redmond et al., 2019). These discursive practices have material consequences. Benevolent frames justify patronising policies and low expectations, while hostile frames, especially in contexts of state violence, fuel a backlash against disability rights and legitimise hate crimes against disabled people (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Nario-Redmond et al., 2019). In convergence, these mediated narratives rationalise structural violence that legitimises or normalises the disposability of certain bodies under neoliberal and militarised logics (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Puar, 2017). This study does not assume that such framings directly motivate killings; instead, it will investigate whether and how these discourse patterns contribute to a broader convergence by analysing the available data.

2.Intersectional circuitry: the intersectional lenses are used to track poverty, rurality, gender, and racialised identity in the press, media, and JEP hearings related to the cases. With these lenses, I aim to trace the journalistic descriptions of victims and victims' own perception of disability. This inquiry is about how these narratives, combined with armed conflict or militarised contexts, can influence how society sorts people into various levels of perceived ability and worth, sometimes treating certain groups as more disposable than others (Davis, 2002; Erevelles & Minear, 2010)

3.Counter-stories in JEP hearings: Survivors' and family testimonies may resist, reframe, or reproduce dominant discourses, not only in the political spectrum and the reestablishing of the citizenship and memory of their loved ones, but also in the existing relationship with disability (Clark, 2024). In doing so, they can present juridical claims and contribute to epistemic interventions (Clark, 2024) that challenge how armed

conflict and militarised contexts frame disability, legitimacy, and victimhood (De Waardt & Weber, 2019).

4. Dual-lens analytic workflow: Combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Narrative Analysis (NA) to examine whether and how ableism appears and moves across different institutions, practices within the context of armed conflict. This combination of approaches shows how these discursive patterns may intersect with other structural forces influencing the treatment and recognition of certain groups.

3.2 DUAL-METHOD APPROACH: CDA + NARRATIVE ANALYSIS.

3.2.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:

While in this research I engage deeply with language, I am far from offering a linguistic analysis of grammar, syntax, or formal structures. Following van Dijk (1994), I intend to critically analyse how discourse functions as a mechanism of power, ideology, and social ordering in the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon.

Drawing on the literature on epistemic injustice, including Fricker's concepts of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007), and relational approaches from Critical Disability Studies (Erevelles, 2011; Goodley, 2014; A. Henao, 2024), the study examines whose knowledge is legitimised, whose perspectives are marginalised, and how ableism, colonialism, and epistemic erasure influence what is recognised as valid knowledge.

I employ CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) to analyse how official documents, legal records, press articles, and NGO reports frame disability and state violence. This approach is grounded in the understanding that social action and discourse are intertwined. According to Fairclough, language is a site where ideology, power, and social practices are both reinforced and contested.

Furthermore, CDA is explicitly intersectional and decolonial, drawing on sociolinguistic and systemic-functional approaches to analyse how meaning is constructed within institutional discourse (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Goethals et al., 2015). It recognises that

institutional discourse describes events while actively shaping the biopolitical contexts in which those events are understood.

Where CDA maps the structural frames of ableism (Fairclough, 2013; Nario-Redmond et al., 2019; van Dijk, 1994), Narrative Analysis focuses on how these frames are negotiated and lived through storytelling. Together, they provide a layered reading of how disability and justice are constructed, challenged, and reimagined in discourse (Loja et al., 2013; Riessman, 2008; Tarvainen, 2019).

3.2.2 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND INTEGRATION WITH CDA: FROM STRUCTURE TO STORY.

Narrative Analysis complements CDA by shifting from the structural mapping of discourse to the lived, storied negotiations of those structures. Where CDA identifies the macro-level frames through which ableism, militarism, and transitional justice are articulated, whether in press coverage, institutional communiqués, or NGO reports, Narrative Analysis examines how these frames are taken up, resisted, or reworked in personal and collective storytelling.

Drawing on Tarvainen's (2019) narrative-circulation approach, counter-stories will be followed across forums, community events, legal petitions, and artistic media, attending to how tone, cadence, and framing shift as they travel. The question is how victims and their families echo, subvert, or repurpose ableist rhythms when recounting their experiences.

A foundational reference is Riesman (2008), whose cautions shape this approach by asserting that narrative research risks reifying the self or idealising agency; that it demands slow, careful attention to context; and that stories do not mirror events but refract them, forging links between past, present, and imagined futures. In line with these cautions, I will work with a small, information-rich set of JEP testimonies, layering contextual memos alongside every coded excerpt and reading each story dialogically, treating the teller, the listener, and the sociopolitical setting as co-producers of meaning.

The integration with CDA is dialogic. CDA will expose the ideological grounds in which stories emerge, such as militarised narratives of *"unproductive burdens"* or policy

framings of “*rehabilitable citizens*,” (Fairclough, 2013) while Narrative Analysis will reveal how these terrains are navigated, challenged, or inadvertently reinforced in the exercise of storytelling (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

For example, a military communiqué that frames a victim’s disability or socioeconomic status as evidence of deviance may later be reframed in a mother’s testimony before the JEP as proof of her child’s vulnerability and innocence. Conversely, dignity claims voiced in court may reappear in press coverage, stripped of their political edge. These moments illustrate the broader dialogic process I aim to trace in this research, in which institutional discourse and personal narrative continually circulate, reshape, and reframe one another.

Souto-Manning’s (2014) Critical Narrative Analysis anchors for this dialogical lens, rejecting the macro/micro split by showing how official frames (dominant social discourses or institutional narratives) cycle through everyday narratives, and how personal stories return to institutional channels. For Souto-Manning (2014), “horizontal” approach considers media, government, human rights bodies, victims, and social movements as co-participants in a shared discursive field. In this space ableist logics—whether explicitly articulated or embedded in silence—can be seen migrating across genres and contexts, shaping both the conditions of grievability (Butler, 2009) and the biopolitics of debility (Puar, 2017).

By bringing CDA and NA into a sustained conversation, I sharpen the scrutiny of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Together, these lenses allow me to elucidate the tension between the terms of recognition of the brutal violence upon the victims of *falsos Positivos* and the limits of who counts as *grievable* that is actively negotiated in the Transitional Justice field (Clark, 2024; De Waardt & Weber, 2019).

3.3 METHODS AND RATIONALE.

3.3.1 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involves assembling a diverse corpus of texts to support this dual analysis. For CDA, I include official statements, legal decisions, military communications, press releases, and NGO reports on transitional justice and disability rights from when the phenomena were known as such from 2002. For NA, I incorporate testimonies, memory initiatives, documentary transcripts, and publications by disability-led movements and families from 2002 to the present. This approach ensures examination of both dominant institutional narratives and resistant grassroots accounts.

3.3.2 CASE SELECTION

There are two cases to examine: Camilo Azure and Roger Acero. Camilo's case corpus draws from multiple sources: JEP Victims' observations hearing March 2024, including Teresa Azure, Camilo's mother and the reply of the JEP magistrates during the same hearing (JEPColombia, 2024); press reports by Colombia Plural (Gómez, 2018), Verdad Abierta (2017); Cambio magazine (Bonilla, 2025). These records are cross-examined against Teresa's testimony and coded individually, using the same coding matrix (see Appendix 1). Roger's case is mainly formed of his brother William's intervention at the JEP hearing (JEPColombia, 2023a); and a piece of media panel interview on the program "*Zona Franca*" (RedmasTV, 2023). Focusing on the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon, this approach treats each case as a living, contested node where ableism, militarism, and discourses of transitional justice collide. Each story (Camilo and Roger's) becomes a discursive constellation that traces how disability is constructed, obscured, or strategically mobilised across different institutional and cultural domains. This allows me to interrogate how disabled and debilitated bodies are rendered killable (Puar, 2017), how their deaths often fail to generate collective mourning (Bonilla, 2025; Gómez, 2018) (Butler, 2009), and how transitional justice mechanisms may recognise

them only as far as they fit normative scripts of victimhood tethered to capacity and productivity.

The two selected cases for the analysis were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Disability as explicitly documented or implied: Cases in which the individual is identified as disabled—through medical records, family testimony, legal classification, or community narratives—so that the framing of disability can be traced through multiple discourses.

2. Availability of multi-source material: The presence of data across at least three types of documents (for example, press articles, legal files, NGO documentation, family interviews, or community counter-memory projects), ensuring the possibility of a rich, cross-textual analysis.

3. Relevance to the transitional justice landscape: Preference for cases that appear in JEP hearings or are otherwise linked to transitional justice processes, given this project's interest in the limits of institutional recognition.

4. Intersectional significance: Attention to cases that also highlight the intersections of disability with poverty, gender, rurality, or Indigenous and Afro-Colombian identities, revealing the compound mechanisms of disposability and ungrievability. These elements are observed across discourse and narratives of the victims and about the victims.

3.3.4 PRESS AND MEDIA CLUSTER

In this cluster I will examine how the national and local press represented the killings and any justice process behind it whether the ordinary justice or the TJ system, paying particular attention to whether and how markers of disability, poverty, or perceived *social uselessness*—such as cognitive impairment, mental health labels, homelessness, drug addiction or informal unemployment—were invoked in these narratives. By reading press accounts through the conceptual lenses of debility and ungrievability, the analysis seeks to explore how ableist logics might permeate public discourse, potentially

framing extrajudicial executions as either necessary operations or isolated tragedies, rather than as outcomes of structural necropolitical governance.

