

**AUTISTIC ADULTS AND THEIR INTERSECTIONS: AN
ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF
DISABILITY IN INDIGENOUS, CAMPESINOS AND URBAN FAMILIES
IN COLOMBIA**

by

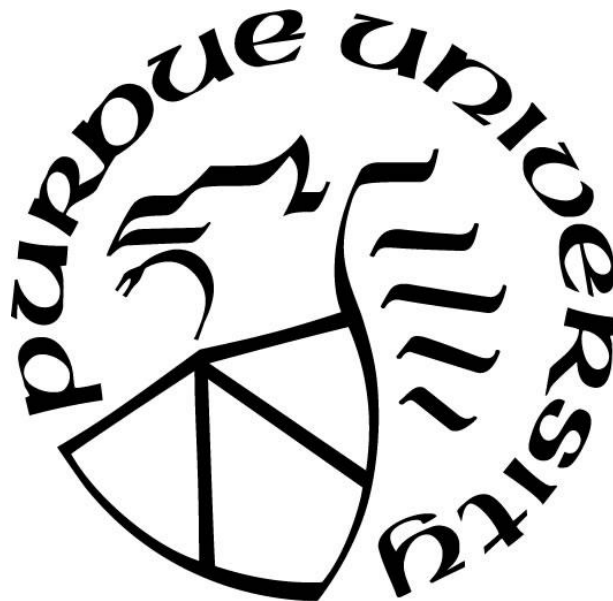
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THE BEGINNING OF A PATH

Anthropology has been a path that has allowed me to get to know distant places and people with diverse cultural backgrounds, but it always ends up taking me back home. It has been that way from my undergraduate days, through my time working at Colombian government institutions, and within my current master's work at Purdue University.

My relationship with what is considered disability from different perspectives does not escape that logic of taking me back home. I have gained empirical knowledge through my life experience with my family in Colombia, that often contrasted with other social and cultural contexts different from where I grew up. The other places that I experienced were mainly rural areas of my country. The last experience was and a volunteer program in England. All of these are integrated in a theoretical and academic exploratory path where my knowledge relates to my anthropological training to date, just now, when I am finishing my master's thesis in the United States.

This thesis reflects on that path of growth and my many returns home. The fieldwork for this research focused on the contexts where I grew up: my home and my family. It also takes up places that I know due to my professional experiences as a social anthropologist in Colombia.

The general goal of my research in disability is to understand how various social analyses of disability are linked to realities in the Latin American region and how they approach or are distinct from the notions and experiences of disability in the Global North. This thesis is the first effort, and also the first steps of a long-term project in which my professional life and personal life are intertwined.

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic project delves into the spheres of life of three autistic adults and their families. This thesis analyzes their experiences, current routines, and personal and family narratives about what it means to be an autistic adult across different identities and geographies. This thesis also identifies forms of knowledge that arise in these life experiences and shape strategies, decisions, or attitudes taken to navigate through life or overcome possible difficulties in their present and futures. This research takes place in Colombia, a diverse country and engages with anthropology of the everyday, sensory anthropology and disability studies.

INTRODUCTION

A conceptual preamble

Throughout this master's thesis, I explore the personal, family, and social experiences of three autistic adults from different socio-cultural contexts in Colombia. I describe the daily lives of these autistic adults and their families; I aim for an inquiry focusing on the public spheres and the social interaction typical of community life. I also look more intimately at the lives of these autistic adults by analyzing their daily activities, routines, and personal and family narratives about what it means to be an autistic adult in a country as diverse as Colombia.

This thesis aims to understand the life experiences of these autistic adults and their families. This research project proposes identifying the forms of knowledge that arise in the strategies, decisions, or attitudes taken to navigate through life or overcome possible difficulties. I also highlight how these autistic adults and their families envision a future life, as both a short-term and long-term life project.

Having said that, it is necessary to specify that this research intertwines anthropology and disability studies. This statement implies the need to clarify several concepts throughout this introduction and deepened during this thesis's development.

Drawing upon these literatures, I engage with disability as a “social category and relational concept” (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013). Importantly, this diverges from considering disability as a medical or pathological conception of diverse conditions of the body or the mind of a person or a group of people (Wasserman, et al. 2016). Instead, I take up disability as a social category with multiple meanings and expressions and which intersects with diverse identities, such as gender or ethnicity. These definitions and categories relate to people's identities and are deeply influenced by cultural conditions and social relations (Reiss, Serlin and Adams 2015). With this, I want to emphasize that when approaching disability from a social perspective, it is necessary to understand the conditions and institutions of a community or a society that can influence or shape whether a person is considered, or not, as disabled. These delineations are often made based on others’

conceptions of abilities and the meanings and implications of various physical or mental conditions (Hubert 2000).

Traditionally and broadly, anthropology engages with questions that focus on the study of humanity and culture (Peacock 1990). Studies of disability emerged as a field of interest within medical anthropology since the middle of the 20th century (Anta Felez 2015, Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, Suttleworth 2004). However, the evolution of the concept and the creation of Critical Disability Studies as noted (Hartblay 2020, Hall 2019) led some anthropologists to consider disability, not only as a field possible within anthropology (Anthropology of Disability) but critically evaluated the way in which it demanded attention to diverse ways of doing anthropology (Disability Anthropology) (Hartblay, 2020). In Disability Anthropology, the ethnographic study of experiences is essential. It allows the understanding of day-to-day life and where the accounts and the voices of disabled people are central (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, McKearney and Zoanni 2018). Using ethnography, researchers can gain knowledge and understanding through in-depth inquiries, participant observation, and dialogue with other research. In the same way, ethnography can engage more advocacy-oriented and action-based research possibilities. In this way, researcher can make central to their work ways to create better-living conditions for people who are being marginalized, discriminated against, or excluded from a majority social group (Hartblay 2020).

This introduction situates the concepts and positions that guided this research. I highlight my approach to disability and anthropology, ethnography, and disability studies. In so doing, I emphasize, the importance of delving into the routines and daily life of disabled people and their families. The first chapter of this thesis will address and explore these concepts, as well, and discuss how they are critical to working with autistic adults and their families.

The thesis outline

This chapter traces the historical context of the concept of disability and the difficulties of adhering to a single and unified definition. This chapter also highlights the current main anthropological approaches to disability, and points out the relationship of anthropology, especially social anthropology, with studies of disability. This first chapter also highlights the definition of

ethnography used in this research and further discusses ethnography's potential within anthropologically oriented disability research.

Equally important to this work is honing on the concept of *everyday life*. This is a fertile concept widely utilized in the human sciences and has also impacted the development of ethnographic work in social anthropology. *Everyday life* is intricately connected with sensory anthropology approaches. In so doing, I describe the everyday life of autistic adults and their families, and the senses occupy a prominent place within the narrative.

Although the first chapter of this document has a theoretical focus, this research's core is ethnographic work. Here, and as it will be shown later, I take as inspiration the work of Cassandra Hartblay (2021) and her in-depth fieldwork carried out in Russia with physically disabled adults. She works by using strategies such as theater to prioritize the senses, the corporal expressions, and the narratives of the people she worked with, their interaction with the material world, and the other people they daily encountered. Although I do not use the theater as a method in this work, as with Hartblay (2021), I do subscribe to the need to establish close relationships with the people who are part of this work, paying close attention to different forms of expression, including non-verbal narratives as well as focusing on their opinions, stories, and knowledge.

Hartblay's influence on this thesis is strong. To a large extent, I follow her ethnography scheme in the way in which she describes her personal experience, her learning amid ethnographic work, and like her, I also point out that my research work does not seek to be totalizing or homogenize the experiences of disability. On the contrary, I seek to point out the scope of the narratives and experiences of disabled people, in my case, from different familial and cultural contexts in Colombia in a similar way.

To talk about my positionality as an anthropologist and as a person during this research, I will share with the readers the personal path that led me to become interested academically and professionally in disability. I will follow the norms of auto-ethnography while incorporating a critical and retrospective perspective. I want to note here how reflecting on disability has been a transformative route for me and is still a place of learning and academic and personal growth. All

of this has taken place with the belief that the understanding of disability as a social category that intersects with human diversity, will contribute to understanding the everyday lives of disabled people and their families. This understanding has both theoretical and applied implications (McKearney and Zoanni 2018).

Before outlining the structure of this thesis, I wish to describe in detail the spaces and temporalities within which fieldwork was carried out. I also wish to briefly present the families I worked with and their cultural contexts, which will be described throughout the text.

The Fieldwork

During May- July 2019, in December of that same year and the first two weeks of January 2020, and April 2020, I spent a long time speaking, sharing, and accompanying in various activities the members of three Colombian families. Despite their considerable differences, these families have a commonality. Among the family members, at least one adult has been designated as an autistic person, medically or socially. This thesis analyzes both these autistic adults and their families' experiences in different and diverse contexts across Colombia.

Throughout this writing, I highlight the diverse regions and home spaces of several different Colombian families and autistic adults. I also describe how these families self-identify. Colombia is a country of high ethnic diversity within the geographical regions that comprise it. Such forms of diversity can be seen in terms of language (67 indigenous languages) (Instituto Caro y Cuervo 2020), historical background (land tenure, waves of colonization, mestizaje, historical periods of the armed conflict in Colombia), ecological relationships (use of resources), among many other categories that create diverse identities. The experiences pointed out in this thesis are far from being the only way to understand Colombian realities.

I worked with three different families. I worked with a family with a strong Campesino identity, dependent on an agricultural economy for sustenance and who live in the Cundiboyacense plateau in the central area of Colombia. I also worked with a family who recognize themselves as indigenous, belonging to the Pijao People, originating from Natagaima, a town in the south center of Colombia, and who have lived in Bogotá, the capital of the country for at least four years. The

third family with whom I shared time is my family that, although it has a Campesino origin, define themselves as an urban family. They have a strong bond linked to life in the city, its educational offerings, the medical services it provides, and the forms of employment that can be acquired in a large city.

This ethnographic project aims to understand how autistic adults and their families navigate through their lived experiences, and especially explore how lived experiences relate to the different cultural and social conceptions of autism in Colombia. As I mentioned, families in this study belong to diverse ethnic groups and regions. This research compares family social participation, social inclusion and exclusion, and quality of life across diverse identities and geographies. The ethnographic analysis also investigated relationships within the family, with communities and governmental and private institutions that assign programs aimed at these families. I will return to a discussion of programs, services, and caregiving at the end of this thesis.

The autism literature is growing cross-culturally. This research seeks to bring additional ethnographic insights to the global dialogue. At the same time, it aims to contribute to debates on disability in Colombia, where the construction of a welfare and care system for vulnerable peoples is in progress. All of this is taking place amid a post-war period (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2018). By conducting an ethnography with families' experiences from different groups and regions, it is possible to learn more about how to improve access, reduce barriers, strengthen social networks, and create a more inclusive world.

For this ethnographic study on the cultural and social conception of autism, official documents that show the medical criteria used by psychologists or psychiatrists to diagnose autism were not considered, as they are not the most important or appropriate sources of information. Instead, I focused on family recognition or self-recognition by autistic adults. All interviewed participants are people over 18 years of age; the age at which a person is considered an adult in Colombia. All participants in this study, including disabled people, gave informed consent, which was fully explained. All participants in this study expressed willingness to participate in this study orally or in writing. All the families participating were Spanish speakers (including those from indigenous

communities living in the Bogotá area and Campesino families living in Cucunubá, a city in rural Cundinamarca).

The result of the ethnographic work with these three families is narrated in the following three chapters of this thesis. For this, I decided not to present the story of each family in each chapter. On the contrary, I have decided to link the experiences, seeking to create a dialogue throughout the narrative, taking advantage of common features and divergences in the stories.

Ethnographic interviews, observation, and accompaniment in various activities focused on understanding families' routines and especially of autistic people. This text, then, is narrated following that logic of routines and with everyday and sensory ethnography in mind. After the theoretical chapter, the reader will find a chapter entitled *Morning*, where disabled adults and their families are presented, and I describe what three adults do during the first hours of the day. Here, not only are routines presented, but their definitions of autism are explored, both for the autistic adults and for their families. Also, the chapter describes some strategies, beginning in childhood, around the upbringing of an autistic person. In particular, the morning is a moment of family interaction for each of these people. Here, the voices of the autistic adults and their relatives intersect to describe their home environments.

The third chapter is titled *Afternoon*. In this chapter, I explore activities outside the home, typical of the autistic adults and their family's socio-cultural context—in addition to narrating what autistic adults do in the afternoon. At this time of the day, relationships are discussed with neighbors, caregivers, and educators—people outside the family. This chapter intersects stories that reveal personal skills and strategies created by autistic adults to adapt to various situations outside of their home environments. It also delves into their concepts of social life, emotional ties, and friendship. Other people's perceptions of disability due to being neighbors of the family or having a link to care or education are explored.

Chapter four is titled *Night*. In this chapter the moment of the return to the home is narrated in addition to nocturnal activities, forms of leisure, and activities of rest. The chapter also describes

the expectations, desires, and purposes of both autistic adults and their families and other people with whom they have a close bond.

Throughout these chapters, different moments of the everyday are captured through describing routines and through describing activities that are part of the present of autistic adults and their families. The moments of the day are also meant to serve as a metaphor in which anecdotes of the present and the past intersect. This metaphor represents an awakening and understanding of disability in these familial and broader environments. It also represents the social relationships that are woven and point to future dreams, strategies, and some things that should change or continue to ensure well-being in the life of autistic adults and their families.

PART ONE
CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 1. A THEORETICAL GUIDELINE

1.1 Disability concept

As I mentioned previously, this thesis understands disability as a social category. This implies a particular understanding that disability is not a condition inside of the body and the mind but a social construction. Society determines the potential and possibilities of people and their abilities, the access to places, the access to services such as education, health, job, social participation, and others. In that extent, I follow the definition of disability proposed by Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp:

[Disability is] a profoundly relational category, always already created as a distinction from cultural ideas of normality, shaped by social conditions that exclude full participation in society of those considered atypical. [...] Disability is thus recognized as the result of negative interactions between a person with an impairment and his or her social environment (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, 1)

However, the meanings of disability have changed a lot over the time, within different academic fields and outside of academia. For example, disability, in terms of a medical perspective, is typically defined as a chronic impairment that significantly impacts a given individual's daily life. Yet disability is a much more complex category with culturally contingent political and social meanings. (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, Hartblay 2020).

The first difficulty in defining disability lies in the wide range of experiences that people can have in terms of sensory abilities, mobility, development, and transformations of the body, cognitive skills, and how society perceives an individual—or group's physical and/or mental characteristics. Another difficulty arises in the way in which disability has historically been associated with incapacity. Defining disability in terms of what a person can do or not is a fundamental limitation of such definitions and furthermore highlights the ambiguity and lack of clarity of the concept. There are numerous scenarios in which the absence of ability or skill to perform an action is not considered a disability, nor is there a negative stigma (Kasnitz and Shuttleworth 2001, Shuttleworth 2001).

Ginsburg and Rapp's (2013) definition is a result of the development of Disability Studies and Critical Disability Studies during the past thirty years. Over that time, disability, as a category of

cultural, social, and political analysis, established an important place in anthropology, especially socio-cultural anthropology and medical anthropology (Littlewood 2006, Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, Hartblay 2020, Kasnitz and Shuttleworth 2001, Reid-Cunningham 2009, Shuttleworth 2001). Despite this, authors such as Ginsburg and Rapp show how disability was not yet considered a primary category of human diversity within anthropology's introductory courses. This is in contrast to other diversity analysis categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, among others. Disability was an absent phenomenon for many decades of the development of anthropology (Reid-Cunningham 2009). Its long absence was manifested in an attitude, which, as Ginsburg and Rapp (2013) detail, still prevails in academic and pedagogical fields, as well as in the teaching of anthropological theory in the new generations.

What is more, the anthropologists Patrick McKearney and Tyler Zoanni (2018) point out that the study of disability from an anthropological perspective has been neglected even today, in general terms, because such an in-depth understanding problematizes some of the principles already established axiomatically within the discipline. These authors specify how European and American anthropology, since its inception adopted ideas formulated by Adolf Bastian and popularized by Frans Boas, called the "Psychic Unity of Mankind," where people, regardless of their origin, share a set of fundamental ideas and behaviors. According to McKearney and Zoanni (2018), these behaviors become unique to the extent that a person socializes and interacts with a group. All of this allows forming a collective knowledge that adjusts to a specific temporality and locality in which the culture develops. Adolf Bastian's ideas were echoed by Franz Boas and those who followed his line of thought that dismisses the idea of race as determining a cognitive and biological hierarchy. This argument Boas raises that, in essence, all humans share a basic set of physical and cognitive abilities. This basic set and social interaction allow people to think and manifest in culturally different ways (McKearney and Zoanni 2018).

Despite the development of anthropological theory, even today, it remains a fundamental challenge for anthropologists to more fully consider the bodily and mental diversity of the people. For example, McKearney and Zoanni (2018) emphasize how anthropology has built and followed classical paradigms that have become widespread over time. To name these absences becomes a fertile opportunity to think and rethink discussions that were considered overcome around

anthropology and human diversity in terms of physical and intellectual abilities. Therefore, debates that promote the diversity of bodies and minds are necessary and also reflect on cultural, social, and political models that discriminate against people or groups of people based on socially and culturally constructed beliefs (Hartblay 2020, McKearney and Zoanni 2018). This challenge is not only aimed at enriching anthropological visions of disability, anthropology in general, but it is also a contribution to academia and social activism that seek to change realities in those places where disability has been established as a category of oppression and social marginalization.

One of the significant influences that anthropology had some decades ago was establishing an approach to disability that was integrated with activist work. This approach was developed in the United States and the United Kingdom between 1960 and 1980. This approach problematizes the established historical definitions of disability and its association with disease (Wasserman et al. 2016). This approach to disability groups scholars and allies together; seeks to give voice and agency to people historically marginalized from social and community life and to make their political agency visible due to a particular physical or mental condition (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013, Hall 2019). This approach also suggests that the limitations do not reside in each person's biological characteristics but that these are consequences of social precepts, strict norms, and physical environments that do not accept differences. One of the fundamental features of the social model is the search for inclusion, equal rights, and the development of a life independent of disabled people in a society that understands and adjusts to diversity (Schalk 2017). This struggle is exemplified in several historical moments in the United States, from joining the fight for civil rights in the 1970s, to the promulgation of the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA, 1990) to the growing academic interest in the different perspectives of study and activism present these days.

Thus, the social model of disability starts from the rejection of the perspective of a medical model. The latter understands disability as a physical and mental condition of individuals and considers that the limitations faced by persons with disabilities are the main or only result of their physical conditions. An adequate social response to disability under this model is confinement or try to modify people's conditions to make them "fit" for a life in society. On the contrary, the social model emphasizes that the transformation must take place in society itself.

