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Tensions of organisational identity in transition from illegitimacy to legitimacy: a perspective from the Colombian peace process

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Introduction

Identity has been a major research area in organisational studies. During the eighties, the question: “Who we are as an organisation?” (Albert and Whetten, 1985, p. 33) opened a continuous flow of research connecting identity and organisations. The study of identity in organisations has led to the concept of identity work (Kreiner et al., 2006; Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2015). Identity work research has two main focuses: identity work focus on the individual and organisational identity work. On the one hand, individual identity work refers to identity construction process, how people define themselves in organisations in an interactive and ongoing way (Brown, 2015; Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). On the other hand, organisational identity work involves the social construction of a dynamic process of creating, maintaining and changing organisational identity (Hatch and Schultz, 2002; Kreiner et al., 2015). The majority of studies of identity work have been focused on the individual (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kreiner et al., 2006; Brown, 2017; Harvey et al., 2017), suggesting that organisational identity work need a deeper understanding. Recently, Fachin and Langley (2015) and Kreiner et al. (2015) concept of tensions of organisational identity has suggested that organisational identity is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by internal and external tensions at different scales. However, most of studies on identity work have been focused on an assumption of a legitimate identity and how to become legitimate, obscuring the potential contribution from the position of illegitimacy. Therefore, this paper examines organisational identity work in the transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy.

Our case provides a rich context to analyse tensions of organisational identity of illegitimate bodies. We focus our empirical analysis on the recent peace process between the Colombian government and the so-called Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the oldest guerrilla of Latin America and one of the oldest in the world. FARC transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy has been represented as tensions that have formed their organisational identity. Although this strategic change began in 2011, FARC organisational identity tensions have roots in the past that come from decades and even centuries, which have needed a content and historical approach to grasp such tensions. Consequently, this study is guided by the following questions: How does tensions of organisational identity work manifest in organization transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy? What are the observable consequences?

The negotiation between the Colombian government and FARC included the agreement validation by the citizens through a referendum. The unexpected results of the referendum raised new tensions in and around Colombian government and FARC in order to succeed in their efforts to reach a peace agreement and FARC transit from armed to political struggle. The purpose of this paper is to exemplify how internal, external and in between tensions make sense of organisational identity work in transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy, and how the various stakeholders dealt with the unexpected results derived from such tensions.

The paper is structured as follows. The following two sections illustrate the processual aspect of organizational identity and how legitimacy is important for organisational identity work. The method section describes the content analysis and historical approach we did during this qualitative research as well as introduces the case context and prologue. Results show internal and external tensions of organisational identity identified. Discussion deals with dynamics of legitimacy and illegitimacy in organisational identity work, and extends our knowledge of organisational identity, comparing results with previous research. Conclusions make sense of contributions, limitations, and further research.

Theoretical orientation

Identity scholars have enlarged organizational identity focused on it as a constant construction process. In their review of organizational identities, Hatch and Schultz (2002) describe identity as “a dynamic set of processes by which an organization’s self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organization offered by all organizational stakeholders.” The following empirical cases illustrate processual aspects of organizational identity.

Johnson (2012) refers to organizational identity as threefold continuous activity: what it is, how it should behave, and what it should look like. In their study of sustainability initiatives in 10 US botanical gardens, the author found that local setting and cognitive culture affect organizational identity processes, and defined organizational identity work as “a critical process in the creation and assertion of personal meaning in the face of organizational change” (p. 278), considering identity as a constant subject of assessment, particularly relevant in strategic change.

Knapp et al. (2013) studied organizational identity by interviewing 44 individuals in four family businesses focused on the dynamic border between family and business. The authors identified 13 identity work tactics in both domains; describing these tactics through the use of gerunds, such as adapting (managerial style), emphasizing (boundaries), being (open), aligning (values) and extending (family). None of these tactics are static, all of them require action, and require change depending on the situation.

Fachin and Langley (2015) described tensions of organisational identity that happen among the founders and among the members into a technology start-up focused on the development of open source hardware for the medical sector. The authors identified three types of organisational identity work: ideological work, practice work and boundary work. Ideological work represents the historical importance of identity work, i.e. what an organisation has been, is and wants to be in the future, which shows the ongoing process of organisational identity work. Practice work, refers to the discourse used by individuals to create, sustain or discontinue some activities related to the organisational identity, which in addition shows that organisational identity is construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. Boundary work, related to who is in and who is out into the organisational boundaries, which is also a dynamic process. These three different patterns of organisational identity are in constant tensions from which organisational identity emerges.