3.3.5 VICTIMS' AND FAMILIES' TESTIMONIES IN JEP HEARINGS:

The second cluster engages with testimonies presented before the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), approaching them not merely as juridical evidence but as narrative acts that may contest epistemic erasure (Fricker, 2007; Pino-Morán et al., 2023). In this analysis I will pay close attention to how families navigate institutional demands for “proof” of victimhood—demands that often intersect with disability assessments, medical certifications, employability metrics, socioeconomic status and location (rural /urban). By centring the testimonies of Camilo and Roger, I seek to explore here, how processes of witnessing and documentation might resist ungrievability, negotiate recognition, and make visible the entwined dynamics of ableism and militarised statecraft (Butler, 2016; Das, 2007).

Working within this cluster I remain cautious not to relegate disability to a demographic sidebar or framed solely as a marker of special vulnerability, I approach ableism as a potentially constitutive force in both the violence of war and the administrative architectures of peace (Loja et al., 2013; Walach & Petruželka, 2024; Wolbring, 2008). By tracing these cases through the JEP hearings and testimonies, I aim to critically examine transitional justice and human rights approaches that often treat atrocities and hate crimes against disabled people as deviations from an otherwise functional liberal order (Davis, 2002; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Sherry, 2016).

3.3.6 CODING METHOD

Aligning with the conceptual framework in chapter three, I have built a matrix of codes applied to the material to analyse. The coding system helps to classify excerpts from the data. It can happen that the same excerpt contains different codes in it. At the same time, the codes I classified the codes into eight nodes, or parent nodes aligned with the main concepts I am tracing in this enquiry: Ableism, debility, grievability, and other nodes proper to the operational strategies of *Falsos Positivos*, intersectionality, and the dynamics within the Transitional Justice.

I do the coding utilising NVivo software (Mortelmans, 2019) to apply the codes to the excerpts in the texts I am analysing. By applying the coding to text format, I translate and transcribe other formats such as video recordings of the hearings to facilitate the coding exercise.

CHAPTER 4

4.0 FINDINGS / ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having outlined the analytical framework and the key categories guiding this inquiry, the following section turns to concrete cases to illustrate how these discursive mechanisms take form in lived experience. Through the stories of Camilo and Roger, the analysis traces the rhetoric of vulnerability, productivity, and worth circulating within the Transitional Justice hearings, shaping who could be recognised as a victim, whose suffering could be grieved, and whose life could be rendered unintelligible. This narrative serves as empirical evidence of the discursive patterns identified through coding, also as an entry point to interrogate how *ableism*, *debility*, and *grievability* operate simultaneously as technologies of recognition and exclusion within Colombia's post-conflict discourse, determining the moral worth of systematically marginalised populations.

In what follows, I turn to track the discourse surrounding the *Falsos Positivos* phenomenon in the post-conflict or Transitional Justice scenarios. I do it by analysing the excerpts generated by the coding exercise. In the analysis, I utilise excerpts that can help to illustrate (1) how moral worth is categorised—ableism (Goodley, 2014; Nario-Redmond, 2019; Scuro et al., 2019), (2) how debility is produced and reproduced (Agamben, 2015; Puar, 2017), and (3) how it all influences the perception of “grievability”¹ or public mourning (Butler, 2016; Henao, 2021)

The coding process is based on effects and is non-exclusive i.e. *vulnerabilidad* can represent both ableist masking and debility as a form of selection. The aim is to examine the impact of these statements in the discourse (value, jurisdiction, accountability) rather than only what they convey.

4.2 CASE ONE: CAMILO RICARDO AZUERO SUÁREZ. (2007)

FROM VULNERABILITY TO DEVIANCE: THE SORTING OF CAMILO'S LIFE.

Camilo Ricardo Azuero Suárez (b. 1978) completed compulsory military service² in 1998–1999. According to his mother, Teresa, during this time, military superiors instrumentalised him to purchase *basuco*¹¹ in downtown Bogotá using army vehicles. This exposure marked the beginning of a long struggle with addiction, during which Camilo moved through a series of private rehabilitation centres, many of them of a predatory nature, all around the country. The last time he was relocated to a new rehab centre for safety reasons was in February of 2006, in Copacabana- Antioquia, situated more than 400 km away from his family's home in Bogota. About 5 months later Camilo left the centre with a staff member, and it was the last time his family had any news of him. Camilo had then disappeared, one more of the thousands in Colombia, particularly at that time when it had been proven was the pick of *Falsos Positivos* cases (CEV, 2022; CNMH, 2013).

Teresa, almost alone, began searching for her son in a city that was strange to her, while dealing with the indifference of the authorities.

Her search lasted 9 years until the authorities finally linked Camilo's remains.

Teresa then would find out that on 2 July 2007, soldiers from BAEEV-8⁴ executed Camilo along with another two men, near Machuca/Vereda El Saltillo, Segovia (Antioquia) and registered within the forensics as "NN¹²" (Bonilla, 2025; Gómez, 2018)

In 2015, prosecutors charged *Col. Nelson Velázquez Parrado* in connection with multiple homicides in seven staged military operations from 2007. For Teresa and her family, this meant a trace of justice in many years of impunity.

¹¹ Illicit drug made of cocaine pastes blended with other chemicals to lower production costs, which increases its accessibility for many people. See: http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2011-08392022000100007.

¹² Abbreviation of the Latin Nomen Nescio. No name known.

The Colonel spent only three years in prison before the case was transferred to the Transitional Justice Tribunal, JEP, in June 2018. The transfer suspended the ongoing criminal trial and ceased the investigation under the regular criminal system, as well as the release and freedom of Colonel Parrado for more than five years. Five years of freedom for the Colonel have been five more years of waiting for justice for Teresa.

For Teresa, this procedural shift felt like another form of impunity. She stated that she had to start again, retracing Camilo's steps to bring the Colonel to account before the JEP tribunal. However, she feels the JEP offer little to no accountability for the Colonel.

Her voice, firm but weary, carried both persistence and disappointment:

Sixteen years after his murder, I had to follow Camilo's steps, go to Remedios in the northeast to seek justice, and so in December of last year we managed to get this Colonel to come to the JEP. But he came to lie, saying there were few bad apples brought from another Battalion. (Teresa, JEPColombia, 2024, p. 6:32:43).

The expression, "*few bad apples*", has become a familiar script within the military discourse. It works to isolate blame, suggesting that the crimes were exceptional acts committed by a few individuals; it denies a systematic pattern and the architecture that enabled the *Falsos Positivos*.

It is perceived that at the same time, this rhetoric produces a powerful social effect: it reassures the public that the institution remains honourable, and that the moral order is intact. The "bad apples" narratives then work as twofold, erasing systematicity while normalising violence as an *unfortunate* but acceptable tangent.

This machinery of death depended on a much broader collaboration. Civilians and Paramilitary force often took part in what could be called *a chain of production* of the *Falsos Positivos*. Civilian's involvement was predominantly as recruiters; they were often responsible for providing the military with information of *suitable* victims to recruit. In this sense, many civilians collaborated with paramilitaries and the military in the luring and transportation of the victims into the hands of the military (Gordon & Evans, 2020; Vivanco, 2018); however, in many cases, it emerged from the belief that some lives, those marked by poverty, disability, addiction, and in general marginalised by the imperative normative abled bodies, were less valuable and more expendable. Therefore,

the normalisation of elimination was not confined to the military sphere; it extended into the social fabric itself, finding legitimisation in social sectors.

The persistence of ableist and moral hierarchies in Colombian society has normalised the idea that the elimination of certain bodies is a necessary condition for social stability; however, the “rotten apples” discourse has been broadly used by the media and military (Gordon & Evans, 2020; Henao, 2021). This discourse displaces the possibility of a collective responsibility onto isolated individuals and obscure the structural complicity logic that conceives such violence imaginable and permissible.

For Teresa and many Colombians, facing this truth is as painful as confronting the Colonel himself; it meant recognising that there is a significant sector in Colombian society that had pre-empted Camilo’s life of his value long before a soldier pointed a gun at him.

This moment condenses the prolonged fatigue of her search. Every institutional shift requires her to begin again, to repeat her story before new officials, while those responsible continue to walk free.

As part of the transitional justice process, the JEP has held various events for different audiences across the national territory. JEP has called the “Macro case 03” *Falsos Positivos* or Extrajudicial executions, and from there it continues classifying cases in groups of regions. Camilo’s case belongs to Macro Case 03, specifically the Antioquia subcase (JEP, 2018). In 2024, JEP held a Victim’s observation hearing in Antioquia, and some families and victims of these crimes were allowed to be speakers.

Teresa stood in this tribunal to tell Camilo’s story and to establish a dialogue, even without intending to, with the state that made her and her son victims. Teresa’s soft voice is consistent and has the authority and weight of a woman who has carried the memory through the years. She stands at the tribunal to say she is tired of repeating it without achieving an effect. She wishes she did not have to repeat it once more, but there is no stopping unless there is justice.

Teresa's testimony anchors this analysis. From her account, it is possible to reconstruct details of the apparatus, how it operated, who directed and how the "results" were staged. At the same time, restoring Camilo's name and life story.

4.2.1 BODY COUNT: METRICS, ORDERS, AND THE STAGING OF MILITARY RESULTS.

Camilo's homicide unfolded within a broader performance regime in which the *bajas en combate* (*Body count*) operated as a metric of institutional achievement in combating the national internal enemy (Castañeda-Hernandez, 2016; Rodriguez, 2018). Teresa describes the Colombian Army as "criminal machinery" that despised the lives of the "humble and vulnerable".