However, the social disability model is not singular; several plural perspectives underlie it, such as the Minority Group Model, which sees people with biological and mental diversities as a minority that has been subject to stigmatization and exclusion; or the Human Variation Model, in which many of the challenges faced by disabled people do not result from a deliberate and explicit exclusion but from a mismatch between their characteristics and the physical and social environment that surrounds (Wasserman et al. 2016). These two variations of the Social Model are not incompatible and in many contexts are interconnected.

In the Minority Group Model, civil rights and anti-discrimination laws may be appropriate responses to Disability (Hahn, 1997; Oliver, 1990). In the Human Variation model, an adequate response to disability is defined from non-discrimination in concrete material conditions, such as the design of physical structures to access buildings or the comprehensive implementation of inclusive forms of communication for blind or deaf people, among other situations. This model emphasizes that such changes not only benefit disabled people but society, under perspective such as Universal Design (Ginsburg and Rapp 2013).

The social model of disability has resulted, in part, in the development of Critical Studies of Disability. If late-twentieth-century disability studies were associated with establishing the factors that led to the structural, economic, and cultural exclusion of people with sensory, physical, and cognitive impairments, then disability studies in the current century might be seen as a time of developing nuanced theoretical responses to these factors. Scholars in disability studies sought to break boundaries between disciplines, deconstruct professional/lay distinctions, and decolonize traditional medicalized views of disability with socio-cultural conceptions of disablism (Stavrou 2020). Thomas (2015, 22), for example, defines “disablism from social oppression as involving the colonial imposition of activity restrictions on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being”. This definition sits alongside other forms of oppression, including hetero/sexism and racism. Indeed, as explained below, the intersectional character of disability is one of several reasons why we might conceptualize the current state of the field as critical disability studies.

Under the umbrella of Critical Studies of Disability, Hartblay (2020) outlines a distinction between the forms of anthropology that address disability and discusses two categorical labels namely: Anthropology of Disability and Disability Anthropology. For her, Anthropology of Disability emerges as a subdiscipline of medical anthropology, cares about the social nature of disability, but does not establish a direct and explicit connection with the debates of the multiple disciplines that establish conversation under the theoretical umbrella represented by Critical Disability Studies. Disability anthropology, on the other hand, does seek to be an explicit part of that discussion, giving direct voice to disabled people and inserting discussions of identity, humanity, oppression, and exclusion in various forms of disability, contemplating the inclusion and demand for rights, in search of a change in the economic and governmental system. Disability anthropology explicitly recognizes its connection with postulates of Critical Studies of Disability (Hartblay 2020).

Hartblay (2020), in her call to consolidate a Disability Anthropology, further delves into the potential of ethnographic work with people, disabled peoples' experiences, and the knowledge that arises there. Ethnographic work with disabled people requires establishing bonds of trust that allow a lasting relationship over time. If such a relationship is formed, the anthropologist may be allowed to participate in and observe aspects of the personal life of disabled people. This relationship enables ethnographers to detail how various people interact with the environment surrounding them and how they intertwine social relationships with the people they live with or interact with occasionally.

Through participant observation, the anthropologist can synthesize creative knowledge forms that allow people to adapt the world around their personal needs. Ethnography also seeks to delve into how, through daily actions, disabled people reconsider the categories of pity, absence of full personality, or illness. This type of knowledge that arises in these contexts, Hartblay (2020) calls "disability expertise."

The category of disability expertise was formed across synergies within Critical Disability Studies, disability feminism, and science and technology approaches and work. For example, Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Frisch (2019), among others, show how disabled people are potential expert designers for the transformation of material and communicative environments, which not only

benefit disabled people but also offer infrastructure and tools useful to improve the quality of life of society in general. Hamraie and Fritsch specifically indicate how this knowledge is not well recognized to highlight academic "experts" in disability design.

Importantly, Hartblay invites us to think about *disability expertise* beyond the design context, inquiring about the different forms of knowledge and expertise of disabled people. Hartblay points out that the potential to deepen these forms of expertise lies in allowing a balanced relationship between the anthropologist, disabled or not, and the people involved in a research project. The disability experience seeks to break with the hierarchical research schemes that constantly designate the academy as an expert and exoticize the communities or people involved in a study. Hartblay advocates research that gives explicit importance to disabled people, their testimonies, their actions, and social relationships in everyday life.

This thesis subscribes to this call for a Disability Anthropology and describes different forms of disability expertise in the life experiences and the interdependence relationships between families and autistic adults- and others.

1.2 Anthropology and knowledge

Anthropology, says James Peacock (1990), can serve as a tool; that is, a place of analysis to break with the naturalized character of cultural and social values. Peacock argues that people, in their daily lives, do not stop to analyze the origin or meaning of their behaviors or the nature of the relationships they build with others. People act and relate following cultural patterns unconsciously and intuitively. Peacock argues that analyzing naturalization, the deep meaning of those practices, and how they circulate socially is precisely anthropologists' work.

Understanding these how certain processes are naturalized allows us to establish critical positions regarding historical realities that have generated oppression and exclusion and rejection of certain peoples. It will enable us to understand the categories that are usually naturalized or normalized under certain conditions.

This thesis focuses on the premise that knowledge is not intrinsically evident in individuals. This is to say knowledge is a process of contrast, debate, and interaction with the surrounding material and social environment. Knowledge is not evident if there is not situation where it is discussed or applied to solve needs. This affirmation arises from critical and debate perspectives. Thus, this thesis shows how, although I have a valuable family experience related to disability, it radically changes amid dialogue and observation of other realities. These changes impact current experiences and the strategies that, as a family or as individuals, we can assume to overcome discriminatory contexts.

From disability studies in Latin America, the Mexican political scientist Patricia Brogna (2009) criticizes both medical and social discourses on disability, which she considers over-academic in character. Brogna focuses on highlighting eugenic and discriminatory approaches, but also points out with great concern how areas of the human sciences such as history, sociology, and anthropology, from a distant perspective, on numerous occasions do not link their intellectual analyses with actual realities and activist movements promoting social justice for disabled people in Latin America.

Brogna emphasizes the vital link and redirection between what is considered academic and the realities of disabled people and their social networks. Brogna highlights that the search for a relationship that creates dialogue between experiences, knowledge of various kinds, academic and non-academic, produces new theories and expertise about what disability is. The theories produced in this dialogue and knowledge should not only be an academic exercise. Still, the theories should be a stage for transforming the realities of people marginalized and oppressed by negative cultural labeling associated with their physical or cognitive characteristics.

This approach is interesting in the field of disability. It is linked to what other anthropologists such as Jonathan Maldonado, from the studies of Crip Anthropology and Interdependence (2016), Gerardo Ardila, from environmental processes (2005) or Luis Alberto Suarez, on his investigations on the Andean world and *El Campesinado* (2017), proclaim. They affirm that knowledge on multiple occasions is not isolated and solitary, but is created through relationships, contrasts, and comparisons. Furthermore, knowledge comes from critical positions regarding what is assumed as naturalized or normalized. This perspective about knowledge and the importance to contrast

applies to this thesis because, it is possible to say that disabled people and those around them possess specific knowledge as individuals or as nuclei of people. This knowledge will only be evident through analysis, questioning, trying to understand their context, how they apply it and how is different or similar with other peoples' realities. The ethnographic information showed in this thesis seek to delve into everyday knowledge as well as how families must overcome possible challenges - and creates a reference for other families in Colombia were the category "autism" needs to be more public.

1.3 Ethnography

I approach ethnography by following anthropologists' words, such as Luis Alberto Suárez, who, from Andean studies, points to ethnography as an "epistemological option." According to Suarez (2015), ethnography leads to worlds of knowledge, analysis, theory, and practice. Ethnographic knowledge is so valuable that it has the character and meaning to be put in dialogue with the knowledge classified as academic, such as a world theory (Suarez, 2015). Suarez's approach is in tune with the potentialities of the ethnography proposed by Hartblay (2020) from the critical studies of disability.

As noted above, Hartblay argues for a Disability Anthropology and the recognition of disability expertise. She points out that the knowledge and experiences of disabled people create expertise, a particular kind of knowledge, that disabled people develop and embody, as transforming agents of environments related to social norms, bodily conceptions, and material environments. Hartblay (2020) points out that the intimate relationship between disabled people and ethnographers can underscore the knowledge that arises from disability and the interaction with the material and social world that surrounds them. Hartblay (2020) also proposes that, under the position of inquiring into expertise, it is possible to go beyond experiences of suffering, of exclusion without denying its existence. In other words, it is possible to focus on experiences and knowledge to create, transform, and propose new knowledge.

1.4 Everyday Life

Everyday life as a concept of analysis in the social sciences has a polysemic and interdisciplinary character. The concept has a great degree of variability. Everyday life was initially a point of interest of sociology and history, and in a much more recent way, of anthropology (Giannini 2013, Löfgre 2015, Zamora 2005). Everyday life appears as a concept with an independent path in each discipline, with several well-defined theoretical and methodological perspectives. The concept within each discipline (history, anthropology, and sociology) has been changing, and at the same time, it has created a space for conversation and convergence across the social sciences. Despite the variability of the definitions, it is possible to find common elements in the debate and the perspective in this thesis.

1.4.1 Common elements in the conceptualization of Everyday Life

The concept of everyday life emerges in the social sciences as opposition and criticism to traditional ways of understanding society and the history of communities (Zamora 2005). The main points in this perspective of history were the representative events of individual characters such as kings, war heroes, political leaders, or particular events such as armed conflicts, political treaties, or trade agreements.

On the other hand, an approach to everyday life sought to move beyond a sole focus on historical figures or particular events to describe the intimate ways of life of communities and the effects that political decisions or historical events have on the lives of individuals, families, or peoples. Everyday life originated as a perspective of analysis between currents such as French historiography in Social History and the History of mentalities proposed by the founders of the so-called School of the Annals, among them, the historian Fernand Braudel who had an interest in understanding long-term phenomena; that is, he focused on the analysis of historical phenomena experienced by several generations in a specific geographic space. The definition of everyday life, from its origins, was also characterized by demarcating the everyday life from the non-everyday (Fishman 2013, Zamora 2005).

1.4.2 Different currents of thought and different ways to understand Everyday Life

In the United States, the American sociological school in Chicago, influenced by French historiography, focused on studying human groups considered marginalized from social studies, not only in a historical sense in the past, but also absent in modern industrial societies of the early and mid-20th century (popular classes not only in rural areas but in urban settings) (Zamora 2005).

In France, Henri Lefebvre (1984), a sociologist, was concerned with observing how everyday life and even the most banal moments of daily life were scenes of capitalist consumption and spaces of domination of large social structures. Critically, Lefebvre, saw the daily life and the popular classes as a social, temporal, geographical space of control, colonized by modern capitalism. Lefebvre also used a neo-Marxian analysis to create a tripartite construction of lived space (Giannini 2013). The French sociologist Michel de Certeau (1996), on the contrary, focused on understanding everyday life as space also in a broad sense, of creativity, resistance, consumption, and cultural creation (Zamora 2005).

Within anthropology, the use of the concept of everyday life was not used explicitly until the first decades of the 20th century. This was partly because anthropologists and their detailed ethnographic descriptions of cultural phenomena presupposed immersion in specific contexts, in non-western or marginalized populations, and an approach to phenomena experienced by a social group over long periods. Characteristics that in the other disciplines were considered fundamental for analyzing social phenomena from the perspective of everyday life. Sara Pink (2009) argues that in ethnographers' work, everyday life often tends to refer to an assumed or unquestioned category. For many contemporary anthropologists and sociologists, everyday life is a fact; it is not a neglected domain of practice that needs to be highlighted or a category that needs to be defined. Rather, it is part of the approach seek to understand other people's lives and developing analyses concerning alternative theoretical paradigms.

1.4.3 Cultural Anthropologists and Everyday Life

According to Zamora (2005), the influence of structuralism searched to define everyday life is historically dichotomy, that is to say in opposites, between every day and non-every day. This

sharp division defined the understanding of various positions. Here I explore the relationship between cultural anthropology and everyday life because current anthropological approaches regarding theoretical understandings of everyday life can complicate and challenge normative approaches to notions of routine in disability studies.

From interpretive sociology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology, the *everyday* is defined through routine activities, and the non-daily is associated with extraordinary social activities that are not part of routines. From the sociologists influenced by Marxist currents, everyday life happens in the days of work (especially for the workers) and the lives of the popular masses. The non-daily under a Marxist trend is understood as the life of the powerful and privileged classes, who live without having to work or who hold powerful positions within governments of monarchical regimes. In the School of the Annals, in the field of History, everyday can be understood as the domain of the daily life experience or that which corresponds to private life. The non-everyday in History, on the contrary, is established in the spheres of public life and in historical events of great social impact. All this analysis was often focused on labor and class identities, but, I am extending these ideas to be applied to disability studies in this thesis.

In phenomenology and currents associated with the philosophy and analysis of thought following the positions of Martin Heidegger (Zamora 2005), the everyday is understood as that which is in the spheres of spontaneous, authentic, and unreflective experiences and thoughts, also ideological thoughts. The non-everyday, on the contrary, is represented by the sphere of artificial, reflective thoughts, in particular philosophical experiences, and scientific thought.

1.4.4 Limits of a dichotomic vision of Everyday Life

Historical approaches to everyday life created categories that ethnographically this work seeks to challenge. The positions presented above focus on divisions around activities (work vs. rest), social groups (popular classes vs. elites), the level of communication (public vs. private), or thought (thoughtless vs. thoughtful ideas). In contemporary times, these dichotomous divisions around the definition of everyday life have been subverted (Giannini 2013). There is no reason to believe or affirm that elites or power groups do not have private lives, routines, and rest times that are not related to their institutional activities.

According to Zamora (2005), the difficulty of research traditions that limit everyday life to routine and thoughtless thinking is that they leave many explanatory gaps to understand the change and modifications in society's structures because precisely change restricts it to major historical events. Under this conception, daily life would only be a fertile field for repetition, but not for change and transformation, which makes it difficult to study long-lasting gradual and slow transformations.

1.4.5 A proposal for everyday life from complex thought

The previous section showed the difficulties in defining the everyday as opposed to something called the non-everyday. The Chilean philosopher Humberto Gianni (1998) proposes a definition not based on dichotomy, on opposites, but continuums and interrelations. Unlike previous theories on everyday life, Giannini's (1998) work constitutes a great effort to show that everyday life is extremely broad so that, from an analytical perspective, it can dispense with the notion of the non-everyday. Overcoming the division between the everyday and the non-everyday is a step towards complex thinking, which constructs its concepts without thinking about its opposite. In complex thinking, the multiple relationships that constitute any fact are emphasized, which allow us to understand aspects of reality that may seem contradictory to simple thinking. Giannini considers that Everyday life is in all the moments and spaces of our life in society: on the street, at work, at school, when we argue, or in affective relationships, in such a way that it becomes natural and invisible to consciousness. Delving into everyday life requires an intellectual and reflective effort. This is the way I am ethnographically approaching everyday life through this thesis.

It is possible to find at least three basic meanings in Giannini's definition of everyday life. First of all, everyday life as what happens every day (Giannini 2013). Giannini points out that any definition that is made about everyday life has to start from this obvious fact. In this, apparently, trivial definition, the complex interrelation between the ordinary (routine) and the extraordinary (transgression) that characterizes everyday life is presented: what happens refers to all the activities and characteristics of reality with which a person or group of people is found daily, and that in appearance is immutable (Zamora 2005). At the same time, everyday life has a surprising, extraordinary character with what we can find at any time or place: the disruptive. Giannini affirms

that routine and transgression interact in a complex way and lead to repetition patterns while generating possibilities of change and transformation.

Secondly, in daily life, there is a fluid articulation between the personal, individual, private and intimate, passing through social spaces of family life that are still private until reaching public spheres and interaction and incidence in other lives. Here Giannini points out that in everyday life, there is also reflection and taking advantage of the ideas of Michel de Certeau (De Certeau 1996); it is a space of cultural creation where decisions are constantly made around two questions: the first, about the meaning, Why do I do this action? And the second environment to the foundation, What is the purpose of this action? This question is addressed during the ethnographic work with autistic adults to understand the routine, sensations, and motivations during the day.

Giannini approaches Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodological proposal, understanding that routine activities are not thoughtless, nor do they exempt people's creative capacity; those are full of significance and full of decisions. Under his continuous proposal, Giannini (2013) points out that when a transgression appears, the subject will use previous or new knowledge to re-establish "normality". The "getting ahead" in everyday life presupposes creativity. People can act innovatively before variations of the previously known and experienced ways. It allows an individual to have enough courage to face new circumstances and even more change to transform their environment and include new actions in their normal routine.

Thirdly, daily life has an omnipresent temporal space character; that is, it is analyzable through subdivisions in geographic space and time. This characteristic requires that basic temporal coordinates (holiday time, rest times, work time) and topographic (home-street-work) be determined for its analysis, in which there are specific forms of behavior that influence in a peculiar and distinctive way. People's actions, beliefs, and attitudes but are part of a general whole. It is to understand daily life under the perception of local and global scale.

Zamora (2005) and Pink (2009), in tune with Gianinni, point out how understanding everyday life from a non-dichotomous position is important for the human sciences. Pink (2009) speaks of locating daily life between practices and places through a detailed, committed vision of the

ethnographic description where the position of the researcher tends to break hierarchies of power and knowledge between anthropologists and people in the communities in which research and fieldwork occur. Pink points to participant observation, the construction of life stories, visual ethnography, or delving into sensory experiences as useful tools to narrate not only important events within the life of communities but also to appreciate the flow between social events, family spaces, and personal conceptions. For Pink, everyday life is a continuum that is maintained and flows through different spaces, and ethnography under multiple tools is the perfect methodology to understand any phenomenon of everyday life.

Disability understood as a social phenomenon and category of diversity, which not only involves a person but has an impact on family and social life; as a category that is present in a broad continuum over time and impacts various spheres of private, social, family, work-life, etc.; and understanding autism as a condition that is not transitory or temporary, but is present throughout a person's life. It becomes a category that can be analyzed from the conceptual perspective of Everyday life, from complex thinking, from the positions of Giannini (2013), of Zamora (2005) following Pink (2009) and in affinity to what Hartblay (2020), proposes thinking from the perspective of Critical Studies of Disability and Disability Anthropology.

Ethnographic work and anthropological perspectives on disability in non-western societies are a potential contribution to the rejection of the Ableism concept (Reid-Cunningham 2009) and the recognition of human diversity the body, physical, and mental capacities. Furthermore, Hartblay (2020) points out that anthropology and the intimate relationship between anthropologists and disabled people can highlight the knowledge that emerges from the physical conditions of these people and their interactions with the world. Deepening this type of knowledge can allow us to investigate disability beyond experiences of suffering and responses of exclusion or pity on the part of society, without denying the existence of these aspects.