Kreiner et al. (2015) focused on organisational identity tensions in the Episcopal Church, as they elected their first openly gay bishop. Their 10-year study, which involved 72 semi-structured interviews, observations and documentary analysis, developed the concept of organisational identity elasticity as “the socially constructed tensions that simultaneously stretch identity while holding it together, akin to the boundaries of a balloon or rubber band expanding and contracting” (p. 982). Through this push and pull of elasticity, the authors represent the constant process of organisational identity construction.

Wang et al. (2016) analysed online severe devaluation reviews posted on Tripadvisor in a 10-year period. The paper reveals how customers challenge organisational identity through their comments, even if organisations are certified through the evaluation of experts or sector authorities. Mismatches between internal and external stakeholders, and between customers and sector authorities represents organisational identity tensions and the increasing participation of external stakeholders in organisational identity.

In all these examples there is often an implied assumption that actually we are constructing identity of a legitimate kind. This however ignores the possibilities of illegitimate identities. This is not to say that there are not studies on illegitimate identities, certainly there are a few recently that have started to look at mismatch from political outcomes and citizens Christian identity (Hudson, 2016); and illegitimate identity of plus-size fashion industry as their offers are not aligned to customers identity projects (Zanette, 2016). But, by large, most studies tend to focus on legitimate identities or how to gain legitimacy rather than consider illegitimate identities. Therefore, we may argue that in the case of an illegitimate organisation in its transition to legitimacy, or certain degree of legitimacy, organisational identity is highly influenced by internal and external tensions at different scales. The following section explores relations between legitimacy and organisational identity.

Legitimacy and organisational identity work

The previous section showed organisational identity work as an ongoing processes as well as internal and external tensions. This section explores how legitimacy has been considered into organisational studies, and consequently how it is related to organisational identity work.

Organisations seek for legitimacy. Clegg et al. (2007) suggest that organisational identity begins to form into a wider context, known as sector or industry; and among this established and legitimated order organisations identify their similarities and differences, through which they build their own identity. So, the following approaches to legitimacy make sense of how does legitimacy manifest in organisations and contribute to understand the natural link between legitimacy and organisational identity work.

One of the first approaches to legitimacy was managerial legitimacy, initially conceived as the right of managers to give orders (McNulty 1975); it has turned to employees' view of managerial actions (Yoon and Thye 2011). In a study with 320 respondents from 56 work teams in Korea in the industry of electric and electronic supplies for home appliances, Yoon and Thye (2011) found that managerial legitimacy is a threefold process of social validation: endorsement by team members, propriety by managers, and authorization by higher management. This initial legitimacy analyses legitimacy at the interior of organisations, but most of approaches to legitimacy considers a higher influence from external forces.

External stakeholders influence in legitimacy comes from socio-political legitimacy. Mitra (2009) studied how organisations seek credentials to obtain socio-political legitimacy from their organisational identity. Through the analysis of five ICT firms in the UK, the author describes socio-political legitimacy as the acceptance of new ventures by the general public and key stakeholders, which are those who require from the new ventures products and services. The author argue that capabilities and competencies that organisations acquire in their first years are closely related to the resources available where the firm is based, which involves a constant flux between the firm and the external stakeholders around it. These constant interactions between organisations and externals construct socio-political legitimacy.

Cognitive legitimacy moves in between internal and external stakeholders. Bridwell-Mitchell and Mezas (2012) consider cognitive legitimacy as the meaning of organizational activities, i.e. how organizations make sense of the activities they do. The authors argue that cognitive legitimacy is based on organisational identity, as the activities the organisation do define its identity as such. However, cognitive legitimacy and organisational identity work become problematic in times of strategic change, as new activities require from a match between managers image of future and employees image of present. So, the authors argue that communication strategy to internal stakeholders comes before external validation, despite external validation is needed for a sophisticated process of cognitive legitimacy known as prestige building (Mittiness et al. 2013).