"...having become a criminal machine as a public institution, one that disregards the lives of the humble and vulnerable." (Teresa, JEPColombia, 2024, p. 6:32:59)

Her words highlight how the system preyed on people already positioned as socially devalued. Camilo and two others were reported as combat kills by BAEV8 in Segovia, Antioquia, under the tactical mission "Joel".

The official narrative claimed that the three were killed in battle, aligning with reports that claimed three-minute firefights, which were later circulated as evidence of operational success.

The press further corroborates the fabrication.

As Colombia Plural reported:

The Fourth Brigade submitted the patrol report for Operation "Empuje". It reported a firefight lasting between 3 and 5 minutes, resulting in the death of three "antisociales" (petty Criminals/delinquents) members of a gang dedicated to charging gramaje and stealing alkaloids (Gómez, 2018)

The brevity of the reported clash and the remote location enabled rapid circulation of these results rapidly, while the NN classification deferred scrutiny and silenced families. These reports demonstrate how tactical scripts were calibrated not for genuine combat. Lethal outcomes were rewarded through recommendations and congratulations. The repetitions of the label "*antisociales*" (petty criminal/ delinquent) reinforced a narrative

template that conflated social precarity with war enemy designations. Similarly, Verdad Abierta (2017) noted:

As part of its strategy to combat the guerrilla and drug trafficking, the Tactical Mission Joel was authorised on 1 July of that year (Verdad Abierta, 2017)

Put differently, tactical missions were directly authorised by military command and later presented as legitimate combat deaths. The pattern in these cases, and in thousands more, reveals a consistent link between metrics, orders, and rewards.

The killings of civilians framed by the state forces as *operational results* both satisfied ministerial performance indicators and generated institutional prestige at that time. In Butler's (2016) terms, labelling the victims as *petty criminals/delinquents* foreclosed their legibility as *grievable* subjects. At the same time, the framing of brief, staged encounters as *combats* demonstrates what Henao (2021) calls the assumption of *invalid lives* (Henao, 2021), populations rendered disposable under ableist biopolitics.

Seen in this light, Camilo's death was a planned conversion of his pathologised, hence socially devalued (Henao, 2021) life into a narrative of militaristic success. That is to say, the discourse of results reveals the biopolitical circuit at work: the life of Camilo, marked by debility, *disablement*, addiction, and marginality, was translated by the army into operational statistics that sustained a bureaucratised method of systematic elimination of marginalised populations known as *Falsos Positivos* (Erevelles, 2011; Henao, 2021; Puar, 2017).

4.2.2 MICRO-MECHANISMS OF FABRICATION OF A FALSO POSITIVO: LURE, CONTAINMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE SMOOTHING:

Beyond the broad architecture of metrics and orders, Camilo's case illustrates how *Falsos Positivos* were carried out through patterned micro-mechanisms. Teresa's testimony makes visible this pattern at work:

Searching for Camilo, I learnt that there was an army that invented battles and operations, that the disappeared were victims of executions (Teresa, JEPColombia, 2024, p. 6:34:49).

These recollections frame official reports as technologies of concealment¹³ Camilo was first lured and held temporarily in a hotel with two other individuals. They were led to believe they had been hired for a job. Then executed and passed through a sequence of bureaucratic omissions: although an autopsy was performed, his family was never notified, and forensic registries were not cross-checked. This resulted in a prolonged absence, keeping Camilo away from his family for nine years.

As Cambio magazine (2025) confirmed:

Although the autopsy was performed, relatives were never notified, and no forensic medicine databases or records were checked. In other words, Camilo remained disappeared for his family (Bonilla, 2025).

The omission prolonged Camilo's disappearance for nine years, producing debility across time as his family continued to search without institutional support. In practice, Teresa was forced to assume roles that properly belonged to the state. This sequence illustrates what Puar (2017) identifies as the governance of populations through debilitation, where harm is extended rather than resolved by the state.

Economic incentives also facilitated the lure stage. In cooperation with the Justice system, a Second Lieutenant confessed, as Colombia Plural (2018) reported:

From 600 to 700 thousand COP was paid per person they found...and they were brought with lies (Gómez, 2018).

Camilo's addiction and housing precarity made him both recruitable and administratively erasable. These traits were exploited by intermediaries paid per head, linking social marginalisation directly to the logistical supply of bodies. Once executed,

¹³ See appendix 1 Coddling Matrix. Technologies of concealment it's a term I use as a code to identify discursive and administrative techniques through which state actors hide, sanitise, or mischaracterise the real events—for example, by reframing executions as combat deaths, deploying euphemisms, or fragmenting responsibility across bureaucratic procedures.

these same vulnerabilities were re-coded as “NN” or “antisocial,” producing clean paperwork that counted as a combat success.

Internal communications reinforced this reward system.

Verdad Abierta (2017) noted:

The ‘results’ were considered so effective that, on more than one occasion, superiors congratulated the soldiers who carried out Colonel Velásquez’s orders (VerdadAbierta, 2017)

In this way, lethal outputs were celebrated and reproduced, embedding the micro-mechanisms within a broader performance regime. The pattern of lure, containment, staging, and administrative smoothing demonstrates how individual lives were systematically converted into quantifiable “results” (HRW, 2019; Vivanco, 2018).

For Camilo’s family, these mechanisms created years of silence. Teresa’s words capture this prolonged absence.

After five months, they informed me he was gone. No one else could tell me anything about him. I searched for him on the streets of Medellín for nine years (Teresa, JEPColombia, 20246:37:00).

As Teresa recalled:

His death and body remained silent for eight years until 2015, when Colonel Velázquez Parrado was charged with 17 homicides committed in seven false operations that occurred in 2007 (Teresa, JEPColombia (a), 2024 6:35:29)

Her testimony situates the temporality of Camilo’s absence within the harm itself, exhibiting the calculus of the state’s silence that purposefully and gradually debilitates families.

Furthermore, the lack of an answer from the state institutions and the inaccessibility to justice for so long also imposed a burden on the victim’s families, particularly women (CNMH, 2025, 2017b). In Teresa’s case, the institutional abandonment forced her to assume roles that properly belonged to the state, including conducting searches, tracing forensic evidence, bearing the costs of rehabilitation without support, and seeking

justice. Thereby, she continued her own shoulders the duties that state institutions had neglected.

According to Butler (2016), the withholding of recognition transforms death into publicly unacknowledged loss. It means Camilo's life was taken by the army and then administratively suspended, making his family's grief unintelligible, a matter of a *faulty* individuals, for nearly a decade.

Through these micro-mechanisms, the *Falsos Positivos* practice emerges as an administrative manoeuvring of lure, containment, and concealment that worked together to (re)produce ableist logics of disposability (Henao, 2021); erase individuals' identities, and impose *ungrievability* (Butler, 2016). The social and political failure of Colombia's State is then portrayed as a personal matter or a private issue that the family must deal with.

4.2.3 DISCURSIVE SORTING: MORAL WORTH, CRIMINALITY, AND ABLEIST LEDGER.

What discursive work, then, do these labels perform in practice? How do they pre-classify Camilo as morally disposable while shielding perpetrators from ordinary criminal scrutiny? Moreover, how does Teresa's intervention unsettle that calculus? This subsection builds on the prior analysis of micro-mechanisms by focusing less on the procedural choreography of *Falsos Positivos* (lure, containment, administrative smoothing) and more on the discursive registers that made such practices appear legitimate.

Whereas the section above detailed the operational sequence, here the emphasis is on language, categorisation, and the symbolic work of labels. To track these operations, several analytic codes built into the methodology of this work are particularly relevant here: moral worth, pre-emption of mourning, intersectional differentials, and utility/disposability (see Appendix 1 Coding Matrix).

To begin, Teresa's intervention before the JEP illustrates the stakes of naming and classification:

They want to call this a war, but it cannot be called an armed conflict, they were criminals yes, but not part of a war (Teresa, JEPColombia, 2024,6:33:49).

By stating this, Teresa rejected the war frame. She conceded that her son was labelled a “*criminal*,” however, she insisted this did not make him a military target. Her intervention aimed to for a jurisdictional correction. Specifically, Teresa petitioned the JEP tribunal for Camilo’s homicide to fall under ordinary criminal accountability, not the exceptional immunity of war, which for her represents the Transitional Justice system.

Building in her instance, Teresa rejected the “*vulnerable victim*” script—a discourse that frames marginalised people as weak or helpless— and resisted what scholars call respectability politics¹⁴ (Higginbotham, 1994). Likewise, Disability scholars refer to these expectations as demands for “*worthiness*”, requiring marginalised people to appear norm-abiding and pleasing to be considered valuable (Harris, 2019; Kafer, 2013a; McRuer, 2006). Furthermore, as observed during JEP hearings, families of victims often emphasise that their loved ones were *hardworking campesinos* (farm workers), *social leaders*, or *students*, assuming these categories bring them closer to the *normative citizen* and therefore gain greater legitimacy in their demand for justice (Fassin, 2011). Those like Camilo fall outside these frames; people who struggle with addiction and mental health, live in poverty, or housing instability, are often dismissed or blamed for their own “*fate*” (Fassin, 2011).