Critical Disability Studies also seek to give a greater role in academic discussions and activism to people with profound cognitive disabilities, who are often not verbal or do not conform to traditional communication paradigms. Too often such individuals have been considered less smart or sensitive. Such people have frequently been excluded when ideas like social independence and

competition within society are prioritized. As McKearney and Zoanni (2018) point out, they have also been too often excluded from disability studies. To overcome this exclusion, McKearney and Zoanni (2018) propose the use of contemporary anthropological ideas for theorizing. In particular, they focus on the use of the Ontological Giro, which departs from the idea of the same basic reality for all human groups, as well as basic biological conditions for all human beings, which vary through the practices and interpretations of the same world, making possible diverse cultures (multiculturality). The ontological turn indicates the possibility of multiple worlds and multiple ways of reasoning those worlds, which is called multinaturality. These worlds do not exist independently and in isolation but can interact, leaving aside the verbal emphasis of communication and exploring sensory and emotional characteristics.

Detailed autistic experiences, from the perspective of everyday life, narrated by autistic people themselves, in contrast to what was said by family members or anthropologists, shows the possibility of an ontological understanding of disability. When comparing narratives, it is possible to identify three different world descriptions. The ontology would indicate that they are not three visions of the same world but three well-defined realities that are accessed from the corporality and the mind.

The ontological vision allows breaking the paradigms around people with cognitive disabilities who have too often been considered incapable of feeling or not being communicative. We see this frequently in the medical model and beyond where people with dementia or autism are often judged in these negative and limiting ways. Ethnographic works based on sensory experience and the idea of diverse capacities and worlds have found that such judgments are visible and limited to certain medical contexts in which they are evaluated. (Driessen 2018 , Fjord 1996, Frank 2000, Garland-Thomson 2002, Howes 2014, McKearney and Zoanni 2018)

Combining an attentiveness to disability experience and engaging with the ontological turn, the ethnographic approach taken here integrates these notions with that of daily life. Furthermore, interweaving these approaches are examples of the ways in which anthropology could be articulated with the growing theoretical debate and the multiple categories proposed by Critical Disability Studies.

1.5 Sensory Anthropology

In this research I go beyond verbal narratives and include the experience of the body and feelings of autistic adults and their families in order to privilege diverse sensory experiences. In so doing, I follow current trends in sensory anthropology on the interlinkages between the sensory and the everyday.

McKearney and Zoanni (2018) seek to integrate an ontological proposal in the study of disability. They are especially interested in generating theoretical horizons and tools that deepen understanding of cognitive impairment in people, such as little or no verbal or sign expression. McKearney and Zoanni suggest that the anthropology of disability needs to be nourished by tools that do not emphasize oral language but contemplate other communicative forms such as the senses and emotions. These sensations are possible after a long and deep relationship between anthropologists and people with cognitive disabilities.

Guerrero Muñoz (2011), in an approach similar to McKearney and Zoanni, points out the possibility of investigating the close relationship between a disabled person and their circle of support, which may often include family, and caregivers. In this sense, Guerrero Muñoz emphasizes the importance of work like David Goode's ethnographies, where a clear differentiation between the testimonies of doctors and nurses or physical therapists about persons with deep cerebral palsies was evident. These differences originated in the type of relationship and the closeness among others with the disabled person. Among the doctors, who had less contact, an impersonal version focused on the disease and negative ideas about the disabled person prevailed. On the other hand, nurses and physical therapists' testimonies about the same person included personality traits, recognition of reactions to different stimuli, and a human vision that arose from their constant physical contact and shared time.

Similar and much more contemporary experiences are pointed out by anthropologist Patrick McKearney (2018) when conducting an ethnography in a support center for adults with cognitive disabilities. There, McKearney learns that one of the main principles of the Catholic religious organization that manages the support center is to create bonds of solidarity between caregivers and disabled people. The bonds of solidarity lie in the awareness of the caregivers' vulnerabilities and the learning that can be done by establishing a close relationship of mutual support with people with cognitive disabilities linked to the center.

Another example is the work of Annelieke Driessen (2018), who explores how in a care center for older adults with dementia, caregivers focused on generating pleasant experiences such as music, hot baths, and massage to stimulate pleasant memories in older adults. Driessen, analyzes how in these care practices self-subjectivity arises for the older adults and analyzed by caregivers, refuting the idea of “loss of personality”, commonly associated with dementia.

An answer from anthropology can address the need for fieldwork that investigates forms of knowledge and experiences beyond verbal language can be provided by sensory anthropology and its proposal for participant sensing, as opposed to observation.

Participant sensing is one way to do so. Sara Pink (2009) defines participant sensing as a tool that serves not only to show the diversity of the sensory models of cultures but to delve into the sensory perception itself and the expressions of knowledge and interaction that reside in it. The participant sensing approach allows the analysis of multisensory experiences of both the study participants and the anthropologists who perform ethnographic work (Howes 2014). For Pink, sensory ethnography is a critical method in that it delves into fields of interest that move further away from Western societies' ethnocentric visions. Pink shows that this tool is not exclusively applicable to sensory research, which tries to combine the visual and auditory dimensions with other sensory experiences. The utility of this approach is that it can go beyond what can be seen and get to perceive deep forms of knowledge and experiences that are part of a world not adequately spoken of and vaguely explored.

PART TWO
ENTHNOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 2. MORNING

2.1 Who is Rubén Camilo?

Rubén Camilo is recognized in the neighborhood and by his family as a strong, hard-working, and helpful man. He regularly spends hours exercising during the day. He sometimes jogs, sometimes rides his bike around the neighborhood, and sometimes stays home using a weight set. During those hours of exercise, Rubén Camilo usually wears shorts or T-shirts that reveal his strong arms and muscular legs. There have been countless occasions in which neighbors and people from the neighborhood have emphasized the strength that Rubén Camilo's body shows.

The body strength perceived and commented on by people, coincides with Rubén Camilo's self-concept. When I asked him to describe himself, he mentioned between smiles that he is the tallest of his siblings and the strongest in the home. On that occasion and while he spoke, he touched his head and stroked his hair in satisfaction. When Rubén Camilo greets, he usually does so with a firm handshake to the men and a "bear hug" to the women he frequently shares and establishes a trust bond. Above all, women tend to recommend that he hug more lightly, and although the suggestion is momentarily noticed, he laughs, enjoying every time someone refers to his strength. He told me how good it feels when someone recognizes his physical force. He said it and he smiled meanwhile in various conversations.

Rubén Camilo is not a shy person. On the contrary, he is quite friendly and enjoys greeting people who come to the family home for the first time by introducing himself. With a broad smile and a strong voice, he usually extends his hand and says, "Nice to meet you! I'm Camilo." If Rubén Camilo is not in a family environment, if he is outside the house and surrounded by people other than his family or people from the neighborhood, he usually presents himself as Rubén. A mischievous smile is drawn on his face on some occasions when I decided to accompany him to his activities outside the home. This happened just when he saw my confused look when teachers, leaders of workshops, and even classmates in those activities called him Rubén. A name that, for me, like his sister, is not so often used.

When I arrived at these activities, I usually introduced myself as Camilo's sister and companion, but no one seemed to recognize who I was referring to. I quickly had to adapt to the idea that he

had assumed to acknowledge himself and present himself differently at home. He started and maintained a duality from his school days in childhood: "Camilo" always at home and "Rubén" always at school. Now in his recreational activities Rubén Camilo navigates among the people and in the spaces where he is called Rubén or Camilo throughout the day and throughout his weekly routine.

When I told Rubén Camilo about my intention to write this thesis, I asked him which name was more comfortable. After a while of indecision, he ended up telling me that both names were his favorites. When I did a previous reading of some sections with him, he simply indicated that he would like to appear in the thesis with his first name and his middle name.

Rubén Camilo is a 33-year-old young adult. He lives in a middle-class urban family in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. His family origins are campesino, but he has lived all his life in the city. Although he treasures his drawings that remind him of the landscapes and means of transport, he sees that when as a family we travel to the countryside, his house, his home, his life, and his customs are intertwined with life in the city. A few months ago, while we were traveling in Bogotá's public transport, I asked him if he would like to live in the countryside. He replied that no, that he would only like to travel once in a while, go for a walk, "echar un trote" (a colloquial expression to jogging) for a few hours on the trails near the town where our grandparents were from. In that conversation, he stated that he prefers life in the city. He also stressed that he has a lot to do in Bogotá, while in the countryside, he would have nothing to do. In Bogotá, he knows how to live, in the country, he would not know what to do.

Rubén Camilo is the third son of a family made up of a mother, father, and four siblings. All his life, he has lived in the same sector of the city: a neighborhood in the southeastern suburbs of the city called "Península." There, our father, a builder, just like many people in the sector, constructed for 15 years, step by step, year after year, a large three-story house. The first floor has space for a family-owned store, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen. The second floor is for bedrooms and bathrooms. Finally, there are study rooms on the third floor, a space for watching television, a terrace for flowers, and a small area for cultivating aromatic herbs and fruits. Although the entire family grew up in this place, today, Rubén Camilo and our parents are the ones who permanently occupy the house.

Rubén Camilo's childhood, like the rest of the brothers, passed with tools, materials, and some noise due to the gradual construction of the house. There I, the youngest daughter of the family, learned to walk and say my first words and complete sentences, just at the moment when Rubén Camilo was four years old, and he barely said a few words and took a few steps. This situation alarmed my parents, who, concerned about his physical and motor development, decided to take him to various medical care sites.

Initially, no diagnosis reported a physical illness, or there did not appear to be a condition that compromised his cognitive development. However, our mother's insistence on understanding why Rubén Camilo spoke little was why he was uncomfortable socializing with other children, especially if they were not his siblings. Our parents wanted to know why there was a constant cry if my mother was absent and why Rubén Camilo remained silent even though he seemed to understand when people were addressing him. At the end of that exhaustive search, our parents found a psychiatric diagnosis of mild autism.

In 1990 our parents, and our family in general, heard that word for the first time. They had no previous reference of it, and even less did they know what it was about. Although our mother received a brief explanation about the term and shared it with our father, the truth is that there was no clarity on the meaning of this word for a long time in the family. Furthermore, to describe Rubén Camilo, we were always told about different abilities and tastes. We always assumed they were related to his personality or to the own talents that each brother possessed.

On one of the days when I spoke with Rubén Camilo, I asked him what autism meant, if he had heard that word before. When he answered that he had listened to it, I asked him what feeling it brought him. Rubén Camilo told me that he started hearing that word when he was a child. Maybe he heard it a few times, but when he was between 15 and 16 years old and began to move from one school to another, and even went a few months without studying, the frequency with which he heard this word was much higher.

He understood that this word was related to the fact that, despite having good grades, they did not allow him to continue studying, or that our mother was recommended to get an educational place for "special children and young people." He told me that in those years, he didn't like to hear that word. While he said this to me, he clasped his hands, looked at me, and when he noticed that I was

looking at him, he quickly lowered his gaze with a nervous smile. Observing the ground, he told me that he did not like to remember the times and constant changes of schools.

He told me that when they found the last school he studied at, he felt calmer. He entered this school when he was already 20 years old. This place was a school dedicated mainly to young people with cognitive disabilities, and there he found more young people like him. After mentioning this, I asked him in what way were these young people similar to him. Rubén Camilo stressed that they were all around the same age in the first place, and many of them had gone through various schools and had also been withdrawn from those places. He told me that they had similar abilities like easily remembering numbers, playing sudokus and that he noticed they were sometimes confused with the same things that he couldn't quite understand. He was talking about the instructions given by the teachers or with texts that made they were made to read. Some, like him, enjoyed drawing very much.

In those years, a school bus came to pick him up, and one of the things that most caught his attention was a huge bus for more than 50 people. He liked that route, and on numerous occasions, he drew pictures of the bus in various locations, almost as if capturing scenes where he was passing by. He remembers that the word autism was mentioned to him again in the new school. The directors also offered talks and explanations about cognitive disability and the diverse talents a person could have.

Rubén Camilo told me about his first schools and said that he really liked to study, learn history and mathematics, but the school environment seemed difficult. For him, some classmates and teachers were loud and ill-tempered. Instead, in this new space, people seemed friendlier. One of his favorite features in this new space was the opportunity to have instructions explained not just once but multiple times. He told me that at this time, he stopped disliking the word "Autism." He even began to feel comfortable meeting young people with talents and tastes similar to what he had.

Rubén Camilo defined autism as a set of abilities that some people may have, such as a good memory. Rubén Camilo can accurately remember dates when certain events occurred: such as family events such as weddings, or anniversaries of deceased relatives, high school and university graduations, accidents, dates of movie premieres, concerts, or trips.

He also has a remarkable ability to remember people's faces and their names. These include such faces of the neighbors or new people he meets or the people on television and radio programs that he likes to listen to. Rubén Camilo also defines autism as a strong taste "for things of yesteryear" and "things of memory" (things of the past). To exemplify this for me, he told me that he and his classmates liked to watch a very famous Mexican comedy program in Latin America called "El Chavo del Ocho" and the comedy show in which the same actors participated, entitled "Chespirito." These programs were created in 1970, 16 years before Rubén Camilo was born. Although they were broadcast for several decades, those are considered old television programs by the general public and even by himself today. Rubén Camilo points out that this taste for the old, even for the television program itself, has been something that he has recognized in other autistic people that he has known during his life.

Autism for him is also related to emotions. Although he considers himself a cheerful person, he admits that he is sometimes ill-tempered or temperamental, especially when he feels that people do not understand what he is trying to say, or when in conversation or on television, people use many words that he does not know. He also told me that he gets very stressed at times when other people give him many instructions at the same time, for example, when he is working in the family store, and they ask him to do accounts, and at the same time, they ask him to organize goods or clean a shelf. He hates that.

He also points out that he gets upset when routines or the order of certain activities that he does frequently change. An example of this is when he decides to cook, and suddenly my mother or someone in the family intervenes in the recipes to add a little more salt than the recipe indicates or modify the weights of the ingredients. Also, it annoys him a lot when somebody promised something, and the people around him do not keep it. Like when his brothers pledge to go exercise with him but end up postponing it for another day or a different time than the agreed one.

Rubén Camilo told me that he does not know exactly what it is that bothers or makes other autistic people that he knows, but if he does, he perceives that they are people who, when they are happy, laugh out loud, wave their arms and when they are upset, they demonstrate these emotions with ease. He told me that we, referring to his brothers, act differently. In his words "It is as if they feel less, less cheerful or temperamental. As if they think that life is straightforward and it is not." In

general, when Rubén Camilo is very upset, he usually repeats through different sentences how the perception of the complexity of life is different in him and in us (again referring to his family). He usually says:

"Everything is easy for you."

"Of course I change because for you to change is not difficult, and you understand everything well."

"It's not my fault that life is difficult for me."

"Those words that make life difficult for one."

"I don't know why you don't understand that this is not easy for me, although it is for you."

When asking our brothers and my parents about Rubén Camilo's personality, they point out that when he is happy, more than in words, he usually expresses it with his smile. He constantly smiles and seeks to hug another person. Usually, our mother with whom he shares a very close bond. Sometimes some words stay in his mind, and he repeats them over and over again aloud as he walks through the house, strokes his hair, or smiles, looking up, tilting his head in sign of what he is thinking.

Rubén Camilo is usually happy when he listens to the music that he likes. He sometimes repeats over and over words associated with Mexican music lyrics, internationally known as *Mariachi*, but in Colombia called *Ranchera*. Rubén Camilo also sings *Vallenatos* or *Salsa*, prevalent rhythms in Colombia.

Rubén enjoys working in the family store, especially when interacting with neighbors or customers who visit the place. He usually gives these people some nicknames to socialize and cause laughter. For example, the man who occasionally passes by peddling vegetables and whose name is William, Rubén Camilo, often calls him *William Shakespeare*, just like the English writer and playwright. To another neighbor named Roberto, he calls him *Robert de Niro*, the actor, or *Roberto Carlo*, the Brazilian soccer player. A young man named Estiben is often called *Steven Spielberg*, like the film director. This is how he also calls the people named Rafael; he calls them *Rafael Escalona*, a famous Vallenato composer. For the neighbors named José, he recalls *José Alfredo*, such as a

Mexican singer from the 50s and very popular in Colombia. For the women named María, he calls them *Marimar*, as the central character from a popular Mexican telenovela from the 90s.

Rubén Camilo usually repeats their nicknames sporadically for several minutes or simply recounts a couple of times with different short phrases. He said: "Don William Shakespeare visited us today," "William Shakespeare came to buy some soft drinks and sold us vegetables," "William Shakespeare is on our street again. "Always with joy and clapping his hands in front of his chest as a sign of satisfaction.

Rubén Camilo does not usually refer to his siblings by nicknames, but he has a similar gesture of joy when one or more of us are visiting home. He is generally very affectionate with his sisters-in-law and repeats several times throughout the day, almost as if thinking aloud our names or phrases alluding to us. He said: "Andresito visited us" (familiar diminutive for one of our older brothers) or "Jorge is at home." Rubén Camilo is the main assistant in the family store, and this has made him have a close relationship with the community. People know him, and he knows the neighbors very well. When he leaves the house and walks around the neighborhood, he enjoys greeting them, raising his hand, smiling, and asking, "¿Qué hubo vecino!" (What's up my neighbor), and people respond with equal joy to his effusive greetings. Rubén Camilo is a well-known person in the neighborhood where the family lives.

2.2 Rubén Camilo Morning

Rubén Camilo gets up every day a bit after 7:00 a.m. At that time, a nearby bakery usually calls to take the bread order for the store. Rubén Camilo wakes up a few minutes before, and he spends time in bed waiting for that call. As soon as the phone rings, he gets up to answer it and begins his day. Rubén Camilo clearly knows how much bread is in the store, the inventory that must be kept, and the quantities he must order daily to maintain that inventory. Just as in the morning he places the order for bread, he can place an order for any other item sold in the store.

Little by little, our mother has given more responsibility to Rubén Camilo in the store's administration. A few years ago, she patiently taught him: prices, how to serve people and then showed him how to organize the merchandise. Rubén Camilo seems to enjoy these activities and

the commitments made. A good part of his daily routine is to fulfill the tasks related to the care, customer service, and administration of the store.

After answering the call for bread, Rubén Camilo returns to his room, makes the bed, takes a shower, gets dressed, and prepares a small breakfast for him. This little breakfast consists of coffee or oatmeal with milk or chocolate. Rubén Camilo, like most of the people who grew up in that house, has internalized that breakfast should be a hot and sweet drink most of the time. While doing these activities, Rubén Camilo awaits the arrival of the bread order that he made previously. The people who bring that order always ring the doorbell a little before 7:30 a.m. After receiving the order in a large white plastic bag, he prepares to create packages with six pieces of bread each and leave them in the store window under the banner "Fresh Bread." Rubén Camilo finishes his packing task a little before 8:00 a.m. and just then cleans the counters and displays cases quickly. He seeks to remove any dust or dirt that he may have left the day before. After finishing the cleaning, he opens the grocery doors and windows.

After the grocery opens, he turns on a small music recorder, right at a popular music station (string music and traditional campesino music) where the music alternates, with informative capsules of the latest national news every hour.