Another perspective of legitimacy in organisations, and likely the most studied, is moral legitimacy, as it is associated to corporate responsibility (Lewis et al. 2016), i.e. “doing good while making a profit” (p. 594). The authors, who analysed moral legitimacy in four sectors (chemicals, vehicle parts, pharmaceutical, and utilities) of Fortune 500 firms, mention that moral legitimacy has an external emphasis, as it reflects an evaluation of organisation activities. Richards et al. 2017 studied moral legitimacy at coffee, tea, and chocolate industries in European and American firms. The authors argue that in such industries moral legitimacy is hard to get as those workers are subject to hazardous conditions and eventually extreme illegitimate practices such as child slavery. So, organisations seek for obtain certifications in order to show they have moral practices, and consequently moral legitimacy.

Above references to legitimacy give us a sense of a close connection between legitimacy and identity; as Díez-Martín et al. (2018) affirm in their compilation of studies on organisational

legitimacy, organisations identity survival depend on legitimacy achieve, not as a static achievement, but as a continuous process. We have chosen these perspectives of legitimacy as they show a natural connection between legitimacy and organisational identity work. Moreover, these perspectives also show that certain kind of assessment, internal and external, is necessary to gain legitimacy. Suddaby et al. (2017) review of legitimacy proposes three ways to assess legitimacy: property, process, and perception.

Legitimacy as property means that legitimacy can be gained, acquired, accumulated, increased, restored or lost (Suddaby et al. 2017); so, illegitimacy would be the absence or a negligible amount of legitimacy, if we had units to measure it. As we have no units of legitimacy, scholars use a relative measure, i.e. organisational legitimacy is measured against other organisations. This emulation among organisations lead to the concept of isomorphism, which means that in order to gain legitimacy, some organisations emulate others, adopting standards, regulations, characteristics and practices. The emulated organisations are those that are leaders in the industry, those who seem to have a recipe for success. Suddaby et al. (2017) findings suggest that organisational attachment to regulations from government, professional associations, an even the general public influence notoriously in the firm survival.

Legitimacy as process is the constant construction and deconstruction of legitimacy, so the proper words are legitimation and legitimizing, meaning a constant flux of legitimacy and illegitimacy (Suddaby et al. 2017). If we relate legitimacy as process to legitimacy as property, we could make a metaphor of organisational legitimacy as a tank with some evacuation windows. As a property, the tank needs to be filled with enough amounts of legitimacy to be recognised as such, i.e. to reach a threshold from which legitimacy begins to be recognised. Organisational legitimacy may involve processes of complying with certain bodies of knowledge requirements, fulfil government rules and requisites, or obtain some relevant certification. However, Suddaby et al. (2017) note that legitimacy processes tend to work as a U-shaped curve, so legitimacy reach a tipping point, and then legitimacy properties reduced due to cultural, political, technological or social changes until they disappear or eventually become illegitimate, so the threshold is lost by the evacuation windows and require new processes to become legitimate once again.

Legitimacy as perception is mainly individual; legitimacy as well as illegitimacy “resides in the eye of the beholder” (Asforth and Gibbs 1990, p. 177). So, we can see a substantial

difference between legitimacy as process and legitimacy as perception. While legitimacy as process relates to organisational identity, legitimacy as perception focuses on individual identity; however the sum of individual perceptions makes the collective, and may represent the collective thought. Suddaby et al. (2017) suggest that perceptions of legitimacy do not come from personal analysis; on the contrary, perceptions come from influences in social groups, social media, and traditional media. The authors also argue that people falsify their perception if they are pressed by rewards or sanctions in order to go with the mainstream.

In this paper we focus on legitimacy as process and legitimacy as perception. From legitimacy as process, transition of FARC from armed to political struggle is a process as such, a process that has not ended yet, and has been subject to considerable questionings. Regarding legitimacy as perception, legitimacy tensions have been moderated by perceptions of powerful actors which have influenced individual perceptions of citizens, as Colombian government called for a referendum to validate the final document of the peace agreement with FARC. So, the next section describes how we identified legitimacy tensions that moderated organisational identity of FARC along their path from illegitimacy to legitimacy.