In line with these broader expectations, Teresa refused to play by these rules. She did not deny the stigmas attached to Camilo; instead, she insisted that none of those labels justified his execution by the Army. By doing so, she challenged the idea that justice depends on moral approval and affirmed instead that it must rest on law and rights (Harpur & Ashley Stein, 2022). In other words, even if the army’s stigmatising labels were accurate, they should not transform a civilian into a wartime enemy or license lethal force (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005). By conceding the label “*criminal*” but rejecting the war frame, she interrupts this mischaracterisation that made “*deviant*”

¹⁴ Respectability Politics originates in the Black Feminist Historiography to refers to a strategy that seeks legitimacy by performing “respectable” identities. See (Higginbotham, 1994), for the foundational formulation.

individuals “combats” to the army, anchoring the case within the regular criminal justice, where the state must prove a crime.

Media accounts reflect how these discursive operations worked, from *deviant* individuals to the criminal portrayal, played out. Verdad Abierta (2017) described those targeted:

Actually, they were civilians who had nothing to do with the conflict and whose only common factor was "having a criminal record, being drug addicts, homeless in the city of Medellín, having no contacts or links in the area where they were killed (VerdadAbierta, 2017).

This inventory of criminal records, drug addiction, and homelessness comes from a journalistic account that in turn quotes a judge. This convergence of institutional and media voices forms a pipeline that portray markers of social deviance legible as individuals to be combated by the state, thereby inserting them into a frame of war, which strips the marginalised of protection (Butler, 2016; Harris, 2019; Walach & Petruželka, 2024).

Once entered, these descriptors travelled as if they were facts, excluding contestation and lowering the threshold for lethal force. During the development of this work, these descriptors were coded under intersectional differentials, which shows how multiple intersections, poverty, addiction, and displacement, were combined to reduce individuals to less credible and more easily targetable entities.

Teresa continues as she highlights how the military actively produced Camilo’s debility:

How is it that he is going to do his military service, and they poison him, they hand him over to me as a useless being to the community (Teresa, JEPColombia, 20246:38:27).

Teresa expresses that the army “*poisoned*” her son and “*returned*” him as a *useless* being. With this, she exposes two effects: first, she attributes the production of debility to state (army) action, shifting causality from individual deficits (such as homelessness, drug addiction, and uselessness) to institutional harm or the ongoing process of debilitation (Puar,2017) Second, by expressing indignation and insisting that the loss is wrongful, she reverses the moral charge onto the state and positions Camilo as a

deserving public mourning (Butler, 2016). The concept of usefulness is named directly. The army did not simply label Camilo as “*useless*”; through its own practices, it turned him *disposable*. This links to this work’s code: Utility/disposability, exposing how military discourse calibrated human worth in terms of productivity. At the same time, this excerpt is coded under ableism – moral worth, because Teresa partially adopted the language of uselessness.

From a Critical Disability Studies perspective, this reflects what is often described as *internalised ableism*: even as Teresa condemned the state for producing Camilo’s debility, her framing still drew on social narratives of productivity and worth (Goodley, 2014; Scuro et al., 2019). Her indignation nonetheless reverses causality and shifts the moral burden back onto the army. In Puar’s (2017) terms, it exemplifies how debility is produced as governance, while Butler’s (2016) notion of *grievability* illuminates her insistence on the public recognition of his life and death.

This tension is echoed again in Teresa’s own words:

I listen to all the victims, and the vast majority are farmers; they are social leaders, but we must take into account the vulnerability of many young people who walk the streets of all Colombia (Teresa, JEPColombia, 20246:38:56)

Here, the message conveys care while simultaneously introducing a subtle sorting mechanism. Campesinos and social leaders emerge as more readily grievable. At the same time, “*muchachos que andan por las calles*” (Teresa, JEPColombia, 2024) (youth who wander the streets) are folded into a compassionate yet still marginalising category of vulnerability.

It connects back to the earlier paragraph of respectability politics: recognition is unevenly distributed depending on whether victims can be portrayed as socially valuable. Again, the code of *ableism/moral worth* emerges.

Teresa’s words press for recognition, but they do so by leaning on a hierarchy of values that mirrors broader social inequalities. In effect, her testimony both resists erasure and reproduces existing distinctions, illustrating how challenging it is for families to claim justice without relying on the same categories that restrict recognition. The tension between advocacy and internalised ableism shows how discourses of worth are

ingrained across all levels of society, shaping institutional practices and the testimonies of survivors and victims' families. Teresa resists erasure as she negotiates the same categories that diminished her son.

4.2.4 ABLEISM THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL AND MEDIA VOICES IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE.

Here, the analysis goes further toward employing discourse analysis and less toward narrative and testimonial analysis that was present in the sessions above. The aim is to track in the discourse the technologies of power dynamics that emerge in the JEP hearing scenarios.

The narrative and testimonial richness of Teresa's testimony opened a terrain of dialogic tension that deserves careful exploration. If Teresa's testimony conveys fatigue and endurance, the Magistrate's reply returns to the formal language of procedure.

4.2.5 INSTITUTIONAL ABANDONMENT AND PROCEDURAL DEBILITY.

Following on Teresa's use of the category "*vulnerable*", the term comes back with the Magistrate's reply:

It matches the vulnerabilities of the victims, which explains why they were selected (Mg. Parra, JEPColombia, 2023a6:44:57)

In this context, "*vulnerabilidad*" becomes a euphemism that simplifies the intersectionality and complexity of this case: disability/physical/intellectual, a person with a substance use disorder, homelessness, and poverty; into a single moral category. Vulnerability, it is deployed as an elastic signifier to cover those lives that are illegible (Henao, 2024). It over-includes disability, socioeconomic status, gender, race; while under protects because the category does not activate concrete duties of the state. In doing so, it sacrifices a rights-based approach (including accommodation, due process, justice, and anti-discrimination duties) *for a moral pity discourse* (Couser, 1999).

Therefore, the shift from a rights-based approach to one centred on sentiment reduces Camilo and others to objects of compassion, undermining their position as subjects entitled to justice.

Didier Fassin (2011) argues that the public exercise of compassion reconfigures structural injustice as a matter of individual suffering, thereby transforming political questions into moral ones: rights/justice to pity/charity. This discursive move redirects attention away from institutional accountability toward emotional appeasement.

Finally, compassion, as Fassin notes, operates through a vertical relation, “from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker...” (Fassin, 2011, p. 4) In this way, the emotional response it’s also a social mechanism that stabilises inequality under the guise of benevolence (Fassin, 2011).

4.2.6 SORTING LOGIC.

Labels do pre- work, by downgrading an individual’s worth, suspending rights, and smoothing the passage from management to elimination.

People with problematic drug use were selected precisely for those reasons (Mg Parra, JEPColombia, 2024,6:46:26).

Building on the Judge’s phrasing, “problematic drug use” and following Fassin (2011), moral vocabularies reorder political problems, including justice demands, into gradients of deservingness, distributing compassion and punishment accordingly (Fassin, 2011).

The label “problematic” thus does anticipatory work or pre- work pre-screening credibility, lowering the ethical threshold for harm, and making elimination or neglect to appear as administratively reasonable and politically justifiable. Within this framework, Camilo’s life is evaluated by its proximity to moralised norms, specifically by sobriety, productivity, and autonomy (Campos, 2019; Goodley, 2014; Yarza et al., 2019). While perhaps intended to describe systemic failure, it inadvertently reveals a deeper rationale: the normalisation of the targeting of those already positioned in the margins.

4.2.7 SYSTEMIC FAILURE IS PORTRAYED AS A CASE OF MISFORTUNE.

Although Judge Parra names “the state” as responsible, the sentence bases causation in *addiction* as the “*starting point*,” converting a designed operation of unlawful force into a narrative of misfortune and family suffering; this discursive pivot moves the case from adjudicating illegality to administering vulnerability.

...as the state is responsible for your son's incursion into drug addiction, which is the starting point of the tragedy that you had to live through as a mother and the tragedy that your family had to face (Mg Parra, JEPColombia, 2024,6:45:14).

The reference to a tragedy by Judge Parra in the excerpt above makes one wonder if Camilo's addiction as such was the “*starting point*” of a “*tragedy*” or, instead, a symptom of a broader social and political systemic failure. What if the military conscription had not been compulsory? What if, like his siblings, Camilo had gone to university instead? Following Kafer's (Kafer, 2013b) call to imagine other futures that think differently about disability and the lives of disabled people, these questions may unsettle a discourse of “individual misfortune”, I aim to translate the discussion into considering this to be an engineered harm. Camilo was exposed to harm because there is a system deliberately engineered to prey on young men like him—a machinery sustained by what Puar (2017), drawing on Mbembe, refers to as a biopolitical production of debility, and by the militarisation of everyday life in Colombian society¹⁵ (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Paley, 2015; Puar, 2017; Rodriguez, 2018).

In conclusion, the obligatory conscription of young men from low socioeconomic status to serve in the military should be the basis for thinking about Camilo's life. It demands a shift from interpreting his life trajectory as biographical misfortune to recognising the material circumstances and governance mechanisms that rendered his life both legible and expendable (Foucault, 2003).

¹⁵ For deeper analyses of Colombian militarism in the context of the drug war and long-term internal conflict, see Paley's argument that the “war on drugs” operates as a neo-liberal vector for militarization (Paley, 2015) and Rodríguez's mid-term account of “civilian militarism” and everyday militarization (Rodriguez, 2018)

4.3 CASE TWO: ROGER ACERO.

The story of Roger is perhaps one of the few stories of a disabled person that became visible during the transitional justice process following the discovery of the *Falsos Positivos* scandal. Given the limited information available about him, this analysis integrates his story with those of others as it unfolds.