From 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., Rubén Camilo is the main person in charge of customer service and the orders that may arrive after the store opens. In those two hours, the traffic of clients is less than in other moments of the day. In these morning hours, most people come to buy food to prepare breakfast at their home. Rubén Camilo takes advantage of the time to organize the showcases and check the product inventory.

Between 8:30 am and 9:00 am in the morning, our parents wake up. At that time, our mother prepares a breakfast with more food and more nutritious that complements that small, sweet breakfast that Rubén Camilo ate a few hours before. This breakfast is usually salty, a beef broth, chicken broth, or a light and salty milk and egg soup called "changua." At approximately 10:00 am, Rubén Camilo has breakfast with our parents. Family breakfast is always a space for conversation. They talk about the day's chores, the activities outside the house, usually done in the afternoon. They also talk about the neighbors who have passed by the store in the morning. Even

my mother takes the opportunity to talk about the inventory and the things that Camilo or she must request to fill the grocery.

Sometimes some of the siblings go home for breakfast, and Rubén Camilo usually smiles without asking much but keeping full attention on what is being discussed. When the siblings visit the house, the conversations about the store take a back seat, and they talk about the most recent events in the life of the one who is visiting. Rubén Camilo always smiles in these visiting settings, but not all his smiles indicate complete joy. Sometimes, according to what he told me, and our mother has been able to interpret, his smile is nervous and even a little anxious.

One day, during one of the breakfasts in which I participated, the conversation turned to plan a trip, then to criticizing the high prices of tolls in the area around Bogotá. Suddenly I noticed him. While he was eating, he was listening attentively. Although his lips drew a smile, his eyes and forehead instead had a look of tension and bewilderment. For a moment, there was silence, and I took the opportunity to ask him if something was bothering him. He told me that he did not know what to say in that conversation with a slightly nervous voice.

That he did not know "Echar cuentos" (Tell stories) like the rest of the family, I asked him if there was something in particular that he didn't understand, if there was something that was bothering him in the conversation we were having. He refused to answer for some moments, but his face continues to mix between smile and concern. Besides, he added a tapping gesture on the table with the tips of his left hand's fingers as a sign of nervousness and impatience. So I decided to change the question. I asked him if something made him curious about what we were talking about or something that caught his attention. He told me that yes, he was happy because we were going to travel. He then asked me why we weren't happy about the trip? I asked him again why did he feel that we were not happy? And he answered me because of the tone of voice we had and because we were talking about problems. I explained to him then that we, like him, wanted to travel and we were excited about it, but that we were worried about the costs, the taxes to leave the city. He asked me about the word "Toll," and I explained it to him. Then he asked me if that was going to keep us from going on a trip. At that time, more people in the family, my parents and one of my brothers, entered the conversation with laughter, saying that no, we were complaining about money, but that would not affect our travel plans. Rubén Camilo's expression left behind the concern

features to become just a smile, after seeing everyone laughing and speaking in a calm tone and even more, confirming the trip.

At 11:30 am, after resting for a few minutes, he goes to a park near the house and jogs. Camilo uses to jog every morning, but he doesn't always do it in the same places. Sometimes he goes to the park "La Victoria", a park 15 minutes from the house, which requires good strength and stamina because, although it has a wide space for jogging, it is full of hills. On other occasions, he usually goes to a more distant park, near the center of the city called "Bosque de San Carlos," where he travels by bus and likes to jog for more than an hour because it is a flat place to run at a higher speed. Rubén Camilo enjoys exploring parks and incorporates them into his routine to exercise every day in a different location. Rubén Camilo takes a break from his exercise routine on the weekends.

After exercising, Rubén Camilo returns home a little after noon, takes a second quick shower, and gets ready to take care of the store again. Our mother is responsible for the store while Rubén Camilo was out. After he returns and be in the store again, she cooks lunch for the family.

A few years ago, one day, in the morning, our dad crashed his car without major consequences. The accident and solving the damages required that my mother left her daily occupations and came to my father's aid. At home, Rubén was alone.

On that occasion, Rubén Camilo prepared his breakfast as our mother would prepare it and was satisfied. As soon as noon arrived, at lunchtime he simply did not know what to do. I remember, I went home a little after one and I found my brother in a very bad mood, muttering phrases, waving his arms, walking from side to side. When I asked what was going on, he started complaining, saying he was very hungry, that our mother was gone, there was no lunch prepared and that he didn't know how to do it. I was very surprised to see him complain of hunger because at home, the grocery store remains open for us and he could easily have had chips, cookies or any snack to satisfy his appetite. Beyond that, I was incredibly surprised that he said he didn't know how to prepare food. At that time, my brother had already acquired a reputation as a good cook within the family.

Finding him so upset, I tried to calm him down by telling him that he should have prepared a broth, such as the one he made for breakfast, or that he could have taken any package of food from the grocery we have in the house. After that, I prepared a couple of sandwiches for us just as transitory relief to the hunger. That day I spent a long time talking to him about a life lesson; I talked about the different difficult times we face every day and how we should use our skills to solve it. It was an extensive talk. I wanted to teach him and reflect on life and how to solve difficulties and not make simple things so hard. I don't know how accurate this message was for him or all of how he internalized it. What I know is that at least my words calmed him down a little, and when his bad mood diminished, we both sat to prepare spaghetti with meatballs. I cooked the meat and he concentrated on chopping the onion and tomato for the sauce. The afternoon, in general, was noticeably quiet for both of us.

Sometime later, in 2016 I was in England and being influenced by the training sessions on autism that I was receiving in my volunteering program on the routines, the sensory experiences of light, color, flavors, and memory creation. I remembered that anecdote about lunch and the frustration it caused my brother. How he was feeling unable to cook. In the midst of those workshops, I understood that my brother never complained about not knowing how to cook, he specifically complained about not knowing how to prepare a lunch. Moreover, in detail, Rubén Camilo had felt frustration because he did not know how to prepare what at home is considered a lunch: a salty meal consisting of white rice, grains such as chickpea or beans, cucumber, tomato and avocado salad, some type of meat and most of the time salted or fried potatoes.

In those days and at a distance, being in England I spoke by video call with my parents. I asked them if my brother had never prepared lunch on his own. We realized that he only knew how to prepare white rice, but he did not prepare the other foods that completed the dish. That day we concluded that my brother should learn how to cook grains or prepare salads and do everything independently, under supervision, but all on his own.

In the first weeks of June 2019, in a conversation, Rubén Camilo and I remembered the anecdote about the car, the lunch and his mood. I asked him about the date of that day, and he remembered it accurately: May 4, 2015. He also remembered exactly the lunch was supposed to be prepared on that date. As he told me, the day before the car crash, my mother had soaked red beans in water to

soften their texture. Beans are usually prepared under a pressure cooker. To give them flavor, the first step is to chop onion and tomato in small pieces, in order to make a stew. Then add bacon and wait until is cooked. After that add water, wait for it to boil, add beans and finally seal under pressure and wait until the pot to release steam. At least twice. After all of this the beans are ready to eat. This precise procedure was the one that my brother did not know in detail.

I understood that his frustration did not come then from the fact of not knowing how to cook, or not being able to cook certain parts of the lunch that could have also satiated his hunger at that time. His greatest frustration came from not being able to fully cook what that day was supposed to be prepared. I asked him again about what happened that day and he narrated the situation chronologically, from when my mother went out to the street until I arrived, and the concern caused him to see the beans soaked without knowing what to do with them. It was very interesting to hear his version of the facts, paying attention and finding what his needs was. Maybe I did not do that exercise from the very beginning of the situation many years ago, when he was upset that afternoon and he was frustrated because of needing to cook a lunch.

At the end I asked him what things had changed from that event to the present. My brother reaffirmed to me that he had not relived such a situation where cooking was difficult for him. He told me that even if my parents leave in the morning he likes to sit down and start preparing lunch for everyone to have the meal together, a little afternoon, just when they come back.

2.3 Who is Fabian?

Fabián is a young 24-year-old student in his second year of law at the National University of Colombia. We were able to get in touch through a university psychologist who knew my research. Fabián called me and expressed his interest in being interviewed. However, it was challenging to find a space on his schedule for our meeting – and as you will see next it took some doing.

When we talked on the phone to plan, Fabián used to go over his activities for the week while I was listening to him. It was as if he created a mental and oral image of his occupations. Almost as if he wanted to find a free space for the interview between his words. After a couple of calls we managed to arrange the meeting, finally. Fabián decided to see me in the morning, right after a law exam and before an interview with the university's media network.

The day we met in person, Fabián greeted me with a smile and a voice with great force. However, his eyes did not contact mine until after a few minutes. We said hello briefly, introduced ourselves, and walked through the university until we found a cafeteria—a place where Fabian felt comfortable because it was a wide and outdoor space full of flowers and grass near the tables.

I reaffirmed that my interview was designed for an hour, but I would have no problem if we had to finish earlier. Fabian smiled shyly at me, and again under brief eye contact, he told me not to worry. He had planned to spend about an hour and a half with me, and his subsequent meeting would not interfere.

At that moment and in that first conversation, he stressed that he likes to be organized with his time, that he feels distressed when he is arriving late to a place, and it bothers him that people are not punctual with their responsibilities.

At that moment, he told me a popular saying, "As a good Colombian...leaving everything for last," and he laughed with a soft laugh. Fabian raised his hand as if pushing the air, slapping his hand, and said, "no, I don't like that." A few seconds later, he glances at me to confirm if I am laughing.

I asked him: what is his strategy to be so organized with his time? He replied that he had an excellent memory. He never forgets a compromise or a meeting. Also, he told me that he likes to calculate how long it takes for a bus to move from one part of the city to another, even giving extra time in case of traffic jams or accidents.

Fabián talks for a long time about how chaotic transportation is in Bogotá and how much it bothers him. It is a lousy system for him. A little more annoyed, he raises his voice and frowns. At that moment, he mentions that he detests traffic jams, and more than traffic jams and the unpunctuality of buses, he is bothered by crowded places. He hates spending part of his days and nights at Transmilenio stations (articulated buses in the Bogotá transportation system) trying to catch a bus.

Fabián lowers his voice a bit and more calmly told me that traveling by bus, that is to say, sitting on the bus, is a thing that he likes a lot. He is fascinated by seeing large buses, with two or three cabins and the joints that connect each section of the bus. Besides, he likes to memorize the names of the stations and to know which bus uses specific bus stops.

Fabian sometimes checks the public transport app to find routes. He showed off a bit and told me that he knows the transport system perfectly. Even, he said he can tell better recommendations than those that are provided by the different app cell phones.

He immediately asks me where I live, and I answer that it is close to the Portal 20 de Julio.¹ He asks me in which neighborhood, and I answer him in "Peninsula." Fabián smiled effusively, and he told me that there is a "Bus Alimentador" (feeder bus)² called Peninsula and that the route number is 13.7. I smiled at him in response, deciding that it is true, that it is just the bus that I take to go home after traveling on the Transmilenio. Fabian stopped a bit and thought.

He lowered his head and looked down at the ground. I asked him what he was thinking about, and he answered that he was precisely calculating the route to get to the Portal 20 de Julio and then take the 13.7 feeder bus. A few seconds passed, and he pointed out exactly the way, the stations, the transfers, and the numbers on the buses that I should take. I smile at him and tell him that he is right; it is exactly the route I must take to get to my house.

He recommends to me not travel during peak hours because it is complicated to take a bus at those hours. I nod and show him that I took notes of his advice to follow later. Fabian looks at me carefully to see what gesture I made, without saying words. We both smiled.

At that moment, he mentions things that bother him about the transport again. He told me that he feels imprisoned and that there are also very rough people who push him or insult him if he tries to accommodate himself. He told me that he misses Natagaima, the town where he is from, in those uncomfortable moments with so many strange people.

At that time, I asked him to tell me a little about that place and his family. Fabián told me why he came to Bogotá and what other things he misses about his town. Fabián said that he was born in Natagaima, a village in south-central Colombia, where most of the population is indigenous. Fabián identifies himself as indigenous Pijao and proudly takes out his cell phone and shows me

¹ A portal in Bogotá, is the final and big station of every single line of the public transport system. Portal 20 de Julio is located at the south east of the city, just in a Neighborhood named 20 de Julio, honoring the Colombian Independence Day.

² A Bus Alimentador (Feeder Bus) is a free bus with a circular route that drive people from different places nearby to Portal 20 Julio, to specific place to "feed" the transport system.

some photos of the Pijao youth's meetings that he attends when he travels to visit his relatives and celebrate the San Pedro and San Pablo festivities in June of each year.

Fabián emphasizes that although San Pedro and San Pablo's festivities are very traditional Catholic church festivals in Colombia, the true origin is the Inti Raimy festivities or the celebrations related to the sun, celebrated by many indigenous communities in the Andes.

He told me how the Catholic Church changed the reason for the festivities for saints and how in those meetings of the Pijao youth, they are concerned about returning to traditions and indigenous knowledge. Fabián describes to me in detail the importance of indigenous knowledge and practices of southern Tolima and the Pijao people for Colombia. He told me that his family is also part of indigenous organizations. Just as there are Pijao youths, there is the group of Pijao women, the Pijao men, and the Pijao grandparents and grandmothers, who are the community's highest authorities. Fabián told me that they are a highly organized community, especially after political violence and the war in Colombia that greatly affected that Colombian region.

Fabián begun to talk about his family and told me that he is the youngest son in a family of two brothers and two dads. He has always lived with them. In Natagaima, they sometimes lived in rural area. Their home was a large house with land to grow oranges, tangerines, sugar cane, and rice, the main product of that area of Colombia.

In addition to the land for the cultivation and the country house, Fabián mentions that they had a home in the town's urban area. A much smaller place where his mother and father had a small lottery business, sold candies, and natural lemonades. According to him, the big house and the cultivation were where he spent his weekends. During the weekdays, he stayed in urban area of Natagaima. He, his brother, and the family lived in the house and opened the business.

Fabián describes himself as a very intelligent person, but people do not know how to understand him well. He told me that he painted, made plasticine crafts in his childhood, and drawing in his older brother's notebooks, even before starting school. However, he was a very quiet child, and according to Doña Piedad, his mother and whom I met later, he used to cry a lot. He was a highly active child, however he learned to speak after turning 3 years old.

Fabián told me that starting his studies was difficult for him, in the first place, because he felt sad when he was away from his family. His family has always treated him with great affection. Second, some teachers were annoyed that he was so quiet or that he sometimes did not follow the instructions as they gave them.

Doña Piedad looked in several kindergartens and finally, in one, the newest in town and with fewer children, she decided to enroll Fabián. Doña Piedad told me that she had decided to enroll her son there because the teacher was young woman. She had barely opened that kindergarten and seemed to have a lot of patience to explain. Besides, Fabián could have more personalized attention since it was a small group of children. Dona Piedad was concerned about Fabian's shyness and refusal to speak, and she thought that a cozy and small space could be beneficial for him.

Fabian passed kindergarten, and although he continued to show some very marked shyness traits, he quickly learned to write. From those years, his ability to memorize began to be evident for many people. Fabian watched television and news programs with special attention. He learned a lot about the national reality, about tragic events in Colombia's history, such as the murder of social leaders or the armed takeovers of rural municipalities. Fabián also remembers the occasions when Natagaima were attacked by paramilitary forces or guerrillas who lived in the area.

Fabián recalls that he was born on the day that commemorated the sixth anniversary of political leader Carlos Galán Sarmiento's assassination. He also knows that the first time he traveled outside of Natagaima in Colombia, a cycling sporting event known as "La Vuelta Colombia" was taking place in its 45th edition.

Fabián easily remembered peoples' names and dates from Colombian politics before starting elementary school and formally learning about arithmetic operations or spelling rules.

In the town, Fabián began to have a reputation as a very intelligent boy among the neighbors. Dona Piedad, however, was still concerned about his shyness and even thought that Fabián had speech problems and took him to the home of a traditional healer. The healer offered him lemongrass and chili tea and a broth whose main protein was the beak of a hen. All this to awakening Fabian's language and thus curing his "Mal de habla" (speech disorder) how it is traditionally known as the condition where some children do not learn to talk or refuse to socialize with others.

Fabián clearly remembers the drink's taste from that day, even though he was barely five years old. The lemongrass with chili, he liked it. However, the chicken beak broth had a terrible taste. He is not sure if the care that the healer offered had helped him.

However, his mother continued to worry for a few more years and decided to take him to other non-traditional doctors for speech therapy. Sometime later, already enrolled in elementary school and in other children's company, he became much more friendly and talkative.

To look back on his days in elementary school, Fabián feels joy. He was a participatory kid. His good grades often earned him awards. He liked to participate in the school dance group. He participated in the town fairs and festivals, dancing in comparsas. He wanted to attend the Catholic Church's cultural activities and those by local indigenous organizations.

Fabián often speaks with pride of his belonging to the Pijao indigenous council and the traditions that the Catholic Church changed or mixed with indigenous traditions. However, he identifies himself as a fervent Catholic. He told me the kindest people he has met in his life had been people from different church activities such as bazaars, spiritual retreats, and religious pilgrimages to nearby places Natagaima.

Some of his happiest childhood memories are participating annually in the plays representing his way of the cross. Fabian participated, acting as a pastor, apostle, angel, Pontius Pilate, and even played Jesus Christ.

Fabián told me that no one ever worried about the shyness or refusal to speak that he presented in the first years of his life for a few years. Fabián excelled at school in mathematics and history. Although he had some Spanish and other foreign language problems, he overcame them thanks to his parents and his older brother's family support.

Fabian's life began to change drastically when he finished his primary education and started secondary school. Fabián was still an active young man who participated in school activities. However, he began to distance himself from those who, until that moment, were his friends of the same age.

Fabián felt different, and he told me that he did not know how to express it in those years. Fabián liked to talk about television, the news, advertisements, and music. On the other hand, his classmates wanted to talk about the other classmates, the boyfriends, the parties, and the walks. School or village activities seemed to be less and less important to them. Fabian began to spend a lot of time alone. At that time, he felt safe when he attended with church members or when he was at home with his family.

During his first years of high school in the municipal school, Fabián had an awful time. In addition to not feeling comfortable in the group, he became the victim of bullying and constant jokes from other students. Sometimes they placed things on his seat in the classroom. Other times they verbally insulted him. At one point, the situation became so hard for Fabian that he burst into tears after a classmate spent the entire afternoon throwing balls of paper to break his concentration while studying in the library.

On that occasion, Fabian came home extremely heartbroken and sad and asked his parents not to go back to school. Doña Piedad complained at school. Although the teachers pointed out that Fabián had perfect grades, it was difficult for him to follow instructions and he seemed withdrawn. It was difficult for him to participate in class, and he was sometimes found speaking to himself or repeating phrases over and over again. The teachers pointed out to Fabián's mother that he probably had a medical condition or a language learning problem and that she might have to seek a medical diagnosis to know exactly how to support Fabián.