Method

Research design

We did a qualitative content analysis with a historical approach of a six-year period (2011-2017) in which FARC transited from being a terrorist group to becoming a political party. Historical analysis has the capacity to reveal phenomena that explain particular behaviours over a period of time (Novicevic et al., 2011). Likewise, Suddaby et al. (2017) consider historical methods as a novel approach that could extend our understanding of legitimacy in new ways: “it is often only through the distance of time that we can objectively assess legitimating phenomenon” (p.59).

To make sense of internal and external tensions of FARC organisational identity work, we analysed near 400 archives and thousands of posts in social media that came from a wide spectrum of sources. Official history has been consulted into the Congress and Central Bank libraries, as well as the Presidential office archive and the documents gathered at the Colombian National Centre for Historical Memory. Non-official history has been consulted from documents captured to FARC before their reintegration process and their current online media. We have selected papers and books published by right and left wing authors. We have

analysed national and international reports on Colombian conflict as well as national and international media and websites. Artworks also have revealed emergent voices from citizens; and series of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter posts have contributed to grasp the voices of citizens. Data collected is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data collected

Type	Number of contents	Rationale for selection
Official documents	27	To identify the government positions
Reports	61	To check the local and international analyses
Papers	76	To understand the theoretical background
Books	14	To have a wider view of the case
Art works	23	To identify emergent voices
News	68	To make sense of the milestones
Websites	37	To complement non-official data

The criteria to search into the sources were the different perceptions, concepts and visions of FARC organisational identity since 2010, when Colombian government began the first approaches to the peace dialogues. Consequently, terms such as Colombian peace process, Colombian government, and negotiations with FARC were considered. We looked from individuals and organisations inside and outside the Colombian government. It is important to note that all of these participants come from the legitimate side, not only because we have decided to take this point of view, but because the voices from FARC have been mostly silent. In addition, because we argue that organisational identity work, as is assessed by externals, is more ascribed by external entities than described by the entity as such. The knowledge about the sources, particularly the Colombian sources; and which authors represent the different positions into the case study come from the experience of one of the authors, which has been in the Colombian government during 23 years. When we looked at participants between these tensions we consulted mostly on influential voices; we define our meaning for influential voices in Table 2.

Table 2. Criterion for influential voices

1	First or second level at the executive, legislative or judiciary power in Colombia
2	Official voices from foreign governments or acknowledged international organisms
3	Academic publications
4	National and international reports

5	Members of government in the negotiation dialogues
6	Mass media (National newspapers, national magazines, international media)
7	Journalists and celebrities with more than 1 million followers in Twitter

Case background

Our study focuses on the recent peace agreement between Colombian government and FARC during the period 2012-2016. To make sense of this peace process in which FARC has been transiting from illegitimacy to some legitimacy after a 50-year conflict, it is necessary to make a brief description of why this group emerged, how they developed and what failed in previous negotiations.

Since the times of independence in Colombia, after three centuries of Spanish Catholic rule (1510-1810), majority of lands have been in hands of a few minority, which has caused several confrontations since then (Banrep, 2015). Violence increase since 1948 liberal leader Jorge Gaitán was killed. Revolts throughout the country against establishment facilitated the emergence of self-organized groups of peasants known as ‘independent republics’, influenced by communist ideals (Kingsley, 2014). After two failed negotiations, a military solution with the US support displaced rebel survivors to jungle (Stokes 2005). So, FARC emerged as a peasant guerrilla in 1964, inspired by the triumphs of Chinese and Cuban revolutions (Molano 2000) arguing to fight for the underdog. In their beginnings they were financed by the Soviet Union through the clandestine communist party, receiving financing and training (Leonard, 2006). In seventies, FARC established a hierarchical structure and expanded surreptitiously throughout Colombia in areas with scarce state presence (Wüstholtz 2011).

Since eighties FARC involved in drug trafficking, boosting their finances and military capabilities they used to defy the power of the state (Dudley 2004). At the beginning of nineties, the conservative government reached a peace agreement with FARC, but their leaders at their political party they created “The patriotic union” were killed by right-wing extreme groups (Giraldo 1999). So FARC returned to armed struggle and increased their attacks to military bases, kidnappings, and other actions that turned society against them (Jiménez 2014). During 1999-2001 Colombian government cleared 42.000 km² for negotiations, which FARC used for retaining kidnapped, increase their power, as they contemplated to seizure of power by arms (Padilla 2010). After twin towers attack, FARC were declared as a terrorists group at the same level of Al-Qaeda (Room 2001). This

declaration facilitated US military support to Colombia with helicopter night attack and other capabilities, which contributed to reduce FARC (Pastrana 1999). The insurgent group responded with desperate attacks that further reduced their scarce legitimacy (Neira 2002).