El Espectador was one of the first major news outlets to report on people with disabilities being targeted, through Maria Jose Medellin's piece "*10 Crimenes aberrantes del Estado*", which presented ten young disabled men among the victims of this practice. (Palma, 2016). Although this report was published in 2016, there are still no official records that statistically disaggregate how many disabled people have been targeted (CNMH, 2025). As the JEP hearings continue, however, emerging patterns within both official discourses and the media's interpretation may offer further insights.

Findings about Roger's story are both horrific when focusing on the army's *operational mechanisms* and disappointing when examining the media discourse surrounding it. Although in this work there is no space to go deep into media analysis, it is still alarming that it has received so little media coverage.

In most cases, it will suggest that in the universe of what judges, victims, perpetrators and media call "*vulnerable victims*", there are thousands more whose names and stories have not been told in the public scenario. Ironically, what the Army assumed when they designed their strategies to select the victims was that nobody would ever look for their bodies, and nobody would miss them. At this point, it may not be wrong to think that they were right on this one, as after many years of victims and survivors struggling for the truth and recognition, there are still thousands erased from collective memory.

Here, the analysis will start with William's (Roger's brother) intervention at the JEP. To build this analysis, it is also necessary to pay attention to the judge's narrative when the topic of disability arises with William's intervention. Finally, to contrast with the media discourse, there is a section that analyses a panel of opinion and how disability and disabled people are referred to in this context by the media and academics.

4.3.1 ROGER'S STORY:

Roger was a 23-year-old man. He was noticeably physically disabled, and that was enough of a condition for the Army to prey on him.

One of the militaries describes a soldier observing him during the three days before they kidnap him, torture him for three days and then execute him.

All the soldiers knew what we were going to do. The soldiers provided information to report the deaths; in Roger's specific case, the information came from Barrera Cachay. Fernando spent three days watching how he would get that person (Roger) out (Burgos 2023a, 4:56:42).

Roger lived in Aguzul, in the Casanare region, and attended school in the evenings. He also enjoyed carving wood and soap bars.

Roger had restricted mobility, and he had to support himself with crutches to commute anywhere.

On February 27, 2007, at the peak of cases, according to court documents, Roger was approached at his home by two men who asked him to help them find an address.

Two people went to the home of ROGER ACERO HERNANDEZ, a 23-year-old man with great difficulty walking due to osteoporosis, asking him for information about an address, after which they took him away on a motorcycle without him ever returning (Mg Diaz-Romero, 2023, p. 2)

Three days later, on the 27th, Roger became a number in the army's success indicators:

44th Infantry Battalion Ramón Nonato Pérez reported the bodies of two N.N. killed in combat in the village of La Graciela in the municipality of Aguazul (Mg Diaz-Romero, 2023, p. 2)

His body was not identified until 16 days later, according to the same document. However, his family could not recover the body until 16 December 2008.

4.3.2 SOLIDARITY TO CONFRONT ERASURE.

On September 19, 2023, during a JEP hearing in the Casanare Region, William, Roger's brother, entered the hearing with a crutch, one of Roger's carvings, and a photograph as a visual testimony.

He was not on the list of speakers that day. Still, thanks to the advocacy and solidarity among the victims, he was able to talk and expose the hearing's initial erasure of disability.

I'm going to show you with this crutch, that crutch that's here, that you took the life of a person with a disability (William A, JEPColombia, 2023a).

Disability appears in this hearing for the first time, as William uses a crutch, a prosthetic aid, as a "*material witness*," which compelled the audience to confront ableist structures.

The crutch becomes an embodied testimony. William translates an abstract legal language into a tangible, affective object that the audience can touch, see, or imagine.

De Waardt & Weber (2019) note that, although efforts are made to include victims in the process, there is a significant risk that this participation will become "tokenistic" due to barriers to participation. Not all victims want to be part of an organisation, nor do many have the means to participate. It would often reduce participation in "*statement giving*"; genuine participation would mean influence over content, process, and outcome (De Waardt & Weber, 2019).

Furthermore, the initial organisational design for victims' participation had included "disabled victims" as a step forward to acknowledge disability as a constitutive axis; however, barriers are still present and very often make disability and disabled victims an afterthought in this scenario (De Waardt & Weber, 2019). William's participation in this forum, even in small portion, centres the differential experiences that the legal frameworks often make abstract.

4.3.3 DISABILITY/ABILITY "COMPULSORY ABLE-BODIEDNESS"

Following William's intervention, as in the earlier case of Camilo, I track the pivot disability/ability. Nor does it mean that this is an exercise to criticise the victims by standards of "*political correctness*" when speaking of disability, nor to blame them for what is here approached as a structural failure. The concern in this work, therefore, is with the systems that shape these narrative possibilities, not with the victims who navigate them.

But let's not call it a disability; let's call it an ability. He was a night school student, he had talent, his ability to do work, to make bracelets, to carve stones, to carve soaps. He had an excellent way of being a person, of being human... (William A, JEPColombia, 2023a)

As noted by McRuer, this reference to disability is an instance of compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness: disability can surface only on the condition that it be translated into an affirming discourse of productivity, character, and self-management (McRuer, 2006). William secures Roger's legibility not by insisting on the political salience of impairment in the scene of *Falsos Positivos*' violence, but by reattaching value to usefulness and talent, precisely the virtues demanded by neoliberal norms (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018)¹⁶ that McRuer argues make able-bodiedness feel natural and mandatory (McRuer, 2006).

The shift from *disability* to *ability* performs inclusion while re-centring ableist value. It invites recognition only to the extent that Roger conforms to the figure of the *good* or *productive* subject. According to McRuer's terms, this represents a re-articulation of ableism, as the ongoing realities of the chronic pain, fatigue, mobility limitations, and the daily challenges of osteomyelitis are overlooked in favour of *ability talk* as a set of valued capacities (McRuer, 2006).

Puar's analysis further highlights the risk that the audience interpret *capacity* rather than acknowledging structural disablement and the prolonged process of debility Roger

¹⁶ Neoliberal norms as the expectations for individuals to prove their worth through productivity, self-management, and independence; disability becomes acceptable only when reframed as a form of ability that fits these market logics (McRuer & Bérubé, 2006; Mitchell & Snyder, 2018).

experienced, including the ways institutions and armed actors targeted, misread, or made disposable those who relied on mobility aids (Puar, 2017).

In addition, Shakespeare (2017), clarifies further about the cost of this move. He has long warned against “*supercrip*” narratives—stories that celebrate exceptional achievement “*despite*” impairment—which can be emotionally compelling yet analytically corrosive. These narratives are familiar and tend to individualise what belongs to the structural systems, making acceptance conditional (*worthy because talented*), and erasing both the effects of impairment and the need for social change.

Shakespeare’s social-relational account also insists we keep two things in view at once: (1) impairment is real and may involve pain, fatigue, infection, mobility limits (osteomyelitis is not a metaphor); and (2) disablement arises in interaction with social, legal, and material arrangements—in this case, a policing/war logic that sorted bodies, and a judicial script that initially erased disability until victims made it visible (Shakespeare, 2017). As a result, renaming disability as “ability” removes the embodied reality of impairment and conceals the social mechanisms of disablement; by doing so, it weakens the analytical and political grounds for demanding accommodations and for naming ableist attitudes as part of the harm. Shakespeare’s model is an invitation to keep disability analytically and politically at the centre (Kafer, 2013b; McRuer, 2006; Shakespeare, 2017).

Taken together, McRuer and Shakespeare, the excerpt can be read as a double movement: William’s testimony opens analytic and juridical space; second, it risks closing it by converting disability into personal virtue rather than evidence of differential exposure to harm. In other words, it powerfully materialises disability in the audience (the crutch, the diagnosis, the memory of movement), and then—almost reflexively—re-domesticates it within an ability-centric narrative. A crip-informed counter would be to keep disability named and central, refuse euphemism, while also insisting that Roger’s artistry and schooling are not compensations for disability but parts of a non-normative life whose value does not depend on productivity metrics (McRuer, 2006; Shakespeare, 2017).

4.3.4 SELECTIVE DISCLOSURE “BECOMING A TORTURER.”

Williams' intervention at this forum constituted a necessary challenge that disrupted the prevailing discourse and unsettled the military's position.

It was common during the hearing that the military, in their interventions, accepted homicide but were avoidant when asked:

Why torture? If it was only to follow orders and present numbers due to a superior's pressure, why torture? What did you do to them during the three days before their execution? (William A, JEPColombia, 2023a).

Military reactions during the hearing will come from “I don't remember,” “I was not there, the one who did it is not here”, or simply denying it, “there was no torture it must be the bullet's impact...” (JEPColombia, 2023a, 2023b)

When William asks about what happened to Roger, his perpetrators won't go further than this:

...about Mr Roger Acero... I was the one who killed your brother; I shot him (Capitan(R) Convita, JEPColombia, 2023b1:27:10).

...all the soldiers knew what we were going to do; the soldiers provided information to report the deaths. In Roger's specific case, the information came from Soldiers Barrera Cachay. Fernando spent three days watching how he would get that person out... (Sergeant (R) Burgos-Jimenez, JEPColombia, 2023a4:56:42).

Trying to make sense of the tension caused by the evasive and vague answers the military gave to William and the other victim's families. One might think the most obvious reason for the military's avoidance of the truth is self-preservation; while that is correct, this matter deserves further consideration to avoid the binaries *good/bad* or *benevolent/evil* in this analysis.