The words of the schoolteachers were worrying for the family. They assumed that these characteristics were features of his personality and, as he had talents to memorize, he only required support in some activities. The family only noticed in Fabian a marked shyness that dissipated as soon as he became confident.

They assumed that Fabian was a young man who preferred not to make jokes and did not like them being made and a teenager with different interests than the average young man. Doña Piedad and the family recognized traits in Fabián that made him an exceptional person, but that did not mean, at that time, nor does it currently mean something problematic.

Fabián did not feel comfortable in the municipal school, and at the age of 13, he convinced his family not to force him to attend anymore. He dropped out in the middle of the school year and missed all of his subjects.

Fabián liked to study, and he continued to do so from his house in the company of his family. The schooling experience had been so unpleasant that Fabián decided to go to his grandmother's farm for several months to spend time in the fields. His uncles were also there, who gave him books and explained some topics to him from time to time.

Fabián's parents were concerned for months, they wanted their son to continue with his studies, but they did not want him to be in an environment that was so difficult for him.

Natagaima is a town of just over 22,000 inhabitants (DANE 2018). Compared to many other municipalities in the country, it is a small town, and there are not many schools that offer high school. Fabian's family then undertook a search to find a school where classmates and teachers would treat him with patience and respect.

Doña Piedad found three options, and there she tried to explain that Fabián had a different personality from the other young people who were enrolled in high school. She described his interests in manual work and the great concentration he had to study. She also tried to make the teachers understand that Fabian needed some support. Not so much for their schoolwork but rather to relate and establish bonds with other classmates. Many of the teachers seemed puzzled by what Fabian's mother was saying. Many asked if Fabián had any physical difficulties or if he had any illness. She insisted that she did not view her child as sick.

Doña Piedad asked the teachers to be supportive and motivated in the challenging or complex moments that Fabián could have with his classmates. She also told the teachers that Fabian used to speak to himself alone from time to time and he reported feeling uncomfortable and different from others sometimes. However, none of this affected his school performance or his initiative to collaborate in school events.

After repeating his explanations on numerous occasions, Doña Piedad decided to enroll Fabián in an agricultural school on the town's outskirts. The indigenous focus was much more robust since they taught in the Pijao language and taught traditional agriculture. The teachers showed much

more empathy to welcome and understand Fabián and support him emotionally when he needed it.

Doña Piedad, her husband Ismael, and Edgar, Fabián's older brother, had to work hard to convince him to take a chance on this new school, his new classmates, and his new teachers.

For Fabián, it was difficult to accept the proposal, even more so because he enjoyed studying alone and independently. He didn't see the need to go to school. However, for Fabián's family, it was essential that he not shut himself up and withdraw from social spaces. From those years, Doña Piedad had the constant concern and motivation to encourage Fabián to learn to dialogue with others and make himself respected. Fabian had to be a strong person who would not let himself be distressed by others' ridicule or misunderstanding.

Doña Piedad told me that this idea of living in society and not being isolated is very present in raising indigenous Pijaos people. Lonely people are frowned upon. People often think "something is hiding", "something bad is planning." Besides, isolation is a punishment imposed by the community when some of the Pijao laws are broken: such robberies, fights, or someone offended another person within the community. In this sense, exile is a maximum punishment and is synonymous with shame within the Pijaos.

Fabián's family did not want him to assume this attitude of isolation. Fabián had not done anything wrong, nor was he a bad person to live as if he did not belong to the community. He knew there was something different about him. Although she could not pinpoint what, she was determined to support and strengthen him so that his exceptional personality was not an impediment to his development as his person.

Fabián finally finished high school at the age of 19 at that school. He managed to adapt and enjoyed that place. In Fabián's words, that school had a large garden that reminded him of his grandmother's farm. He also found some much more understanding young people and teachers who supported him with speech therapy and with a lot of empathy helped him to be sociable. Fabián is still in contact with many of his companions from then.

In these speech therapies, for the first time, a person suggested to Fabián's parents that he was a disabled person. This person indicated that Fabián could be a person with "Mental Retardation."

The whole family was shocked because they had never heard the term. That same professional suggested that they go to more elaborate speech therapy and artistic workshops in a nearby city called Ibagué. The therapist told them that there they could diagnose if Fabian had some disability.

Ibagué is a city of 600,000 inhabitants (DANE 2018) two hours from Natagaima. Doña Piedad and Fabián began traveling on weekends to attend speech therapy to complement the ones that he received in Natagaima. In that compound, they began to ask about the disability diagnoses and were told that the person in charge of that was in Bogotá (more than 10 hours away from Natagaima). They said that the doctor was a neurologist and that he only traveled to Ibagué on rounds of scheduled visits and under very urgent cases. They stressed that he was a very busy professional, unique in Ibagué, and it would not be easy to contact him. Given these responses, they decided to stop looking for that doctor or for a diagnosis of "Mental Retardation."

Doña Piedad and Fabián told me that on one of those trips to speech therapy they sat in a waiting room to be seen by the therapist. They remember that there was a television there that broadcast the noon news. Suddenly, a young woman appeared on the screen almost the same age as Fabián, talking about her talents for painting, memorizing dates, and how much her family had supported her to attend a school. The young woman also talked about things that bothered her, such as noises, bright lights, and seeing people with anger. At the end of the interview, the journalist mentioned that the young woman was autistic and suffered from discrimination by those who did not understand her. That was the first time he and his mother heard the word autism.

Fabián told me that he remembers that day with great precision because he said he felt very identified with that girl from the newscast. From that day on, Fabian insisted on contacting the doctor, that neurologist who could explain if he was a disabled person and even more if he was an autistic person.

Seeing Fabián's enthusiasm and how important it was for him seeing that interview on television, the family began to contact the doctor who occasionally visited Ibagué. After multiple trips to the city and several months of waiting, they reached him, although there was a preliminary assessment. The neurologist recommended that they travel to Bogotá for a series of tests and tests that could take up to a week.

Fabián's family had no acquaintances in Bogotá to guide them in the city or sponsor their trip. Traveling to Bogotá for at least a week required a significant investment in terms of tickets, lodging, and food, in addition to the high cost of the medical evaluation. The family postponed the visit to Bogotá for at least one more year while the family raised the necessary money.

About these diagnostic tests, Fabián still remembers extended interviews with psychologists, written tests, and physical tests. Finally, the diagnosis was given, and the family received an extensive and overwhelming explanation about the disability and the possible limitations that Fabián would have in his future life.

It was a disheartening diagnosis, despite highlighting Fabian's cognitive abilities and skills to concentrate. The neurologist diagnosed and emphasized the probability that Fabian would have many difficulties in his future life, and it would be difficult for him to achieve a university degree. He also pointed out that Fabian could not have a wholly independent and autonomous life.

The whole family was perplexed by the negative diagnosis. Once again Dona Piedad saw that other people were underestimating her son's abilities and his potential. Although the official diagnosis was worrying, Dona Piedad appreciated Fabian's talents and skills, and she was convinced that he could achieve anything if he received the necessary support. In a way, Doña Piedad ruled out the neurologist's diagnosis because Fabián was not ill for her. However, a more significant concern arose in her mind.

She and her family had been the people closest to Fabian and the ones who most understood his discomforts, his fears, and the difficulties he could have with certain activities. Fabián would be safe as long as he had his family, but outside of that social circle, he would have to face harsh words and negative perceptions, such as the one reported by the doctor in his diagnosis. Doña Piedad knew that, in the future, the day she was gone, life would be more complicated for Fabian. From that moment and with greater fervor, she and the family strove to educate and provide tools so that Fabian would be an independent person in his adulthood.

Fabián finally returned to Natagaima, finished high school with honors, and although he wanted to begin his university education immediately, his parents' financial situation did not allow it. After looking for scholarships, nearby options to study, and presenting several interviews, four

universities in the south rejected Fabián. These institutions argued that Fabián did not achieve the necessary results or adequate performance to be admitted by the institution. According to Doña Piedad, these results were pointed out after the interview and Fabián told his interviewers that he had a diagnosis of autism.

Faced with these situations, seeing his family's concerns, and feeling rejected by a medical diagnosis, Fabián decided to change his initial interest, agricultural engineering, for law. From that moment on, he wanted to defend the rights of disabled people: the right to education and the right to work, especially.

Two more years passed, and finally, he applied to the National University of Colombia, supported by professors and other colleagues from Fabián's prior school. There he was admitted into the admission program for indigenous communities and was also enrolled under a program specially designed for disabled youth, people with emotional or mental health conditions. This program is called *Reasonable Adjustments*. Just as he wished, he would initiate his education in law.

Fabián's admission to one of the most prestigious universities in the country, whose headquarters is in Bogotá, meant a huge change for the family. At that time, they decided to leave their native Natagaima and move to the city. Fabián's brother, who was already studying at another university in Ibagué, agreed to transfer to Bogotá and finish his studies there. Although the family's residence is now in Bogotá, they travel at least twice a year to participate in the Pijao community's events and maintain ties with their people.

Fabian's parents left their trading businesses, sold their belongings, and looked for jobs in the city. It was a difficult task because they did not know many people in the big city. However, little by little, things happened. Nowadays, Fabián's father works in a supermarket as a storekeeper and seller. Fabián's mother dedicates her time to various trades that include handicrafts, house cleaning, and stores in the neighborhood. Fortunately, Fabian's admission also consists of a scholarship loan that makes things materially easier for the family.

Fabian and his family have lived for four years in Bosa, a place at the city's southern end. There Fabián gets involved in the council of the Muisca indigenous community and popular associations. He has learned much more about disability, about the situation of other people with similar

diagnoses to his own. He has become aware of foundations and is interested in participating in conferences or activities on disability and especially autism. Being in Bogotá and making greater use of the internet, he contacted autistic people and even communicated with that young woman he saw on television years ago—the person with whom he felt identified long before he knew what autism was about.

2.4 Fabián Morning

Fabián gets up every day at 4:45 am in the morning (he tells me the exact time). At that time, everyone is awake in his house. Doña Piedad prepares breakfast in the company of her husband Ismael, while Fabián takes a shower after his brother, both of them tidy up their rooms and prepare their backpacks to leave the house. Fabián prepares a student briefcase, his briefcase with books, photocopies, and notebooks to take notes in his university classes.

Fabián enjoys getting up early, and from his childhood, from the days on the farm of his parents or his grandmother, he is used to getting up early. In those years, part of his morning routine included helping with field tasks such as milking cows or watering plants. They are tasks that farmers could only do early, and it was part of his activities when he was on a farm during weekends or vacations. Fabian would like to have a garden at home. Right now, there is no space to have plants, but he hopes to move to a bigger place one day and have some ornamental flower pots and some aromatic plants that he can use in preparing meals. He thinks that taking care of his plants could be part of his morning activities in the future.

The whole family gets up very early because the two young people, Fabián, and his brother, leave to take transport at 5:30 am, although they take different routes. Doña Piedad and Don Ismael go to work at 6:00 am. Fabian then has an hour to get dressed, have breakfast, and get ready to go out. The family usually has breakfast together, some minutes after 5:00 am. The breakfast that Doña Piedad and Don Ismael cook corresponds to the traditional campesino-indigenous breakfast of Natagaima, a meat broth or a bowl of dry rice and grains, accompanied by a sweet cassava flour bread. Mixed with dry cheese and stuffed with a sandwich called "pandebono." It is a regular breakfast and is established in Fabián's deep and strict routine and its customs.

After arriving in Bogotá, Doña Pilar tried to implement in the family what is eaten as breakfast in Bogotá and the center of the country. A hot drink, either coffee, chocolate, oatmeal, or *agua panela* with pieces of bread and cheese. This arose after going to bakeries and observing what people had for breakfast. However, the family did not welcome this change, much less by Fabián, who protested, saying that sweet things are not for breakfast. Just as Fabián does not enjoy hot and sweet drinks, he also dislikes yogurt or milk with cereal for breakfast. According to his criteria, this is food that is suitable.

The city breakfast was completely ruled out. They follow the traditions of Natagaima, even if this takes a little longer or if it is necessary to search in different bakeries or make an order in Natagaima to receive the *pandebonos*, *achiras*, desserts or other types of bread and baked goods prepared with the local ingredients. and under traditional techniques of cooking in wood or under the ground that is not possible to imitate in the city.

Fabián usually has class at 7:00 am, and it is convenient for him to leave his house at 5:30 am. He walks a couple of blocks and takes a feeder bus that takes him to the nearest Transmilenio station called Bosa Centro. Then, as he mentioned, he must wait several minutes in the crowd until he manages to get on an articulated bus that takes him through all of Carrera 30 to the National University station. Fabian almost always manages to get on a little before 6:00 am. The journey on the articulated bus to the university station takes 40 minutes. Upon arriving at the station, Fabián has to walk approximately 15 minutes, enter the campus, cross several meadows and buildings, and finally arrive at the law school building, where he takes morning classes.

Fabián sometimes arrives a little earlier than 7:00 am, and although he likes to arrive early, he resents having to wait outside the buildings. For security reasons, the campus opens at 6:00, and most buildings only open at 7:00 to start classes at the National University. Those in charge of opening the doors are the university security guards.

If students arrive early, they must wait outside. For Fabián, this is not easy. Although he likes to get up early, the cold Bogotá morning seems somewhat annoying. Natagaima is a town that usually has an average temperature of 88 ° F, even the coldest morning can have a temperature of 77 ° F. Bogotá, on the other hand, in its mornings it can get up to 53 ° F. For Fabián, it is a drastic change, and although he has already been in the city for several years, he does not feel that his body has

gotten used to it. The cold continues to cause even physical reactions such as a slight pain in his bones and the urge to go to the bathroom.

Fabian, on some occasions, has faced this problematic situation when he has arrived early. He has had to speak with the security guard to open the door and allow him to enter the bathroom. Fabián tells me that they have been uncomfortable days because the guards refuse to open the door, telling him that it is only a few minutes that he must wait. Fabian is desperate when given these kinds of answers. He feels that he is being denied basic rights and conditions. Fabián tells me that in those situations, he gets very upset and sometimes argues with the guards. He tells them that he is not from the city and that he has the right to use the bathroom as a student. On some occasions, these explanations have ended in discussions, and Fabián, who claims what a right for him, does not like to argue with other people. When those moments come when voices are raised, or Fabián feels that what he wants to say is not being understood, or he himself is not understanding what they are expressing to him. He tells people that he is an autistic young man and demands patience and slightly simpler explanations or simply for people to reformulate what they want to express. This immediately causes the people with whom he argues to completely change their facial expression, decrease the volume of their voices, and speak to Fabian more calmly. After the explanations, Fabián also calms down, and almost always, such simple requests, such as accessing a bathroom a few minutes before the building opens, are attended to.

Fabian has technical words, which he has learned in conferences and workshops on autism and disability (in which he has participated and in videos and readings that he has done on the subject). He defines himself as a neurodivergent person, and he defines me as a neurotypical person. He tells me that his entire family is neurotypical, and the vast majority of his college classmates are. He tells me that one of the things he likes the most about Bogotá is meeting neurodiverse people. He insists that before receiving his autism diagnosis and before seeing that autistic girl on television, he felt as if he were the only person in the universe who thought and behaved differently.

Once, I asked him what it meant to be neurotypical or neurodivergent. Fabian told me that it was a to me that they are words for human beings who, due to certain characteristics, are part of a different group. Using examples of indigenous words, Fabián explains to me: "white people or mestizos tend to call the indigenous people a certain way, they call us Pijaos, which means

magician. And we call them Maio, which means foreigner. They call other indigenous peoples the Kichwas. They call them Runa, which means people, and they call the non-indigenous Mishus, which means colonist or mestizo. Fabián emphasizes to me that neurotypical and neurodiverse are something similar, ways of calling different groups of people, without wanting to express superiority of one group or the other. He feels that the component that alludes to diversity is the most important in those words. He thinks that it is more important to talk about diversity than about disability because disability for him sounds like something negative.

Fabián points out that neurotypical people are the majority group, people who tend to have similar thoughts, feelings, and ideas. They are people who find it difficult to see the world in another way. The neurodiverse are people who feel, think and perceive the world in a different way. Also, he emphasizes to me that not all neurodivergent individuals are the same. Some are more sensitive to sounds, others to images, and not all have the memory skills that he has, some people have skills in graphic arts and crafts, other musical talents, or some people express a certain sensitivity to the world, but not they have a particular exceptional talent. Fabián points out to me and emphasizes that not all autistic people should have a special ability. He points out that autism is a different way of perceiving the world because a person is neurally and physically diverse. Fabián emphasizes to me that for him, the correct term for disability is functional diversity.

Although Fabián does not use the word "disability" much, he explains to me that there are two forms of disability from the perspective of neurotypicals. In the first place, there are visible disabilities, which are those experienced as people who move around in wheelchairs, use prostheses in one of their limbs or perceive the world without using the sense of vision or people with low vision, among others. On the other hand, there are people with invisible disabilities. That is to say that in the eyes of neurotypicals, there is no physical and bodily evidence that the person is disabled in some way. Therefore, there is no empathic treatment or social adaptation for them. Fabian tells me that autism is an invisible disability on many occasions. That is why, in situations such as those he lives in the mornings with some security guards, he decides to explain, say aloud that he is an autistic person and that people must establish a clear language, communicate with him and adapt their behaviors accordingly as they do with a person who has a physical and visible disability.

Fabián, in several interviews, tells me that he wants to focus his law study on the defense of the rights of autistic people and people who experience invisible disabilities. He wants to contribute to the construction of a world adapted for this type of disability. He wishes that mentioning autism or other forms of cognitive disability would not be taboo. He has known autistic people who are ashamed to mention it or families who hide their relatives with some disability. He wants to finish his undergraduate degree and specialize in human rights to work for those purposes. He defines himself as an autism activist.

With these ideas in mind daily, Fabián enjoys having his classes in the morning. He thinks that this way, he can better organize his day. He likes to accommodate his schedule so that in the first hour, he takes two classes, then attends the personalized supports designed by the "Reasonable Adjustments" program.

He tells me that in his classes, he sometimes has difficulties working in a group, sometimes it is difficult for him to schedule spaces with his classmates, and sometimes his classmates are not very responsible for the deliverables or the readings that have to be done for the classes. Despite this, he feels that there is a good atmosphere at the university. Most of his classmates know that he is an autistic youth. At each beginning of the semester, a person from the reasonable accommodation program contacts the teachers who teach Fabián's class, informing him about autism and possible supports that Fabián will need for his optimal development in class. Fabian occasionally asks his teachers to let him introduce himself, and he, in his own words, explains to his classmates what autism is all about.

When Fabián entered the university, he participated in a week of preparation with the "Reasonable Adjustments" program, where they made an individual assessment, where they evaluated Fabián's academic tastes, they observed which types of readings he could concentrate more on and which ones created more difficulty. They also evaluated Fabian's written communication and his ability to argue verbally. After these evaluations, the Reasonable Accommodation Center issued a personalized report detailing the help that Fabián might need throughout his academic life. This is the report received by the teachers with whom Fabián takes classes.