In 2008 FARC lost majority of their power. On the international stage, conditions of FARC kidnapped were compared to Nazi concentration camps (Minutouno, 2008). In Colombian society, over six million people marched against FARC called through a Facebook group (Morales, 2008). Inside of FARC, the founder of the group, aka Tirofijo, died from a heart attack. In the military campaign, second in command was killed, and their most famous kidnapped rescued by the army (Dombret, 2009). However, although FARC was significantly diminished in military and political terms, they conserved around ten thousand combatants, financial power from drug dealing and presence throughout the territory (IISS, 2011). FARC realised they would never defeat the state militarily, and their leaders were dying. If FARC wanted to survive and fight for their ideals, they would need to continue the struggle in the political arena, not through the arms. It was the moment for serious negotiation with Colombian government.

Case prologue

Although case background makes sense of the good moment to initiate of dialogues, the first internal tension emerged, doors were closed. On the side of closed door were organisations and actors which consider FARC organisational identity as a terrorist group, which only could choose between jail or death. A study of FARC relations with Venezuela regime describe Colombian government official position regarding this group: “The FARC is considered a terrorist group because it kidnaps, indiscriminately places bombs, attacks villages disregarding their inhabitants, forces the recruitment of children as a practice to maintain their numbers, and places landmines in any rural area” (Padilla 2010, Colombian Army senior officer). Some national organisations and actors pulled in the same direction. Pure Democratic Centre, a right wing party declares in their manifesto: “FARC are terrorists rather than politically-motivated guerrillas. This, it is said, closes the possibility for peace talks because there is nothing to negotiate with terrorists except the terms of surrender” (Taken from International Crisis Group organisation website 2012); others relied on military forces capabilities to defeat FARC completely and force them to surrender their willing to fight: “the vast majority in Colombia hope the State submit FARC militarily” [translated from Spanish] (Berrio 2012, Colombian Academic). So these examples deny any recognition

to FARC and identify this organisation as a terrorists group, closing doors to their transit to political struggle.

On the side of open door were those organisations and actors that more than recognise FARC struggle as legitimate, identify FARC as a guerrilla organisation with extended military capabilities and expansion throughout the country that makes military solution neither feasible, nor practical. The director of 'School of peace culture' from the University of Barcelona argues "It does not make any sense to hide the existence of an armed conflict, and the realistic thing is that FARC won't be eliminated only through military action" [translated from Spanish] (Fisas 2010). Likewise, a study of Colombian military offensive revealed that continuation of military struggle was nonsense: "The FARC is far from destroyed and likely possesses the military capacity to continue its armed struggle indefinitely" (Rochlin 2010, international military expert). Other similar studies concluded that military solution was not viable: "While the FARC is certainly fractured and immobilized, continuing military-centric policies are highly unlikely to permanently eliminate the insurgent threat" (Day 2011, American academic). So, in spite of accusations of terrorism, it seemed to be that the rational way to conclude this 50-year conflict was through negotiation, and FARC organisational identity described as a guerrilla that confront Colombian state instead of a terrorist group.

So, FARC transition to legitimacy began on the 5th May 2011 with a single declaration of Colombian president, Juan Manuel Santos: "There has been an armed conflict in this country since a long time ago" [translated from Spanish] (Santos, 2011). This short sentence opened the door for potential dialogues and the beginning of FARC transition to legitimacy. The word conflict instead of the term "terrorist threat", widely used in the past decade to designate FARC, gave them the necessary bit of legitimacy to facilitate a dialogue and allowed government delegates to make the first approaches. Nevertheless the tension persisted: "Because their merciless trampling of the rules of war, the existence acceptance of an armed conflict at the country does not imply in any way the recognition of belligerence status to FARC" [translated from Spanish] (Pizarro 2011, Board representative of trust fund for victims of the International Criminal Court).