Austin & Bocco (2016), offer a helpful lens in this context, as they separate the discussion from the legal framework¹⁷. They point out the constraints that the legal

¹⁷ UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) art. 1 defines torture as severe physical or mental pain or suffering *intentionally* inflicted for a *purpose* (e.g., obtaining information, punishment, intimidation,

definition of torture brings to understanding the practice. This element on its own could explain the evasion of the military to admit torture in Roger's case, as torture requires intent, so admitting it is uniquely self-incriminating.

Moreover, disclosing torture would force perpetrators to concede intentional, purposeful cruelty against persons with disabilities¹⁸. Therefore, it would expose their script of *superior's orders* or *chain of command pressure*, increasing moral and legal exposure (Austin & Bocco, 2016). Thereby heightening moral bankruptcy in the perpetrators, and the institution and socially becoming the very Other they had projected onto the victim.

Accordingly, ableism shapes who is harmed; also, it frames what can be admitted: homicide becomes the minimum truth they cannot deny, while torture and the suffering of stigmatised bodies remain the truth they most strategically refuse, if truth is dependent on a legal framework. Gineas's review of *Sociology of denial* by Stanley Cohen, asserts that "denial depends on moral, rather than cognitive, blindness. A moral void is the matrix for the simultaneous presence of 'unavoidable awareness and disregard', and for the normalization and neutralization of troubling events (Guinea et al., 2002, p. 368). Moreover, Cohen with his concept of Interpretive denial, explains how some perpetrators would acknowledge part of the events in this case murder, by normalizing/neutralizing it within moral frameworks. It means in this case perpetrators did not deny the killing of disabled young man, but they acknowledge the truth within a boundary of the moral and institutional frameworks of the state and the transitional justice system.

In cases involving disabled victims, ableist common sense had already cast them as the social "Other"—less credible, less rational, less valuable— and thus as bodies that could be restrained, handled, or managed (Goodley, 2014; S. Tremain, 2006; Wolbring, 2008).

discrimination), by or with the consent/acquiescence of a public official or person acting in an official capacity. See UN OHCHR, *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, art. 1 (Or, 2012).

¹⁸ See CRPD art. 15 affirms the absolute prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and requires States Parties to take effective measures to prevent such acts. (UN, 2008)

In the Transitional Justice, specifically the *Falsos Positivos* or macro case 03, the fact of the victim's death is incontrovertible (a corpse fixes homicide), but when the families and the victims testify torture, their testimonies are considered contestable by the same ableist biases that deem disabled persons unreliable witnesses (Chiara, 2022).

Returning to Austin & Bocco, a more sociological approach reframes the torturer not as a monstrous evil essence but as a situational becoming, so there is not a single decision point; it is a transition (Austin & Bocco, 2016). They propose a micro-sociology to understand how this violence is performed. How does someone come to become a torturer? They argue that there is a network of elements and conditions that enable torture, therefore, explaining torture as characteristic of a political regime or military doctrine is not sufficient, neither the pathologisation of individuals as "*born that way*" even though there are some individuals that given the right conditions will be more prone than others; same way orders from superiors only are not sufficient.

Furthermore, they map a material semiotic network in which objects (elements to torture), and scripts/knowledge (doctrine and cultural "how to") cue the action, which means create the environment for this practice to be normalised (Austin & Bocco, 2016). This distinction is important in the context analysed here, as the pathologisation of individuals was precisely the most prevalent marker of ableist prejudice (Nario-Redmond et al., 2019).

It takes the discussion back to the binary terrain, where paradoxically, the perpetrator is characterised as the "evil" "monster" and the victim as "innocent," "non-deviant". This discourse serves the same purpose, legitimising the perpetrator's actions and leaving the structural and enabling elements intact.

In Casanare cases, all these elements were present and connected to form a network in which the result was the killing of hundreds of men with already stigmatised identities. The Army's dominance on the territory, made soldiers feel comfortable to mobilise and to pick and choose the victims, the doctrine (knowledge) and the pressure from superiors; the material means, transportation, and physical installations; the access to the material to stage operations and finally, the discursive sorting of victims:

ableist/racial/classist tropes that pre-labelled targets within a “criminal” scenario, sanitised brutal violence upon many like Roger, as something normal.

DISABILITY, JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION.

William’s brief intervention offered significant insight into the treatment of people with disabilities in Colombia. Notably, it started a critical conversation, challenging the silence that has enabled the refusal to acknowledge the truth. His testimony raised the question of why disabled individuals were highly visible as targets for the army yet remain largely invisible within the justice system.

The two judges presiding over the hearing responded to William’s intervention. Their points of view reflect the tension within the disability Justice movement.

Judge Parra reflects on the juridical effort to inscribe the differential experience that people with disabilities have endured during the Colombian armed conflict.

...From the special jurisdiction for the peace we have begun to give a narrative to what people with disability in the context of armed conflict, in the context of war, and how it is a differentiated impact due to the way in which that situation of disability served to be selected as victims... (Mg Parra, JEPColombia, 2023a4:29:22).

His intervention situates persons with disabilities as political subjects by naming the CRPD framework.

For example, even the same committee on the rights of persons with disabilities in the United Nations spoke out against the way in which they are being selecting people with disabilities within the framework of the practice of False Positives (Mg Parra JEPColombia, 2023a4:30:08).

Furthermore, Judge Parra situates his narrative here away from disability as an individual’s own misfortune or tragedy.

...What we have tried to make visible is the damage that this the exploitation of people in extremely vulnerable conditions highlights the harm associated with the idea that people with disabilities are expendable in our society. This is the idea that governed this violence, and therefore, reflected in these atrocious events, led to the perpetuation of behaviours of marginalisation, stigmatisation,

finger-pointing, and structural discrimination. Therefore, thank you for your testimony (Mg Parra JEPColombia, 2023a4:30:08). Judge Parra's brief acknowledgement constitutes a crucial move, which recognises that the violence enacted on disabled bodies is not incidental and has deep roots in the historical perception of these lives as expendable (Butler, 2016; Henao, 2021).

4.3.5 A CRIP READING: DISRUPTING THE AFFECTIVE FRAME.

In contrast to Judge Parra's response to William in the section above, Judge Catalina Diaz's response supplants this political momentum by translating disability and justice-seeking into a sentimental narrative.

I just wanted to tell you that you are absolutely right. What we should talk about is diverse capabilities, eh? And we have found how, I remember several boys, one of them, one of the young men from Soacha, were boys with diverse abilities (Mg Diaz C, JEPColombia, 2023a4:30:54 - 4:31:13)

As Judge Catalina Diaz continues:

Those people are capable of enormous love and are capable of many things like the ones you have described today (Mg Diaz C, JEPColombia, 2023a4:31:32).

The pursuit of justice is then reimagined through emotional endurance, displacing the political transformation envisaged by the social and disability justice movement in the CRPD. This dynamic re-imposes the ableist attitudes that, in the first place, enabled the victimisation of disabled young men like Roger.

For instance, McRuer (2006) and Kafer (2013b), would argue that the emphasis on "love" and "diverse" abilities can be read as "*compulsory rehabilitation*", where disability is tolerated only when framed within narratives of hope, care and redemption. Such discourse, while emotionally compelling, instils a vision of justice, premised on healing and closure.

4.3.6 ROMANTICISING CARE: OUTSOURCING THE DUTY OF JUSTICE.

Judge Catalina Diaz has portrayed the victim's families as heroic "caregivers," celebrating their relentless search for relatives who have been disappeared or assassinated by the state.

Their families and their mothers and their sisters and their brothers have searched for heaven and earth, and as many of them say, until they find them, that they have achieved even many, many years later (Mg Diaz C, JEPColombia, 2023a,4:31:43)

She does it while referring to the disabled victims of the *Falsos Positivos* and their families. As discussed earlier, Camilo's case: Teresa spent nine years searching for her son to discover the truth about him. William experienced the same when trying to recover Roger's body.

This rhetoric masks a deeper problem; it romanticises caregiving while concealing the state's failure to fulfil its basic duty as the institutions seem to outsource their own responsibilities to families. Until their loved ones are moved out of the administrative containment that obstructs the victims' public mourning, families must assume all the costs and judicial functions.

Veena Das (2007) captures this dynamic through the concept of the "*zone between two deaths*". The physical killing of a loved one (first death), and the social erasure (second death) that follows when the law refuses to register, acknowledge, or compensate for that loss (Das, 2007).

Within this marginal space, survivors and victims' families are forced by the state's abandonment to become witnesses, investigators, and advocates. Their testimony, therefore, creates a counter-law¹⁹ (Das, 2007; Robins, 2013; Taylor, 2003). This narrative stands in the gap between the official legal silence and the lived reality of the victim, which is precisely what this hearing is evidencing. Similarly, Henao and Buttler's idea of invalid lives and ungrievability resonates deeply here, when they assert that

¹⁹ The term counter-law used here draws conceptually on scholarship on counter-archives and counter-memory and victim-centred approaches to transitional justice to describe how marginalised actors create alternative forms of legal-moral authority that challenge official silence and erasure. (Das, 2007; Robins, 2013; Taylor, 2003)

some lives are not publicly mourned because they were never granted full recognition as valid lives in the first place (Butler, 2016; Henao, 2021).

The state's refusal to name the disappeared as victims denies families the right to collective mourning and memory reconstruction. Within this vacuum, the family's testimonies are acts of resistance to the second death, insisting that grief is not a private emotion but a political act.