At the end of the morning classes, Fabián attends a one-hour session with university psychologists and volunteer law students, with whom Fabián discusses the issues seen in classes and the tasks to

be carried out. In these sessions, both psychologists and law colleagues guide him in group work, activities at home, and help him write and express his ideas. Fabián has these sessions daily, and in this environment, he has been able to get much closer to his colleagues at the university. He enjoys these spaces and, in the future, would like to join the program as a volunteer.

After his program sessions, Fabián goes to lunch at the university restaurant, where he receives food through a food voucher. A program that allows scholarship students to access lunches for much lower costs than they would find in the average restaurants outside the university. An ordinary lunch in Bogotá usually costs between COP 8,000 and COP 10,000 (approximately USD 3). Under the food voucher, Fabián must pay 2,000 (USD 0.75) to access a lunch that includes soup as a starter, and rice, a protein and vegetables as main course.

After lunch, Fabián starts his afternoon activities.

2.5 Who is Jorge?

Jorge Arévalo Calderón is a 42-year-old adult who lives in a remote area of the town of Cucunubá, in the central part of the Cundiboyacense highlands, two hours from Bogotá. Jorge currently lives with his family in an area where there are three houses. In one of them he lives with his father, Don Julio Arévalo, a man of about seventy, and his mother, Doña Alicia Calderón, who must be sixty-five. Their house is surrounded by that of his relatives, his uncle Don Teófilo, Alicia's brother, and that of Myriam, Jorge's younger sister, with her husband Luis Calderón and two children.

The village where Jorge lives is a sector of houses that are far apart, with a total of 100 inhabitants, divided into approximately 20 families. All the neighbors know each other. The villa is about 30 minutes by bus from the central part of the town. Jorge Arévalo is known in the town (an urban center of 2000 inhabitants) and in the rural area where he lives as “Jorge Gato”. This nickname has two reasons. First of all, Jorge is famous for being a very agile person, he has a physical state recognized for being able to take long walks, run quickly, climb hills quickly and also climb trees. When roofs, poles or something that requires height need to be repaired, Jorge is called upon to collaborate on many occasions.

The second reason for his nickname is that the Arevalo family has been called "the cats" for several generations. There is no unanimous reason why, some tell me that it is because of the bearded appearance of the men in the family and others because of the light eyes that some have. The sector where they live, where the three houses and the three homes are, is known as the sector of the cats or "the return of the cat."

Jorge is called Jorgito by almost everyone who knows him. His family members and he himself told me that when he was a teenager many people called him "Jorge the fool", an appellation that was annoying for him and the family. As Jorge grew older, that nickname is heard less and less. It is only used when someone is upset with Jorge for some mistake in his work, although that situation is not very frequent.

Jorge has a friendly relationship with all his relatives. He spends most of the day with his dad and his mom. There is a very friendly and close treatment. Sometimes he goes out to work with his father because he has a chainsaw so and occasionally he is hired to do logging Jorge usually goes to help him.

Jorge's extended family is large and they usually meet regularly on dates such as Easter, Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, among others. The family tends to have big parties and Jorge joins in, smiles, dances, hugs them and without talking much you can tell that he has a very pleasant time with his family.

Jorge's family tells me that, in the village, he is a very esteemed person, everyone greets him well and he is a person who inspires confidence. The family tells me that this respect and trust is an attitude resulting from working as a laborer in the village.

Establishing a fluid conversation with Jorge was something that was not easy for me at first. When I got to his family's house and explained in detail the purpose of the investigation, Jorge looked at me and smiled constantly. His smile seemed nervous. Despite the fact that they were the ones who contacted me and expressed their interest in participating, I asked several times if there were doubts and if Jorge really wanted to participate in the research. Jorge always answered yes, but a certain nervousness or shyness was evident in him. The first time we managed to have a long conversation

where he not only responded to me in monosyllables was when he asked him to describe himself physically.

Jorge is 1.70 m tall. He is white-skinned and the cold climate of the farm where he lives has marked a pinkish tone on his cheeks, burning his face a little. At that point he pointed out to me that even though he uses sunscreen, his skin has become thick on his cheeks and the pink color is permanent. He is a thin man, but constant field work has given him very toned arms and legs. This is how his family describes him.

Jorge, he told me that he knew that people say that he is strong, he also points out to me that, although he is skinny, he can lift very large and heavy things. That day Jorge showed me the large amounts of firewood and stones that he could easily move. As Jorge described himself, he showed me his wavy black hair similar to that of his entire family. He told me that he was getting old because he had some gray hair. He also points to his mustache and his thick eyebrows. His eyes are not clear like some of his relatives, he describes them as small but very healthy eyes because he does not need glasses as if some of his nephews or people younger than him do. Jorge always wears a cap, wool jacket, bog boots and jeans.

Jorge is recognized for being a person of good humor and very smiling. Jorge has a reputation for being a good worker: strong, strong and responsible with his work. They constantly call him to "work days" in the house of different campesinos. "Jornalear" in the Colombian countryside refers to working on specific tasks in one day. One day is equal to one Day and in one day the workers can do various tasks for the maintenance of a farm. When a person "wages" he is not working under a formal contract but under a verbal agreement. The day laborers offer their labor and receive a daily payment and are also guaranteed food.

Jorge sometimes helps with chores like splitting firewood, repairing fences, digging trenches. Jorge also has a talent for depressing cattle, cleaning muscles, and dividing meat. On the weekends he helps different neighbors to kill and cut apart cattle. It is an activity that he does regularly on Saturdays, a day that in the town they call the "Slaughter Day" because many houses with cattle kill a cow and put their meat on sale. Saturday is the meat market day and Jorge is usually very busy that day.

Jorge does not have an official autism diagnosis. His family tried to contact some doctors in childhood when they noticed that Jorge took a long time in pronouncing his first words and in a resounding refusal to go to school until he was 8 years old. The doctors said that Jorge was physically in very good health, but there was no clear diagnosis that could be hindering his speech processes and that was due to the refusal to leave the house and socialize with people other than his family. Although his parents enrolled him in school several times, he used to run away and return home crying in search of his family.

Jorge attended his first years of primary school in the village, he learned to read and write and do some numerical accounts. He began to go to school because his younger siblings also began to study, but he stayed there for just one year, when, already in his teens, he suffered from several students who beat him or made fun of him. Jorge did not want to go back to school, and his parents, noticing his son's anguish and his poor academic performance, supported this decision. Although they were questioned by some of his relatives, they did so under the principle that the most important thing in a person's life is his peace of mind. They wanted to see Jorge calm and noticed that in other family and work spaces in rural areas he felt better.

Jorge did not receive much support from his childhood teachers. His mother tells me that in part that also motivated him to withdraw him from school, as a teacher would yell at it when she did not follow the orders she gave. In those years of school, the family began to notice that Jorge had "something". Jorge's family never uses the word disability in their language. By saying "something", they mean that Jorge is different, he communicates differently, he understands things in a different way and it is necessary to establish different social relationships. When I ask them what is "different", they mention that it is a limitation, a different way of speaking -- and it is as if I see the world in a way that is not the same as how most people see it. Jorge's father, for example, emphasizes to me that it is very difficult for him to determine what exactly makes his son different from others. He knows that it is not a disease, because Jorge is a boy with a very good physical condition, but he does perceive that it is a way of thinking that allows him to be concentrated and dedicated to certain things, such as field work, but that prevents him from understanding others like the value of money, or having fluent and extensive conversations with other people. One trait that is very important to Jorge's father is his shyness and his decision to remain silent at many events even when the house is full of people or they are celebrating. Jorge's father tells me "Jorge

talks little, but he thinks a lot. I wonder all the time what is going through that mind when he sits down to look at us and pay attention to everything we do?"

When I asked them, about the word autism and if they felt that he had any relationship with his son. They told me that once in a health and vaccination brigade that was in the village. A nurse, observing Jorge, and doing a family survey described him as a disabled adult and there she pointed out that he could be an autistic adult. That happened when Jorge was 30 years old. It was the first time they heard the word and Jorge's brothers were interested in looking for more information about the definition of autism and asking from time to time, when Jorge was undergoing medical check-ups.

When reading general definitions, the family thinks that many of the behaviors, abilities and difficulties that Jorge has in his daily life fit the profile of autism. They like that word because they feel that there is no negative charge in it. When Jorge was a child he was called by other children "stupid", "retarded", or "feeble-minded" among other words, all considered insults by the family. They never liked saying that Jorge was sick because he is not. In campesino life, they tell me, someone who cannot work is sick and Jorge is able to work much more than other people in the village.

2.6 Jorge Morning

Jorge gets up every day at 4:30 am in the morning. At that time, his mother is awake and prepares him a dark coffee to deal a little with the cold morning in the village where they live. Jorge wears jeans, bog boots, and a double jacket. Jorge prepares some buckets and a wooden chair and goes in search of the family's cows. Early in the morning is the right time to milk the cows. The family has three dairy cows. Jorge milks all of them and then filters the milk obtained with cloth strainers to avoid any lumps or impurities inside the milk. After straining the milk into plastic buckets, he pours it into 10-liter aluminum containers. Jorge takes a pot of approximately 5 liters, and there he sets aside some milk. The aluminum containers are for the milk car that collects all the milk from the village. This car takes it to a pasteurization center, where the milk is purified and sold to be commercialized by the large dairy franchise of the country. The 5 liters that Jorge sets aside are for home use after a homemade purification process. Jorge brings the 10-liter aluminum containers to the road. His mother or father accompanies him and sells the milk to the milk car, which pays

according to the amount of fresh milk produced at that time. On some mornings in the rainy months, when the cows have good grass, Jorge manages to milk up to 30 liters of milk in the morning and another 30 liters in the afternoon. In the months without rain or in times of drought, he has milked only 10 liters. Jorge's parents accompany him in these transactions, because according to them, Jorge does not know the value of money well, and he tends to confuse some high-value bills and coins with smaller denomination bills. At times the milk buyers have argued with the family. They claim to have given Jorge the corresponding money, but the family claims to have received less than the liters of milk cost. Jorge's parents told me that while Jorge may be confused and may lose money, they believe that some of the milkmen have been abusive and have tried to take advantage of Jorge because of his disability.

Years ago they decided to accompany Jorge in the morning. Jorge milks and prepares the milk for delivery, from 5:00 am to 6:30 am. After that, he sits down to have breakfast with his family, who have also gotten up early to feed other animals on the farm or take care of the ornamental plants and the small garden they have at home, or prepare breakfast. The campesino breakfast consists of meat broth with papa, a cheese arepa, and a sweet drink such as chocolate or coffee with milk. A hot drink called "aguadepanela" is also usually prepared in the countryside, made from a mixture of water and a sweet toast extracted from sugar cane and brought from other country regions. Jorge told me that "aguadepanela con leche", freshly milked and boiled milk, is his favorite drink for breakfast. Cold aguadepanela with lemon and ice is what he drinks every time he feels thirsty in the middle of workdays at the estate. Breakfasts are eaten in the kitchen of Jorge's parents' house and usually involve Jorge's brothers and uncles, who live near the home as well. Breakfast is especially family time. Everyone talks about how they slept, the activities they will carry out throughout the day, and the different events in the town: if someone got sick, if someone traveled to the city, someone came to visit, among other things.

The kitchen of the country houses is usually large spaces separated from the rooms or the house's living room. The kitchens are almost a separate building with a large gate that remains open when the family is home. The gate allows you to see the path of the village. From inside, people can see neighbors passing by, and neighbors on the road can see that the family is having breakfast.

After finishing eating the food, the family usually sits for a long time around the small kitchen table, waiting for the sun to finish rising to continue with their morning activities. It is just at this time of day that several people from the village, including other relatives of Jorge, come to ask if Jorge will be available to work throughout the day to do his day's work. Jorge greets everyone who comes asking for him with joy. He usually smiles effusively and gets up from the table to shake hands. He also looks for the coffee pot and offers a cup to the visitor. In the Colombian countryside, it is very rude to refuse food or drinks, and it is something that Jorge understands well. That's why when he offers coffee and asks, "¿Le gustaría un tintíco? " (Would you like a dark coffee) almost that he offers the cup already served with coffee, without waiting for an answer. The question is rhetorical and announces the courtesy offered to guests over dark coffee.

Jorge has in his vocabulary phrases from the countryside, which draw a huge smile when he pronounces them to ask, "how are you?" He usually says, "¿Mi don/doña cómo se topa sumercé?" "my don / doña, how do you hit?" it means "How is it going?" Jorge is very hospitable when he sees a neighbor entering his house. Besides offering them coffee, after a while, he brings them a chair and generally makes them comfortable. Jorge says a few sentences, but generally, he communicates through body language.

On many occasions, I saw how he waved at people without saying good morning or good afternoon. Although he usually offers the coffee with a verbal invitation, he often serves it and hands it to the guests without asking them but maintaining a cheerful smile. Chairs or other utensils that can make visiting the house more comfortable are reached almost without saying a word. Jorge is an observant man and pays close attention to what is said in conversations. If the neighbor is in the house to look for a tool for some reason, he gets up to look for it and gives it before they ask for it. He also has complete knowledge of the activities necessary for the maintenance of the farm and whether the tools will be available for loan or not.

If the visitor is in the house to ask Jorge for help, he listens carefully to the work for which he is going to be hired. Once the person leaves, he organizes his tools, his work clothes, according to the activity commissioned. Jorge quickly responds if he has the availability to participate in the work, and thus, the day labor deals are achieved in a very fast and concrete way. Jorge's parents

only mediate when it comes to talking about the salary that Jorge should receive and how they should deliver it, apart from that they know that Jorge organizes his time with precision, he knows everything he has to wear and the clothes he must wear. Jorge does not ask many questions about the tasks that are entrusted to him. He only confirms the place and the time and asks what other people will go to work.

Although Jorge prepares all his items early, he usually spends the morning at home attending to the needs of the family farm. He helps weed, ditches, builds or repairs fences, or assists with home repairs. Although Jorge does not help to cook if he lends his strength to cut firewood and take it to the kitchen, to lift food sacks, or other tasks that require strength. Jorge's mother is a campesina woman who, in her youth and well into adulthood, was very strong. However, a fall from a horse, caused her injuries that currently limit her mobility and does not allow her to carry heavy things. In this sense, Jorge has been a great support for her in carrying out the housework. Jorge's mother thinks that, although Jorge could not study for only a few years of school, there are few limitations that he experiences in life in the countryside, where manual labor plays a major role. In addition, he feels that he has a very cordial relationship with his family, that they support him in certain activities that have to do with money, and that they also care about his personal care, his health and his personal appearance in terms of clothing and shoes suitable for the activities he performs. She also points out that fortunately there is a family that supports and cares for Jorge's well-being. She emphasizes this to me because in other villages near the town, other young people similar to Jorge have heard the stories but who have been locked up and treated, according to her, "like animals that neither feel nor think".

Jorge's mother tells me some stories about situations in the countryside of people that she considers to have been mistreated and isolated. She thinks that the main cause of this mistreatment and isolation is the lack of love and family bonding. Even regardless of whether there is knowledge or not about the disability, she feels that it is not the way to treat a person, much less a child. Jorge had difficulties in his school years, especially because of the way other classmates treated him and because he did not seem to be doing well in his studies. Jorge's mother feels that each person has his talent and his talent was not studying, she thinks that the more uncomfortable he was at school, the faster he learned to do countryside work. She feels that withdrawing him from school was the

right decision to the extent that he suffered and was constantly restless. On the other hand, in the countryside work, she feels that he works in a calm way, enjoys what he does and also does it well. She observes the dedication with which he works in the morning in the house and the relationships that he builds with his neighbors, and she thinks that Jorge's vocation is working in the countryside.

CHAPTER 3. AFTERNOON

3.1 Rubén Camilo Afternoon

After lunch, Rubén Camilo hands over the store to our mother. He gives her a brief account of what the morning was like, what orders came in, and how much money is in the petty cash. Sometimes he talks about the visit of the neighbors on the block, especially the older adults who greet him and with whom he has a brief chat about how he is and how the family is.

After this, Rubén Camilo usually goes to his room to look for sportswear. There he chooses between the different athletic uniforms that he owns. Rubén Camilo participates annually in the Bogotá Half Marathon, a sporting event that attracts thousands of competitors from the city, Colombia, and even people from other countries. The half marathon is a demanding race because Bogotá is a city more than 2,600 meters above sea level (8,016 FMSL). Rubén Camilo has participated in this half marathon since 2007, running in this event for 12 years to the present. Every year, Rubén Camilo receives support from the family and pays his registration fee for the race. By making this registration payment, he has the right to a sports uniform with the participant number and the official logo of the race. The colors of the uniform and the distinctive logo change with each edition of the half marathon. Rubén Camilo has a collection of 12 athletic uniforms, and each year he participates, he acquires one more.

Rubén Camilo chooses one of these uniforms, some special jogging shoes, a good cap, wears all his outfit, and prepares to go out to exercise. He also takes a small backpack where he packs his identity documents and a water bottle to hydrate himself. The family has stressed the importance of carrying their identity documents, especially a document called "Libreta Militar" (Military passbook).

My parents and brothers affirm that Rubén Camilo, being a tall and strong young man, attracts the attention of military brigades that usually roam the city, searching for adult men who do not have this document that have not provided compulsory military service.

In Colombia, young men over 18 years of age must obligatorily join the army for a period of service that corresponds to a year and a half. There, they are trained as soldiers and transferred to

rural areas of the country. On many occasions, young people are assigned to places where clashes between the public force and illegal armed groups such as guerrillas or paramilitaries are common.

The military passbook is the document that certifies that the young men fulfilled the obligation of military service; or indicates whether, for medical reasons, in terms of physical, mental, or emotional health, they are not fit to serve in the military forces. Male university or high school students are exempt from military service, but they must process the document to certify why they are not, or were not, part of the army. A third exception applies for families with sufficient financial resources to pay a fine that varies between 2,000 and 4,000 dollars, and thus their sons are not listed. Until recent years and in a minimal way, the debate and the possibility of "conscientious objection" have been opened so that young people who do not wish to do so do not participate in the Colombian armed conflict.

If a person does not perform military service without a *reasonable justification*³ and does not have a military passbook, he is called a "Remiso" (Remiss). Being a remiss is considered a serious crime and carries monetary sanctions or eventual enlistment in the troops of the state's armed forces.

The Colombian army usually makes street checkpoints, where they detain young men between 18 and 25 years old. There, the army verifies their documentation and evaluates if they are remiss or if they have the "military passbook." If the young people do not have the documentation, they are transferred to military battalions to be interrogated and to generate the sanction that the army considers pertinent. Although these detentions are legal, they are highly questioned by human rights groups and political activism in the country, who denounce that these checkpoints are a form of forced recruitment and abuse by the Colombian army.