Results

This section presents some tensions of organisational identity we identified along the case. We divided such tensions threefold: internal tensions, external tensions, and tensions between

internal and external forces. First, internal tensions are those that happen at the level of the Colombian government as an organisation, which also involved forces among Colombian establishment. As political forces around government may change, this is not a closed border; on the contrary, it is a blurry one. Second, external tensions, which involve a variety of stakeholders: foreign governments involved in the process, international organisms, media, academia, international reports, but especially Colombian society. Tensions among citizens were more relevant as the Colombia government called for a referendum to endorse the agreement. Third, internal and external tensions, as we distinguish organisational identity work as a continuous process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of internal and external tensions at different scales.

Internal tensions

In February 2012 was the first meeting between the delegations of government and FARC; in the six following months the delegations studied what have worked and what have not in the previous negotiations (ElEspectador, 2012, Colombian newspaper). On 26th August 2012 the delegations signed a six-point negotiation agenda: comprehensive rural reform, FARC political participation, end of conflict, end of drug trade, compensation of victims, and the agreement endorsement mechanism (Jaramillo, et al., 2012, negotiating teams report). Nothing outside of this agenda would be discussed in the negotiation. We focused on the second the second point of the agenda, FARC political participation, as this point involves the transit from armed to political struggle. , and is the closest to organisational identity work. We have touched some part of the other points in the agenda as they are part of a whole agreement and sometimes overlap among them.

Since the Colombian government open the door to dialogues, the legitimacy of the agreement has been continuously questioned. To exemplify internal tensions of FARC organisational identity since the point of view of Colombian government, we captured multiple quotes among Colombian political establishment, some of them observable in Table 3. On the one hand is the group of forces that criticize the dialogues as illegitimate and continue pointing FARC as mere criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists. On the other hand, the forces that recognise the necessity to transform FARC weapon struggle to a political struggle.

In 2013, Colombian government and FARC reached the agreement in terms of political participation. The text agreed explained the need “to expand, modernize and strengthen our democracy to make it stronger, more participative, and more pluralistic” [translated from Spanish] (Jaramillo, 2013, negotiating teams report). Opposition forces did not agree to this attempt to open democracy and questioned process legitimacy: “President Santos denies impunity, but offer political eligibility to FARC, drug dealers, children criminals, kidnappers” (Uribe, 2013. President of Colombia 2002-2006 and 2006-2010).

In 2014, a year of presidential elections, politics temperature increased, and organisational identity work turned to individual identity work. On the one hand, the president was looking for his second period of mandate. On the other hand, the former president Alvaro Uribe, the main voice of FARC as terrorists. As Uribe had a constitutional restriction to run for presidency again, he named a pupil who had been his Ministry of Treasure, Oscar Zuluaga. The main point between both candidates was to continue with the peace dialogue door open, or to close the door and confront FARC militarily. In April 2014, the office of the high commissioner for peace released a brochure with a message of hope: “Break the link between politics and weapons forever and re-establish a basic rule of society: let no one resort to arms to promote their political ideas” (Jaramillo, 2014). The other discourse was the same as ever: “The indifference of the president @juanmansantos and cowardice of FARC will never lead us to achieve a just peace for Colombia” (Zuluaga, 2014, ex-candidate Colombia presidency 2014-2018). Colombian voters chose to continue with Santos endeavours to achieve peace, letting him to govern another four years.

In 2015, the adjustments to the final agreement increased tensions of FARC identity. On the side of the official position of Colombian government, FARC political participation was clear: “The National Government considers that political participation of FARC members is fundamental because this is the main purpose of the negotiation process” (Cristo, 2015, Colombian Home Secretary). However, legitimacy of the process lost the support from ex-president Andrés Pastrana, who had led the last negotiation process with FARC (1999-2002). In his open letter, the ex-president manifested: “I cannot, as a citizen or as an ex-president of the Republic, write a blank check for a hasty clandestine agreement whose known sketches cast a shadow of doubt on the survival of the fundamental separation of powers and the constitutional order” (Pastrana, 2015, president of Colombia 1998-2002). This questioning and resignation from such a figure undermined the legitimacy of the process.