In summary, the depiction of families as heroic and tireless caregivers reveals the State's abdication of its own responsibility, compelling families and survivors to inhabit the precarious space between violence, debility, and erasure. Consequently, their testimonies serve as a critical mechanism for interrupting the "*second death*" and asserting the right to public recognition and mourning.

4.3.6 RED+ PANELLISTS. MEDIA ABLEISM

To conclude the analysis of Roger's case, I turn to a final media piece that elucidates many elements already identified. These excerpts are from a panel of experts invited to appear on the Colombian news channel, RED+. Featuring writer and Journalist Guillermo Rico Reyes (GR), expert in peace topics and Human Rights Alejandro Posada (AP), Armed Conflicts Analyst, Luis Alberto Villamarín (LV) and the show host Maria Camila Orozco (MC).

This tv show was recorded only days after the JEP hearing in which William took part. The panel opens with a video call interview of William, during which he is briefly asked about Roger. However, the discussion moves almost at once to the other issues, and William disappears from the frame. Roger is no longer even mentioned during the panel.

Throughout the panel, disability is treated as irrelevant to the political, legal or moral frame of reference of the *FALSOS POSITIVOS*. The analysts discussed the duties of the JEP, the legitimacy of Transitional Justice, and even the origins of the armed conflict, but none would consider disability as a social or political category with explanatory power, or even as a conspicuous feature of the victimisation under discussion. As mentioned earlier in the JEP hearing disability appears only at the margins—if it does—and usually in euphemistic, depoliticised or pathologising terms.

Paradoxically, it is only at the very end of the program discussion that one of the guests tries to challenge the discussion by inserting the names of Luz Marina Bernal and Leonardo Porras, the last one killed by the army in the context of the *falsos positivos*. Even then, the intervention is quickly absorbed into a narrative about the costs of peace. The “bitter pill to swallow” reference emerges here, urging to move forward.

This panel segment, therefore, illustrates the broader contours of the Colombian post-conflict discourse—What can be discussed, what is not discussed, and who shapes what counts as politically relevant. Then there is a remaining question: towards what future are we moving? And who is allowed to come along?

4.3.7 LOS SAPOS QUE HAY QUE TRAGAR / A BITTER PILL TO SWALLOW.

The host MC asked the panellists what the biggest challenge for the Transitional Justice would be, and Alejandro Posada was the first to respond:

AP: I would like to highlight something very important that we have not discussed enough, and that is the prominent role that victims have taken on in this type of process. As we saw here a moment ago, the victims have been able to question and confront their perpetrators, which is very powerful because it allows us to think about more profound processes of reconciliation. These are mechanisms for dignifying and reframing the experiences of these individuals, who are victims of such terrifying crimes. (Posada A, RedmasTV, 2023,43:52)

AP frames the discussion here in a conciliatory Human Rights discourse, which makes sense and is easy to agree with until a deeper discussion about who the victims are, challenges this universal category. His approach involves homogenisation, in other words, a tendency to view the victim as an abstract, universal category (Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011).

Moreover, it is how the erasure begins, the category victim is stripped of the intersecting materialities of class, gender, race, and territorial marginalisation that are necessary in the analysis to understand the embodied experiences of violence in Colombia (Ned et al., 2025).

Here, in a form of discursive disablement, AP praises the victim's participation "as we saw a moment ago," implicitly referencing William's interview, but without acknowledging the structural erasure that has already occurred in the panel's own treatment of Roger. Disability, although named by William and central to the case, is treated as irrelevant (Lester et al., 2024).

Continuing with the panel's discussion, GR finally settled on the topic that, from the perspective developed in this work, disability and an intersectional approach should have been at the centre since the beginning, as William started the interview and was asked about Roger. Nevertheless, GR wants to point out what he considers one of the challenges of Transitional Justice by exposing the case of Leonardo Porras¹⁴ and his mother, Luz Marina.

For what follows, the analysis will entail observations on the brief discussion among the panellists. Here, the method I have been following since the start of this chapter changes slightly, with the focus shifting to the dialogue rather than the excerpts as it has been before.

GR: I have one objection, and that is the case of this lady, Luz Marina, from Soacha... Luz Marina Bernal. Because the ordinary justice system sentences her son's murderers to 42 years in prison and the transitional justice system sets them free...That was serious.

AP: Those are bitter pills that, I believe, as a society, we have to swallow.

GR: Yes, but in a case where it was against a person with a cognitive disability? We are talking about a serious case, right? A boy with mental problems and a mental delay...if you'll excuse the term, of course.

So, we then let them take him away and murder him, A boy with a cognitive disability... She is the one who investigates, because it is through her that the chapter on false positives is opened, because of her the world learned of this barbarity, and when they are already convicted...

MC (host): "But are not those the "bitter pills"?... I mean, on both sides, the toads of this special jurisdiction for peace JEP" (Posada A, Orozco MC, Rico-Reyes G RedmasTV, 2023,45:08)

As mentioned before, the topic goes almost unnoticed. GR brings it back to illustrate a current tension in Transitional Justice that Teresa also mentions in Camilo's case and refers to the fact that many military perpetrators were released from prison when they were admitted to the Special Jurisdiction of the Peace JEP, after the ordinary justice sentenced them to prison has caused many victims to advocate before the JEP for their cases to be treated or continued in the ordinary justice system, this sentiment has been triggered also by the lack of compromise of some perpetrators with confessing the truth and not complying with what is expected by the Transitional Justice system and the victim's aspirations to justice.

Nevertheless, returning to the panel's discussion, the way the guest deploys disability here suggests that, rhetorically, GR seeks to intensify the perception of injustice. Following on Garland Thompson (2012), disability triggers certain narratives within abled-bodied people, some of which often correspond to an array of expressions of sentimental sympathy. Moreover, she argues that disability is mobilised as a "vivid" narrative tool that she portrays accurately in this passage: "The fundamental plot here is that the spectacularly disabled among us contribute the cultural work of teaching the non-disabled how to be more human" (Garland-Thomson, 2012, p. 344). The exchange reflects this dynamic in the engagement with disability. It is simply utilised as an enhancer to make a point, from a place that ends up erasing what the embodied experience of violence has to say (Harris, 2019; Mathews, 2018).

Similarly, Cherney (2011) says that disability often operates as a rhetorical intensifier of injustice because it carries strong cultural, moral, and affective meanings that the speaker can easily mobilise to amplify perceptions of harm, without requiring the speaker to engage with the structural dimensions of ableism, inequality or injustice. In public discourse, disabled people are often framed as inherently fragile, innocent, or vulnerable (Mathews, 2018). These culturally settled assumptions make disability a powerful symbolic resource, and by invoking it, heighten the emotional resonance of a case, making the wrongdoing appear more shocking and morally egregious.

4.3.8 THE HUMAN RIGHTS AS THE UNIVERSALISING DISCOURSE OF COLLECTIVE ABSTRACTION.

GR deploys disability through an affectionate register – appealing to care, empathy, and recognition of harm. AP reframes the victim's loss as a necessary sacrifice, as something that “we all” must endure for the greater good of national progress. The metaphor “toads to swallow” operates precisely through making certain forms of injustice tolerable and expendable within a national project of Transitional Justice.

Only moments before articulating his position, AP emphasised the importance of keeping victims at the centre of transitional justice processes. AP's intervention could be considered a merely rhetorical inconsistency; however, it reveals the intrinsic logic of the liberal human rights frameworks. In this configuration “the victim” has become symbolic category replacing the differentiated lived experience. In other words, the abstraction allows justice at a level of discourse, as material justice is deferred or denied to specific families which cases fall outside the acceptable limits of reconciliation.

Ablenationalism emerges here as the appeal to “we all” thus obscures the uneven distribution of loss and sacrifice required for national progress (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018). Human rights regimes rely on a tension between universality and specificity, and disability exposes the limits of this model (Gill & Schlund-Vials, 2014). Similarly, Mark Sherry in his account *“The Promise of Human Rights for Disabled People and the Reality of Neoliberalism”*, offers a critique of neoliberal human rights. While Mitchell and Snyder demonstrate how national belonging (see Chapter 2 Able nationalism) is conditioned upon normative capacities of productivity and autonomy, Sherry shows how these thresholds are operationalised through human rights discourse that promises dignity while producing abandonment. In Sherry's analysis, disabled people are excluded from it, they are included rhetorically while being materially deprived (Sherry, 2016). This dynamic mirrors Able nationalism's core idea, the nation secures its moral legitimacy by affirming universal rights, even as it absorbs the suffering of those who fall outside its participatory bottom line (Sherry, 2016).

CHAPTER 5

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I set out to Investigate the phenomenon of *Falsos Positivos* in Colombia. I argue that a series of extrajudicial executions by the Colombian Army correspond to a biopolitical phenomenon, in which disability functioned as a marker for elimination. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Woodak & Meyer, 2001) and Narrative Analysis (Riessman, 2008) as methodological framework through the theoretical lenses of biopolitics of disability and debility (Mitchell & Snyder, 2018; Puar, 2017) ableism (Goodley, 2014), and grievability (Butler, 2016), this work traced how institutions and discourse depicted certain populations as disposable.

Camilo and Roger's stories provided the basis to understand how ableism mobilises comprehensively across all sectors of society, from state institutions as the military to the transitional Justice system, but also within the social bases and to the individual level among the victims and their families. The analysis reveals disability as a central mechanism of biopolitical control, wherein state narratives and institutional practices systematically construct disabled individuals as sites of exclusion and pathologisation (Cherney, 2011; Goodley, 2014; Scuro et al., 2019).