None of my siblings have served in the military in our family due to short stature or joint care-related medical conditions. These conditions are evident after a physical check. Rubén Camilo has the necessary height, an athletic body, and does not show any condition that makes him unfit to be in the army or not served in the military. Besides, he did not possess any document for more than ten years, such as a card or any certificate that linked him to an educational institution because he was not studying.

³ That is the expression the Army uses for the reason they consider valid to avoid military service.

When Rubén Camilo was 22, and while exercising, he was detained by the army without his documents. The army soldiers questioned him. They asked him if he had served in the military. Rubén Camilo answered no, but he could not justify, to the soldiers, why not. The soldiers never observed any disability in Rubén Camilo, and in this way, he was identified as remiss and taken to a military battalion to define his situation.

At that point, they allowed him to make a call, and he contacted my parents. Between anguish, urgency, and fear, my parents went to the battalion with the identity documents and medical certificates to explain that Rubén Camilo was a young autistic person. That is why he was not suitable to be recruited in the national army for military service.

The army suggested my parents carry false documents and hide my brother from their duty to serve in the military. The biggest challenge was to explain to them that there are disabilities that are not physically visible and that the condition of autism would put him at a disadvantage and vulnerable in military practices and operations. Finally, Rubén Camilo left the battalion after hours of waiting, paperwork, calls for medical consultations, searching for people who could testify that Rubén Camilo was an autistic adult, talking over and over with different army officials. When he left, he met my family without any financial penalty being charged or if the dreaded enlistment in the military forces was an option.

After that incident, Rubén Camilo, on the recommendation of my parents and out of fear, stopped going to the park to jog for at least six months until the government issued his military passport certifying his autism.

Processing the "military passbook" is a process that can take several months. However, for Rubén Camilo, this process lasted at least a year and a half. A year before the detention, the family had already started negotiations. My parents tell me that the delay in processing the document was because the National Army, or at least the officials who attended them, were not familiar with the concept of autism, and there was no protocol for requesting supporting documents or issuing the military passbook with the clarification of cognitive disability. He had a certificate that this document was in process the day he was in detention, but it was not valid for the soldiers' checkpoint.

Although Rubén Camilo is no longer of the target age population of the army checkpoints, he has never left home without his military passbook or his identity documents. Rubén recently acquired an identification card as an autistic person thanks to a census carried out by the mayor's office in 2018 on "Disabilities not visible in Bogotá." He has not had any situation such as those that happened with the army. Still, he told me that on occasions when public officials approach him, or when he has to do paperwork in banks or medical centers, he shows the card issued by the mayor's office and feels that people treat him better and with more patience.

After Rubén Camilo leaves the house in the afternoons, he's heading to a park for a jog. There are three places where he exercises: the first is the Bosque de San Carlos, about 20 minutes by bus from the house, the second is a park 30 minutes by bus called San Cristóbal, the third option is a park 15 minute walking called La Victoria. Rubén Camilo, from time to time, explores other places, but these three are his preference for size, landscape and because he enjoys taking bus tours to reach these places.

Rubén Camilo usually goes on Mondays and Tuesdays to the most distant Park, San Cristóbal. On Wednesdays, to the Bosque de San Carlos and on Thursdays to La Victoria Park. Once he gets to these places, he starts with a walk for about 10 minutes and then jogs for at least an hour, and then runs for at least 5 minutes. On the occasions that I accompanied him; I took the time in the manner indicated above. However, Rubén Camilo does not describe his experience exercising in this way. He also breaks up his exercise routine into a warm-up time, then jogging, and finally running briefly. However, he told me that he does it by laps, two laps jogging, 20 laps jogging at a steady pace, and two laps running. The number of laps varies by park but usually ranges in these numbers.

Rubén Camilo also describes certain sensations that make him change his exercise routine. He monitors the warm-up of his body as the sweating increases and then the rhythm of the exercise increases. He feels that his body is hot and undisturbed. He thinks about the number of laps he has completed and decides to run. He tells me that he stops, just at the moment when he feels a slight tension in his lower legs. After he's finished running, he walks gently and stretches. I asked him where he learned to stretch, and he told me that he started by imitating people who go to the parks, but then he watched videos on YouTube to learn how to do them correctly.

Rubén Camilo spends between an hour and a half and two hours in the afternoon exercising. When he returns home, he takes a quick shower and goes back outside to other playful activities that he likes to participate in.

Rubén Camilo is enrolled in a Bakery and Fast-Food course that he attends on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm. He enjoys cooking, and this workshop is one of the activities that he wants the most during the week. Rubén Camilo has attended this workshop for a year. There, he has established a close relationship with teacher Augusto and some classmates, almost all adults between 40 and 60. The Bakery and Fast-Food course is a free class that issues a certificate, but it is not a space for formal education in cooking. This workshop is a place for people who want to open independent businesses or like to learn some craft skills in their free time. It is a course that does not have significant restrictions on previous qualifications or abilities. The only requirements are to be an adult and live in the neighborhoods surrounding the community center where the workshop is offered.

The teacher Augusto told me that when he started the course a year ago, he was notified that one of the students had a cognitive disability. They only gave him the notice but did not specify who that person was. It took the teacher a long time to realize that Rubén Camilo was the disabled adult referred to by the admissions office, and it took a little longer to understand that he was an autistic young man.

The teacher Augusto noticed certain traits in Rubén Camilo. Firstly, although he seemed to get along well with his classmates, he isolated himself and took his snack alone, a little away from the group on moments such as breaks.

He also noticed that, at times, he would repeat words in a whisper or laugh to himself. On one occasion, he noted the precision with which he took notes in class, distinguishing titles with a specific pen color and then general text with another color. They seemed to him particular characteristics, but he always doubt if those were disability related or if that was what autism was all about. The teacher Augusto admitted that although he has heard the word, he does not have precise knowledge about the meaning of autism.

The teacher Augusto is a 65-year-old man, a pastry chef who has been working as a cooking teacher in social programs of the Bogotá mayor's office and the national government for more than 20 years. Those 20 years, he has worked with adults who take his classes for different reasons. At times he has encountered people with physical disabilities who seek to make cooking and food preparation a tool for financial support. On other occasions, he has met people with emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety, for whom jobs such as cooking are therapeutic.

He has also directed courses for older adults, exploring bakery and fast food to build a life project after retirement. He has not had much experience working with people with cognitive disabilities. He tells me that the characteristics he noticed in Rubén Camilo seemed peculiar and do not resemble other forms of disability that he had seen before in other people, such as physical disabilities or people with Down's Syndrome. For the teacher, autism, according to his relationship with Rubén Camilo, lies in a different way of socializing, of creating bonds of friendship and communication.

Augusto told me that being Rubén Camilo's teacher has been an apprenticeship for him. Humor is a key element in the relationship that the teacher establishes with his students. Teacher Augusto usually speaks with irony, sarcasm, taking advantage of the fact that he works exclusively with adults. He also tends to make indirect jokes and use words or expressions of double meaning. He has seen that Rubén Camilo sometimes laughs at these jokes, but he does it a bit by imitating the group's laughter, according to the teacher's perception. However, when Augusto makes sarcastic jokes towards Rubén Camilo, he does not seem to understand the ironies but rather takes them literally.

The teacher, for example, tends to draw attention to the cooking times of food in the oven and the necessary supervision, through phrases such as: "It smells burnt to me" "The kitchen is going to catch fire because nobody checks those cookies." Rubén Camilo takes these phrases very literally and worries. He checks to see if there is a burning smell and if the kitchen has a fire.

On two times, the teacher has had to warn Rubén Camilo that it is a joke and nothing terrible is happening during the workshop. Humor is still present in the classroom, but the teacher has had to modify his jokes a bit. He has realized that you have to have a sharp tone of voice and some exaggerated gestures on his face, a little more defined to make Rubén Camilo understand that jokes

are being told. A simple wink in the eye, a brief laugh, and looking directly at Camilo, showing him that there are no worries at that moment, makes the teacher get closer to him and establish a relationship of closeness and empathy.

Rubén Camilo describes the teacher as someone happy, a kind person who has a lot of patience to teach. He points out that he is a joking teacher. He even says, "Ese profe es un chancero" (That teacher is a joker), noting that many of what he says in class are jokes. Rubén Camilo actively participates in this class. He takes notes, and at the time of cooking, he mixes ingredients, asks his colleagues to let him knead, and enjoys decorating cakes. Rubén Camilo tells me that his relationship with his classmates is good, and in general, there is an atmosphere of respect and collaboration. They are words that he frequently uses to describe spaces that he likes. He places particular emphasis on the word respect.

He enjoys this space, and once the workshop is over, they leave their food preparation clothes, wash their hands, distribute what was cooked that day among the students, and then say goodbye. Rubén Camilo is known among all those attending the workshop because he usually says goodbye by shaking hands with all the students participating in the workshop. With the people who treat him with the most kindness and establish a closer bond, his farewell is a hug, among them Teacher Augusto.

After the workshop, Rubén Camilo returns home and takes a few teas and the things he prepares in the workshop, and after a short break, he goes out and takes a bus to a nearby educational center where he does his high school studies at night.

On Tuesdays and Fridays, Rubén Camilo has other activities that are part of his weekly routine. On Tuesdays, he usually attends Best Buddies Foundation activities designed for different young adults with cognitive disabilities. These activities are generally spaces for games, sports, relaxation workshops, and interaction with other disabled youth throughout Latin America through video conferences and virtual seminars.

3.2 Fabián Afternoon

In the early afternoon, Fabián usually reads and studies for his classes the next day. When necessary, he organizes meetings with his classmates to solve group activities. In the afternoons after 3:00 pm, he usually participates in other activities where he socializes with other people and cultivates his vocation as an autistic young man and activist for neurodiverse people's rights.

Fabián is linked to the Colombian Autism League. An institution that he knew once entered the university, and one of the psychologists recommended that he go there. The Colombian League is an institution that facilitates the realization of diagnoses on cognitive disability, but according to Fabián's words, these diagnoses are made under the approach of the social model of disability; he emphasizes to me that it is very different from that initial diagnosis made by a neurologist, where autism was seen as a disease.

The Colombian Autism League is an institution founded in 2009 as a private initiative, and its place of influence is Bogotá. It is made up of 20 families who have autistic relatives. These families are from the Colombian upper middle class and work with independent professionals, endorsed by the Colombian medical and psychiatric council, who are the ones who make the diagnoses. It is a relatively recent institution, and its main area of influence is Bogotá. The costs of disability diagnoses range from \$400 to \$700, around COP 1000,000 and COP 3,000,000, depending on the detailed diagnosis and the precise and personalized accompaniment offered to families.

The directors of the Colombian Autism League, whom I was able to listen to in a public conference to which Fabián invited me, affirm that they are aware of the exam's value. They say the exams offered by the professionals who work associated with them surpasses the evaluations that Hospitals or specialized neurology center programs offer them.

They are also aware that many Colombian families, especially those of the middle or lower classes, do not have the capacity to pay for these types of exams (so detailed and focused on recognizing skills and profiling people around personalized therapies). These exams are meant to be accurate and inclusive educational schemes to enhance the skills of autistic people. In this same talk, they mentioned the large number of people who are victims of the war in Colombia, who live in situations of poverty, who live in remote parts of the country, where there may be people located in any part of the autism spectrum and who do not receive a proper diagnosis and attention to their

specific needs. In their words, they highlighted the need to spread knowledge about autism, not to see it as a disease, not to seek miracle cures for nonexistent ills. They discuss learning to understand autistic people and how to create a much more inclusive world for them. In this conference, they concluded that there would also be more demands regarding respect for neurodiverse people if there are greater knowledge and more orientation to families. If there are greater social demands, there will also be greater state concern, and in the future, perhaps not so far away according to them, disabled people throughout Colombia will have better care and greater recognition, including medical and psychological services of quality and respect, at much lower prices. In such a way that the majority of the Colombian population can access them.

The main objective of The Colombian Autistic League is social activism around autism. They carry out activities for the dissemination of information and try to guide the families of autistic people. They also seek to work hand in hand with universities and other care centers for people with cognitive disabilities. They want to find people of different ages interested in learning about disability from a social perspective and highlight the life history of some people who, despite the latent and widespread ignorance in Colombia about autism, have managed to create a life project and generate spaces of autonomy and interdependence. It was thus that, through the *Reasonable Adjustments* program, they managed to contact Fabián and other young autistic students of the National University and linked them to talks and different activities of the foundation. These students are then sometimes guides for other families and other young people; other times they are spectators of conferences directed by social researchers in the disability area.

The League also organizes other activities to create a space for recreation and strengthen close ties between autistic people of different ages. There are spaces designed for their exclusive interaction, but they have also designed activities where family members are involved and also where neurodiverse volunteers also participate. These spaces are designed for gaming activities such as football matches, basketball, or traditional games such as Tingo Tango, Golosa, and sack races. Music and painting workshops are also sometimes scheduled.

Sometimes the League schedules photography and social media classes. The latter is of special interest to Fabián because he opened a YouTube channel a few months ago where he shares his learnings and experiences around autism. Some of the activities of the League are free, and others

require a contribution of up to COP 20,000 for the payment of workshops or the purchase of materials. Universities often sponsor disability information dissemination talks, and on some occasions, the speakers participate as volunteers. Broadcast conferences are usually free and open to the general public.

Fabián enjoys the space and activities organized by the Colombian Autism League and tries to attend several of them during the week, especially the free ones and at least one of the workshops and leisure afternoons. In the Colombian League, Fabián empathizes with me that most of his acquaintances and friends are neurodivergent. It is the only space in his life and in his routine where neurotypicals are not the majority, making him feel comfortable. For Fabián, it is important to meet more young people with characteristics similar to his. He has found young people who, like him, accurately remember dates and events in Colombian history and similar hobbies, such as cars, airplanes, or buses. Although he knows that the autism spectrum is wide and each autistic person has different experiences, Fabián points out that when he is in these spaces with other autistic people, he does not feel uncomfortable or different.

He tells me that it is a completely different feeling than what he experienced in his childhood and adolescence when he had to go to school or interact with people who were not his family. Fabian tells me that he cannot find the exact words to express how he feels, but he knows that it is a good feeling, similar to tranquility and joy. Fabián enjoys this space a lot and also frequents it because it is a place that is in a neighborhood near the university. He barely has to walk for 15 minutes, and it does not involve him in using the city's transportation system or spending more money.

In this place, Fabián develops a large part of his social life and friendship ties, the people of the Colombian Autism League, leaders, and participants like him. They are his social circle in Bogotá. They are the people with whom he spends time the most, as well as his family. Doña Piedad occasionally accompanies him to some of these meetings to learn about autism and talk with other family members about strategies to understand and support her son. However, she explains to me that she prefers not to attend as often. In part, because scheduled activities sometimes coincide with his job responsibilities or other occupations; But the main reason for him not attending these events with Fabián is because he wants him to create his friendships, a different and independent environment from family relationships.

The Colombian Autism League has a monthly schedule that posts on social networks and shares via email to those registered for its newsletter. The programming is also publicized in universities and libraries, inviting all those who want to participate. Fabián follows this schedule and monthly organizes his time and schedule the activities that he plans to attend.

Fabián is recognized by the neurotypical volunteers of The Colombian Autistic League as a friendly and talkative person. One of the most striking characteristics is Fabian's ability to talk about autism as he experiences it. Although Fabian sometimes cannot find the words to accurately express his discomfort. It is easy for him to mention when he feels different and what particular things affect his mood and even suggest what other people can do to make me feel more comfortable. This ability is recognized above all by the volunteers of the League, young psychology students who participate as caregivers in leisure activities. The volunteers also point out that Fabian is a person who easily empathizes with other autistic young people, even those who are not verbal. On some occasions, they also highlight that Fabián, more than a young participant, could be a caregiver in these types of spaces precisely because his life experience and his ability to understand and accompany autistic people can generate personalized and very useful support.

The League, and the university's *Reasonable Adjustments* program, have allowed him to meet different people interested in autism. I met Fabián thanks to a psychologist who is part of that program, and she helped me spread the invitation to carry out interviews necessary for my research. The day we met Fabián, he conducted an interview for the university's media network, precisely to tell about his experience as an autistic student and the possible best in the university's inclusion and social justice programs.

This interview led the Bogotá news channel, called Canal Capital, to include Fabián in a series of reports on life in Bogotá, diversity, and disability. In those interviews, they collect the testimony of Fabián and his mother. There they tell some of the stories that have been told in this thesis.

Fabián dedicates his afternoons to activism. After 12:00 pm, Fabián schedules any interview proposal for a media outlet or for people like me who are interested in learning and doing research. The afternoons that he is not in the Colombian Autism League and has no obligations, he looks for another space like the Indigenous Council of Bosa, where he learns about the history and the

present of the Muisca community in Bogotá. There he has had the opportunity to organize talks on autism and meet roundtables on participatory budgeting and disability organized by the city hall.

Fabian finishes his afternoon activities between 6:00 pm and 6:30 pm. Depending on where he is in the city. Fabian returns home a little before 7:30 pm because he knows that at that time, most of the stores in the neighborhood begin to close, and the streets become lonely and dark. In a city like Bogotá, dark streets at night are synonymous with danger. Fabián also returns at that time to spend time chatting and watching television and having dinner with his family just before reading or studying for at least an hour and then going to sleep.

CHAPTER 4. NIGHT

4.1 Rubén Camilo Night

Rubén Camilo's night begins at 5:45 pm. At this time and after a short break at home, he goes to a nearby neighborhood called Morocco. There he takes classes from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, every night of the week. These classes are aimed at adults who, for various reasons, did not finish high school. These are classes taught by district teachers to groups of 15 students. These classes are designed for people to complete high school in two years, unlike the average colleges where teenagers have to study for six years. This accelerated education model is called cycle baccalaureate. Each cycle is equivalent to one school year, and throughout the year, adults see three cycles, for a total of six cycles in the two years.

Rubén Camilo has been attending this evening class for one year. Although, when he was a child, he did formal education until the eighth grade, after talking about it with his family, he decided to start high school from cycle one (equivalent to the first year of high school) to review content and train his skills as a student again. Rubén Camilo was withdrawn from formal education and entered a school with special education aimed at disabled youth more than 13 years ago.

Our parents for years were looking for opportunities to educate Camilo. They have enrolled him in classes at the National Learning Service (SENA), an institution that offers free courses and offers technical training programs in different areas. Rubén Camilo has attended English, leather goods, and bakery workshops, but he has not been able to access technical education because he does not have his formal high school diploma.

Our parents have also tried to link him to different high school degrees in extra-age programs, but due to the diagnosis of autism, and because Rubén Camilo is over 25 years old, it was not possible to find a place in those programs. On the other hand, they managed to find special education offers focused on teaching crafts and physical activity. They think that these skills are essential and recognize that Rubén Camilo has a great affinity for cooking. Still, they are convinced that Rubén Camilo has the skills to finish an average formal education.