Here, I have argued that ableism served as precursor to the violence that Camilo and Roger experienced. The discursive framing of victims within values of capacity or ability (Puar, 2017) can be traced genealogically (Dwivedi, 2025; Kretsedemas, 2017) through elements of the colonial project in Latin America to a more contemporary phenomena, such as *limpieza social* (Social Cleansing) (CNMH-IEPRI, 2015; Rojas, 1996).

Ableist logics actively produced the conditions that made *Falsos Positivos* possible in the social and political imaginary. Camilo and Roger's story built through the testimonies of their families reveal that they were legible as targets by the army precisely through their positioning within a hierarchy that measured their lives worth against values based in productivity, capacity and conformity to an ideal of healthy social body (Goodley, 2014;

Henao, 2021; McRuer, 2006). This finding pushes against tendencies to treat disability as a secondary characteristic in state violence by establishing it as central to the dynamic in which the targeting of civilians by the army occurred (Davis, 2002; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Salinas, 2017).

Puar's biopolitics of debility has proven crucial for explaining what the concept of ableism alone cannot. While ableism accounts to put it in simple words, for prejudice against disabled people (Nario-Redmond, 2019), the concept of debility illuminated how the state actively produces and manages conditions of precarity across entire populations (Butler, 2016; Puar, 2017). The Colombian army exploited this manufactured precarity, establishing that even though biopolitical power can operate through direct violence, it also does the prior work of making certain populations available for disposal (Ned et al., 2025; Puar, 2017).

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study. First, constraints in the data: as I have mentioned throughout the thesis, there is a lack of disability-disaggregated data, especially regarding *Falsos Positivos* (Biel-Portero & Bolaños Enríquez, 2018; CNMH, 2025; Satizabal et al., 2021), which limited the scope and the approaches of this study.

The absence of disaggregated data on disabled victims of *Falsos Positivos* is itself a symptomatic expression of ableism and a governance decision—whether through insufficient institutional interest or deliberate erasure from national registries (Biel-Portero & Bolaños Enríquez, 2018; Satizabal et al., 2021). I consider that the failure to count disabled victims of the armed conflict and or *Falsos Positivos*, and to recognise them as political subjects (CRPD, 2016), has direct implications in the way the Transitional Justice system is operating and what justice can bring to the victims.

Second, the selection of Camilo and Roger's cases, while illustrative, do not encompass the universe of disabled victims of the conflict and the complexity behind intersecting differentials as gender and ethnicity and within the individual experience of each disabled person.

And third, relying on available discourse and testimonies may have left out perspectives that are less documented or harder to access.

For many families, the Transitional Justice System has been an essential avenue to learn the truth about their loved ones. This progress, however, is vulnerable if the underlying social and political conditions that gave rise to the targeting of people with disabilities are not rigorously identified and addressed by the state institutions. Colombia risks allowing a cycle in which the denial of *Falsos Positivos* promoted by a long -governing political sector will create a space where similar atrocities will continue; the memory of the victims cannot be a task for the victims' families only or selectively invoked or suppressed according to the exigencies of the national project, I aspire for this to be a shared commitment that contributes to the conscience of the truth and a battle against oblivion, by insisting that the lives of the disabled victims of *Falsos Positivos* were, and remain, grievable lives (Butler, 2016).

Finally, victim's social movements in Colombia (MAFAPO, mother of *Falsos Positivos*; MOVICE, Movement of victims of State Crimes, among others) have taken into their own hands the work that the government institutions should do; their struggles for recognition have contested the ungrievability (Butler, 2016) that the erasure from the official records has imposed on the victims, as the JEP has acknowledge there is a provisional universe of victims (6402)(JEP, 2018) of which may increase in the future in the investigations continue and more gets to be clarified also if other victims get accredited by the Transitional Justice system (De Waardt & Weber, 2019).

However, as this methodological constraints shaped this analysis, future research could build on these findings by exploring new methods to collect disability-disaggregated data; Investigation Action Participation (IAP) (Borda, 2013; Díaz-Arévalo, 2022) as culturally responsive methodology (Mere Berryman, 2013) for Colombian context could bring fresh perspectives to the dynamics in the Transitional Justice system.

Additionally, co-research or participation of people with disabilities in their own research exercises is an approach that is strengthening within the Disability studies (Bailey & Gammage, 2019; Goethals et al., 2015) and could contribute into narrowing the epistemic gap (Munévar et al., 2019) within the Colombian Disability Studies academia. Comparative studies across different regions of Colombia, or between Colombia and other countries with similar histories of state violence, also quantitative

research could help clarify how structural ableism manifest in different contexts and provide concrete directions for both policy and scholarship moving forward.

A decade has passed since the Peace accord with FARC in 2016 and more years since the *Falsos positivos*, a question remains would the Colombian state try in the ongoing peace talks with other armed groups to adopt a disabilities perspective in the post conflict and the redress in the Transitional Justice?

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6.1 APPENDIX

Coding Matrix	
Code Name	Description
Ableism	
Utility / Disposability	Frames that evaluate worth through productivity
Erasure/misnaming of disability	Denominating the person as unknown (NN) or by a criminal label that suppresses identity/disability.
Moral worth	Hierarchies of worth that degrade the lives of the poor/disabled.
Pathologised Vulnerability (addiction as defect)	Treating impairments as a moral/cognitive defect to justify targeting or to discredit testimony; includes (a) perpetrator/official justificatory frames and (b) well-meaning 'defect-as-defence' narratives by families/advocates that negate agency/capability.
Debility (Puar)	
State-Produced Incapacitation	Harm initiated or amplified by state actions/omissions (e.g., induction into drug procurement during service).
Institutional Abandonment / Procedural Debility	Administrative delays/benefits that exhaust victims and defer closure. (release, inactivity, stalled reparations).
Engineered exposure to harm	Situations where institutions or actors compel, induce, or structurally position people into ongoing risk, injury, or re-traumatisation, without (necessarily) killing them, thus producing and managing debility over time (Puar).
Labour extraction through precarisation/Privatised Care	Predatory rehab/care markets that manage debility without support, deepening harm.
Disability	
Identity	Disability mentioned as part of the identity
Impairment	Disability as impairment
Pathology	Describing disability utilising medical jargon.
Grievability (Butler)	
Pre-emption of mourning	Frames/practices that render death unintelligible or un/mournable (NN, criminalisation, years of silence).
Administrative Containment	Bureaucratic moves that contain/deflect grief and proof (transfers, deferrals, jurisdictional detours).
Operational Mechanisms of <i>Falsos Positivos</i>	
Lure / Transfer	Moving/luring targets from urban streets or homes to kill-sites (often with deception).
Lodging / Containment	Temporary hotel/safe-house holding before execution.
Roadside Execution	Killing in peripheral/roadside areas is characteristic of staged "combat".

Staging / Fabrication	Invented combat/operations; planted weapons; falsified reports to simulate legality.
Militarism	
Institutional Comfort (shielding)	Normalised protection: military-justice detours, benefits, file destruction.
Militarised Masculinities	Valor/cowardice/bravery scripts; toughening/recruitment discourses; gendered harm.
Performance Militarism (Results & Rewards)	Reward/metric regimes linking kills to “operational positives,” permits, promotions, payments; felicitation chains
Security Doctrine	Internal-Enemy doctrine. Counterinsurgency/common-enemy language that pre-justifies exceptional measures and enemy-making (e.g., “operation”, “antisocial”, dispute over calling it “war”).
Territorial Control Site Selection	Militarised territorial governance: selection of secluded/peripheral sites to simulate combat and manage visibility.
TJ Engagement & Limits	
Jurisdictional shifting	Shifting forums (military courts, to ordinary, to JEP) that stall accountability.
Reparations Stall	Families claim voice/authority against official narratives.
Investigative Non-Uptake	Authorities fail to search/identify; families must initiate.
Cost-Shifting (Outsourced Investigation)	The costs of investigation are offloaded to families (time, money, travel).
Intersectional Dynamics	
Urban/Rural / Poverty / Identity / Marginality	What an urban poverty/marginality increases exposure to recruitment/targeting and reduces credibility.
Family Care Burden	Prolonged unpaid labour of search/care borne by families.
Regional Displacement (Bogotá - Antioquia)	Jurisdictional/access barriers created by movement between regions.
Affective Exhaustion / Family Disintegration	Emotional toll and family breakdown as structural harm linked to the pursuit.
Economic Sacrifice of Justice	Material costs borne by families, e.g., (travel, time off work, “more than six tuitions”). Teresa’s intervention at the hearing.
Gendered Care/Justice Labour	Mothers/sisters disproportionately carry investigative/care burdens.
Resistance & Counter-Memory of victims	
Familial Evidence-Gathering	Bureaucratic moves that absorb/deflect grief and proof.

Alliances with Prosecutors & NGOs	Collaborative work with prosecutors, lawyers, NGOs towards justice.
Counter-Lexicon of Accountability	Terms that reframe the state ("criminal machine").
Route-Tracing & Fieldwork	Reconstructing movements (city → hotel → roadside) and responsible units.
Courtroom Presence & Dossier Work	Authorities fail to search/identify; families must initiate the process.
Testimonial Agency	Families claim voice/authority against official narratives.
Naming Commanders / Chain of Command	Families point out responsibility up the hierarchy to refuse the discourse of the state to place responsibility in a few "rotten apples."