At the beginning of 2018, my parents accompanied Rubén Camilo to a high school registration day by cycles at the same community center where he attends bakery and fast-food classes. There they made the registration to clarify that Rubén Camilo has a diagnosis of mild autism. It is possible that he needs support in specific explanations throughout the development of the topics of the classes. My parents made this clarification looking for the teacher to empathize with him in case of difficulty and for him to also exercise a caregiver role in case there is any misunderstanding or difficulty not only in the topics of the class, but in the relationship between classmates.

At the time of registration, my parents and Rubén Camilo received guidance regarding the schedules, classes, and materials needed for each activity. On the starting day, however, Rubén Camilo was returned early. He came home with a note that said that he would not be assigned to that group but to one that was mainly aimed at disabled people. On that note, they reported that my parents had to wait for a call from a mayor's office, and they would be given more information about the quota and when to start activities. Several days passed and the call never came. My parents approached the community center and sought to speak with the coordinator of the cycle education program. The conclusion of the conversation was that the places for adult education were already packed and that there were not enough disabled people enrolled, so a different group would not be opened for them.

The response was frustrating both for our parents and for Rubén Camilo. When it was announced that there was a possibility for him to start studying formal education, there was some nervousness, especially in him. Rubén Camilo likes to study, but he feels anxious at the idea of meeting new teachers and classmates just in this educational context. He tells me that he does not like to be scolded or not patient with him when he seeks to understand something. In addition, at that time, Rubén Camilo had an established routine with the store and at home in his nights that consisted of organizing merchandise in the windows, preparing dinner, supporting my mother if there are liquor sales, and emptying the garbage cans the days when the collector car passed. At that time for Rubén Camilo, leaving these duties, which for years has been his responsibility at home, meant a significant concern. Very dismayed, he asked who would carry out these activities in his absence. As a solution and to calm down, he organized a scheme to distribute tasks so that those activities were not forgotten. This he did while sitting chatting with the family. On that occasion, our brothers, our parents, and I participated in several talks explaining to him what the dynamics of

the classes would be, and we told him that he could count on our support for the development of activities and tasks. In general, we offered our support in case of any kind of difficulty. As a family, we sought to give him the necessary security so that he could attend his classes with confidence and without fear. For this reason, when the cycle baccalaureate program denied the participation of Rubén Camilo in the group of “regular students” and did not link him to a group with “disabled people”, there was a general feeling of annoyance and frustration in the family. Rubén Camilo asked for several days if we could talk to the teachers and request a new place. The enthusiasm of Rubén Camilo, at that time, motivated a series of calls from different institutions and asked among acquaintances if anyone knew of possible places where they could admit him to finish his high school. Finally, a social worker close to the family gave us a list of nearby institutions where they had training programs for adults over 30 years of age and also for the literacy of older adults over 60 years of age. The vocation of inclusion of these programs and of the teachers sowed expectation within Rubén Camilo and his family.

During the first semester of 2018, my brothers contacted the coordinators of the list of options, and finally, Rubén Camilo managed to be linked to the baccalaureate program by cycles. From the beginning, the teachers were aware of Rubén Camilo's disability diagnosis. To have a better understanding, they gave him an assessment of basic knowledge in biology, mathematics, reading comprehension, and writing. The fact that the teachers at this institute decided to diagnose Rubén's abilities without focusing solely on the medical diagnosis of autism was something the family celebrated. The diagnosis allowed us to see in which areas he should be supported and having knowledge of Rubén Camilo's disability provided tools so that teachers could have a better interaction with him since mid-2018 Rubén Camilo has spent the first hours of the night in this place. According to him, it is a space that he likes a lot, and in general, the support of teachers and classmates has been fundamental in this enjoyment of the classes.

Rubén Camilo is meticulous. He carries a notebook and a pencil case with colored pens to organize everything he writes. In addition, he bought folders to keep the guides of each class according to date, subject, and even some in alphabetical order. He has an exclusive folder for drawings of the different subjects. He also has two notebooks, one for class notes and one for draft assignments. For Rubén Camilo, it is very important that his writings remain without misspelling, without stains or corrections. That is why he first writes the tasks in his notebook, where he organizes the notes

of the books he consults or the mathematical procedures, the questions that we as siblings or my parents solve to help him, and conclusions or paraphrasing of what he understands about each thematic written in your words.

The process of doing the homework in the draft and then moving it to a final document takes a long time. He sometimes works half an hour after he gets home from class, and many mornings he alternates taking care of the store in the morning with his academic responsibilities. He also usually works on Saturdays in these activities. The final document of his tasks is made on white sheets, and they are also kept in folders indicated by subject, subject, and dates.

Rubén Camilo, following dinner immediately returns after his classes. After this, he takes a short break and works on his homework, and then right at 11:00 pm he turns on the computer and watches YouTube videos. At that moment, and for half an hour, he watches Mexican programs, old television commercials that no longer appear on television, or music videos, especially of tropical music from the 70s and 80s. He usually spends time on the computer every night from Tuesday to Friday.

On Mondays and Fridays, at that same time, he uses the computer to read aloud various topics that are interesting to him. He sometimes reads travel literature novels, like "Gulliver's Travels" or "The Little Prince." Most of the time, he reads geography books that describe towns in Colombia or countries around the world. He enjoys looking at maps and detailed information for many places. From time to time, and using his smartphone, he reads the news. In this space for reading aloud, he usually asks someone to accompany him, to chat about what he has read, and analyze some expressions or words. Sometimes my mom or dad accompanies him, and sometimes even from a distance and through video calls, I am with him. After this, Rubén Camilo goes to sleep.

4.2 Thinking about for tomorrow

The future of Rubén Camilo is something that causes concern in the family. The main objective, even observing his rigorousness and his enjoyment in his classes, is that he finishes his high school and thus can access much more formal education in the areas in which he has an interest. Our parents dream that Rubén Camilo will one day be a professional in the kitchen and can work in that area.

Our parents express to me their concern about the future of Rubén Camilo, who will support him and if he will continue to experience situations of rejection and danger associated with his autism condition. They are adults in their early 70s and often think about what things will be like the day they pass away. The first concern is the material life of Rubén Camilo if he will be able to continue managing the family store even when our mother is not there to support him. Although Rubén Camilo has acquired many skills and has responsible management of the store, he has to deal with people who seek to confuse him with the accounts or the prices of things. Rubén Camilo has strategies such as taking an inventory of everything he sells or having a written record of the prices of the items. He has learned to deal with those situations, but in others, our mother has had to intercede to avoid altercations or fights in disagreements in the store.

Rubén Camilo would like in the future to have a bakery and fast-food business where he could apply everything, he has learned so far. He would like to finish his baccalaureate soon and, after that to dedicate his time to cooking classes and learning English.

Rubén Camilo would like to travel a lot. He would like to know different parts of Colombia, such as the ones he consults in the books. He usually clarifies to me that he would only like to travel and be visiting. He would not want to live outside of Bogotá.

Our siblings, while sharing some of my parents' concerns, have observed that a lot has changed in the way people generally understand autism in recent years. In the first place, years ago, that word was not mentioned. Today there are television campaigns to talk about cognitive disability. There are inclusive education programs specially designed for children in the city's schools. They feel that these are different times and that in the future, it will be easier to find suitable options so that Rubén Camilo can continue studying and opportunities to have a stable and well-paid job.

Our brothers and our parents consider that Rubén Camilo is a very independent young man and increasingly sociable thanks to his work serving people in the store and in the numerous activities in which he participates. Although he will need supports, they feel that he has all the skills to be an autonomous person. They emphasize the helpful and supportive qualities of Rubén Camilo. Just as the family supports him, he also cares for the family. In general, there is a feeling that Rubén Camilo requires support, but that does not create a relationship of dependency in him. It is instead a relationship of interdependence where as a family, we take care of and support each other.

4.3 Fabián Night

Fabian returns home after having a study day in the morning and an afternoon dedicated to activities around autism and his role as an activist for the rights of autistic people. Fabián feels that his mornings, taking classes at the university, are lonely spaces. He likes to be alone to concentrate. He does not like to chat in class and prefers to save his questions to the *Reasonable Adjustments* program. Fabián considers the afternoon to be the social moment of his day, of being independent and growing in his training as a lawyer and being in contact with autistic people.

At night, Fabián dedicates himself to being with his family. Doña Piedad and Don Ismael return home at 6:00 pm after their working hours. Humberto, Fabián's brother, returns around 7:00 pm. Once they are home, Fabián's parents prepare dinner, almost always a meat or chicken broth or rice with vegetables. The family waits for Fabián to return, and they have dinner together once he is home.

Fabian's parents prepare dinner while listening to the 7:00 pm news. The family usually dines at 8:00 pm. At that time, the television is turned off, and for an hour, they talk about how their day went. It is a conversation almost always moderated by Don Ismael. He asks his children how their day went. He sometimes waits a few seconds for one of them to decide to answer, or sometimes he directs the question directly to Fabián or Humberto.

When Fabián answers, he counts in detail, mentioning the exact hours and the names of the people he saw that day. Fabián begins by commenting on how he went on his way to the university, if there were traffic jams or, on the contrary, it was a quick trip. He also tells whether he arrived at the university sooner or later and whether he argued that day with some of the security guards when he came to the university. He then talks about the classes he had in the day and summarizes the central themes in a few sentences. Fabián talks in much more detail about the counseling in the *Reasonable Adjustments* program, at which point he mentions the names of the psychologist who treated him and the law colleague who advised his learning. He then points out if he met with his classmates to do group work or if he studied independently. Fabián also talks about the activities of the Colombian Autism League or the Bosa council in which he participated in the afternoon.

Although it is a linear, organized, and very precise story, Fabián narrates it in a relaxed and fluent way. Fabián's parents and even his brother ask him and detail the activities he did that day.

Humberto is the one who asks the most if his brother traveled standing or sitting. He also asks him how he felt throughout the day if there was any space of discomfort if someone mistreated him if he argued with someone. Humberto also asks him if he liked his class and what kind of leisure activities, they did in the Colombian Autism League. For this, he asks you to show him photos. Humberto knows that Fabián often takes pictures and selfies of the events he attends. Humberto listens and observes the routine that Fabián tells.

Humberto, on one occasion, told me that, in the tone of his voice and the face of his face, you could see if Fabián is relaxing and calm or, on the contrary, he feels annoyed, even if Fabián's story, at first glance, does not emphasize bad things. Since he was a child, Humberto has known that Fabián does not usually complain easily. When some situation bothers him, he constantly keeps quiet and frowns continuously, and his hands get shaky. If Fabián has these expressions and does not want to tell what is bothering him or how bad has happened to him, it is necessary to create a trusted space so that Fabián can express himself. Humberto knows that he should speak to him in a very calm way. He should never raise his voice or ask in a holy way what happened. Not asking or showing excessive concern or disturbance would cause Fabián to withdraw to his room or turn on the television and turn up the volume to avoid talking about the subject.

Humberto tells me that when Fabián is uncomfortable about a situation, you have to be very patient. Give space for silences, and ask several times why Fabian is frowning. Sometimes you have to ask him to repeat the story, just that moment when something did not go so well, and to detail in the people who were there and Fabian how he interacted with them. Humberto emphasizes that it is almost like a puzzle to discover and understand these types of situations. Usually, at night and in those family conversations, the difficult moments of tension, sadness, and rejection that Fabián has experienced throughout his life came to light.

At night, Fabián also emphasizes the things he likes to do and his activities for the next day. In the middle of dinner, and even afterward, when they sit down to watch television together, Fabián talks about his future. The night on many occasions, is also the time to plan for the short and long term.

Fabián imagines finishing his university degree in three or four years. When he graduates, he would like to do a specialization or master's degree in human rights, focusing on inclusion. There

is a master's degree in inclusion and social justice in Colombia, and Fabián is very interested in these programs. He has even taken some classes through agreements and electives that the university allows. Fabián imagines himself as a consolidated professional, working in a law firm or in an institution such as the Bogotá Mayor's Office or an NGO whose work is focused on vulnerable populations.

Fabian also imagines his future with his family, in a bigger house with pets and plants. He dreams of traveling through Colombia and tells me that in the short term, he would like to take his mother to see the train of the savannah, a tourist attraction that runs through different towns in the near north of the city. Fabian also would like to know Europe, especially Greece and the Mediterranean Sea.

Doña Pilar and Don Ismael imagine Fabián as a leader, a young man who helps many Colombians to understand in greater depth what autism is all about and that people do not see it as a disease. They imagine Fabian as an independent person but surrounded by other people besides his family. In that sense, they believe that Fabián has managed to adapt very well in the city, has strengthened his social circle, and has met people who teach him and support him in developing his professional life.

Doña Pilar told me that she imagines that Fabián, who has expressed interest in women, has a stable partner and also a family (with some shame, Doña asks me not to ask Fabián or other members of her family about this topic is because it is something that Fabián only talks to his mother).

In general, Fabian and his family feel that Colombia has shown a drastic transformation around the understanding of disability and autism. They think that now there is much more knowledge and many more tools for people to know what autism is and not be discouraged by medical diagnoses that emphasize peoples' limitations. They think that other young people in Colombia will have more understanding from their families and educators. However, they believe that it is a work in progress. It is necessary to talk much more about autism, especially in remote parts of Colombia and indigenous communities. Beyond the diagnosis, Doña Piedad and Don Ismael believe that it is essential to clarify that a different child, a disabled young person, is not synonymous with limitation. Think of communities like Pijao or the indigenous nations of

Colombia where disability is a little-explored taboo subject. However, they believe that the sense of togetherness and integration in these communities is a positive aspect that can facilitate the growth and social development of autistic people.

CONCLUSIONS

This ethnographic project explored the experiences of three autistic adults and their families. Using sensory ethnography and anthropological approaches to the everyday, I described their routines and shared their life stories and understanding of autism. I emphasized how autism and its experience are intertwined with daily activities and future possibilities. In focusing on three stories of autistic adults and their families from three different regions in Colombia, I pointed out diverse experiences and strategies adopted by families and autistic adults in challenging situations. I also showed the ways autistic adults and their families navigate through life, and what are strategies to address possible difficulties.

It is important to note, the three stories presented throughout this thesis do not seek to be generalizing or totalizing experiences of what life is like for autistic adults and their families in Colombia. Although there are common experiences between families and autistic adults interviewed, it is not possible to say that all autistic people are the same. Autism is often described as a spectrum of possibilities for world perception and social behavior. I suggest that ethnographic work, as explored in this thesis, is essential to understanding the lives of autistic people. Further, I suggest that this type of work will allow the creation of different supports, both for autistic people and their families and caregivers – and help to make a more inclusive society overall.

Families were a key part of this research project. As it was discussed in the three cases presented here, most of the families and relatives encountered the concept of autism or disability once they noticed that their relative acted in some way different. Before that, the families had not heard the concepts or terms of autism or disability, much less were they prepared to assume the care and support of their disabled family member. Many families are overwhelmed with that first encounter with disability in Colombia, often not aware that disability causes many adults to suffer discrimination, isolation, and abuse.

It is important to note that the relationships presented in this thesis are not meant to fully represent all the urban, rural or indigenous families with a disabled relative. In a country as diverse as Colombia, the experiences of families intersect with other social factors, such as the war that greatly affects the rurality of the country, or the circles of poverty and inequality that impacts more

than 70% of Colombians (MinSalud 2019). These realities need to be taken into consideration alongside local violence or family violence, for example. Thousands of disabled people do not have the same support as the autistic adults who were interviewed for this thesis.

In addition to autistic adults and their families, I interviewed several caregivers in order to better understand services, programs, and initiatives in Colombia. Colombia is a country with a welfare system under construction (Ministry of Health and Social Protection 2019). Services dedicated to the care and support of disabled people are scarce, and most training programs and integration to life in society are designed for children and young people. Adults, on the other hand, are barely attended to in the public sector. While addressed by various private sector initiatives that have great intentions, but ultimately are difficult for people of lower socioeconomic status to access due to their cost and location.

In the caregivers' opinions, most of the private initiatives available in Colombia are focused on creating inviting spaces for older adults, where the learning of arts and crafts is emphasized for eventual entrepreneurial businesses in the future, or simply as occupational therapy for disabled people. Caregivers refer to these places as places of rest, sometimes seen as nurseries or rest centers for adults with cognitive disabilities, but not as places of true deep training in aspects deeper than the crafts they learn, nor do they see them as places that promote social inclusion, the development of an independent or interdependent life (Garland-Thomson 2002).

When discussing interdependent living, I draw from a disability approach which emphasizes that all disabled and non-disabled people depend on social relationships for the development of their lives. All people require support, help at certain times in life, and all people are capable of learning and sharing knowledge regardless of their physical or mental condition. The interdependence approach emphasizes the need to break a hierarchical relationship between disabled and non-disabled people. In addition, it emphasizes overcoming the idea of help and support in a single way and superiority, generally from non-disabled people to disabled people. In other words, in these relationships of help and support, it is possible to conceive that two people will be the beneficiaries, two people who shared their knowledge and two people who strengthened their social ties, generating part and part learning, without individuality or autonomy and agency of neither of the two is violated.

The work of these care centers is important insofar as it generates occupation and welcome spaces for disabled adults, and seek to prevent isolation or boredom due to lack of activities or eventual mistreatment that disabled adults could suffer in some of their homes. However, in the words of some of the caregivers interviewed, these care centers are a social bubble where disabled people are isolated from society in general. In this sense, these care centers in Colombia are places designated exclusively for disabled people and do not encourage interaction with people considered neurotypical or not disabled.

In Colombia, no popularized caregiver service, no systems of support and no training places exist that have an inclusive approach. This includes services or systems for disabled adults or adults with mild to profound cognitive disabilities. There also does not exist an extended support service that focuses on the development of skills for independent living. Current services do not encourage interaction between disabled and non-disabled people. Primary support thus continues to be families, and the process of accompanying care and interaction falls mainly on parents and siblings.

In this way, this thesis begins to explore the multiple dimensions and intersections of disability in Colombia. I would like to continue this work by working with autistic adults and their families to examine how people with cognitive disabilities have been victims of the war in Colombia, of the internal armed conflict that has affected the country for more than 60 years. There are reports that indicate how the war has generated physical and emotional disabilities in people (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2018), but there is no clear indication of how physical or cognitive disability has been a factor of vulnerability that has involved disabled people in the dynamics and the national armed conflict.

There is so much more to discuss from this work, such as the joy, pleasure, and connectivity between and among autistic adults, their families, and their networks that came out in this research. These experiences contrast with the dominant literature and stereotypes, which often portray autistic adults in an emotionally impoverished way. I also showed the ways in which autistic adults and people within families, organizations, or programs continue to deal with aspects of society that are not yet very inclusive. Sensory ethnography and anthropology of the everyday continue to be an important approach to reveal and explore these dynamics – and what

they mean for people at different moments and across their lives. The current COVID-19 pandemic and unfolding of unrest in Colombia makes it difficult to conclude this work. Instead, I offer these possibilities for future inquiry and a promise to dedicate my future to continuing to examine these issues.

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