Table 3. Examples of internal organisational identity tensions (inside Colombian establishment) 2010-2016 [translated from Spanish]

Internal forces inside Colombian establishment that contributed to legitimize FARC transit from armed to political struggle	Year	Internal forces inside Colombian establishment that contributed to delegitimize FARC transit from armed to political struggle
“I have said it and I repeat it: it is possible to have a Colombia in peace, a Colombia without guerrilla, and we’ll demonstrate it” (Juan M. Santos, President of Colombia 2010-2014 and 2014-2018. 2010 presidential possession speech)	2010	“The bandits of the FARC are terrorists. They will not have political status, nor they will ever have a belligerent status” (Germán Vargas, Vice-President of Colombia period 2014-2018. Twitter account @German_Vargas, 2 Mar 2010)
“There has been an armed conflict in this country since a long time ago” (Juan M. Santos, President of Colombia 2010-2014 and 2014-2018. Declaration after a security council, 4 May 2011)	2011	“Terrorists do not meet the requirements for belligerence status, why do they (the government) open the door for them?” (Alvaro Uribe, President of Colombia 2002-2006 and 2006-2010. Twitter account @AlvaroUribeVel, 4 May 2011)
“The issue is to agree an agenda for the termination of the conflict that allows the FARC to present their ideas without the accompaniment of the weapons, and with full guarantees for their transformation into an unarmed political force” (Humberto de la Calle, Chief of Colombian government delegation. Speech on the national government in the installation of the dialogues, 10 Aug 2012)	2012	“The statements of FARC show that it is not possible to believe them. FARC are drug traffickers and kidnappers” (Oscar I. Zuluaga, right-wing ex-presidential candidate 2014-2018. Twitter account @OIZuluaga, 7 Sep 2012)
“To achieve a solid peace it is necessary to expand, modernize and strengthen our democracy to make it stronger, more participative, more pluralistic” (Negotiating team of Colombian government, partial agreement on FARC political participation, 9 Nov 2013)	2013	“President Santos denies impunity, but offer political eligibility to FARC, drug dealers, children criminals, kidnappers” (Alvaro Uribe, President of Colombia 2002-2006 and 2006-2010. Twitter account @AlvaroUribeVel, 4 Apr 2013)
“Break the link between politics and weapons forever and re-establish a basic rule of society: let no one resort to arms to promote their political ideas” (High commissioner for peace, taken from the booklet: “Everything you should know about the peace process, 1 Apr 2014)	2014	“FARC is an organization that attacks and offends the Colombian people, every terrorist act gets the rejection of Colombia” (Juan C. Pinzon, Defence Secretary. Ministry of Defence Twitter account @mindefensa, 22 Nov 2014)
“The National Government considers that political participation of FARC members is fundamental because this is the main purpose of the negotiation process” (Juan F. Cristo, Home Secretary. Declarations supporting FARC political participation, 9 Nov 2015)	2015	“I cannot, as a citizen or as an ex-president of the Republic, write a blank check for a hasty clandestine agreement whose known sketches cast a shadow of doubt on the survival of the fundamental separation of powers and the constitutional order” (Andrés Pastrana, President of Colombia 1998-2002. Letter of resignation to the peace commission, 15 Oct 2015)
“The Agreement on “Political Participation: Democratic Openness to Build Peace” is a necessary condition to guarantee a sustainable process of reincorporation of the FARC-EP into civilian life in the political sphere” (Juan M. Santos, President of Colombia 2010-2014 and 2014-2018, and Rodrigo Londoño, FARC leader. Text on the final agreement, 24 Nov 2016)	2016	“The referendum that will serve to validate the peace agreements with the FARC, approved the day before by the justice, is illegitimate” (Alvaro Uribe, President of Colombia 2002-2006 and 2006-2010. Declarations on radio broadcast “The hour of the truth”, 19 Jul 2016)

On August 2016 the parts finally agreed the full document of the peace agreement according to the established agenda (DelaCalle, 2016, Chief of negotiations government team). The mission was to communicate the agreement to citizens for their endorsement in October 2016. A few days later, the constitutional court approved the referendum; anyway former president Uribe alleged illegitimacy: “The referendum that will serve to validate the peace agreements with the FARC, approved the day before by the justice, is illegitimate” (Uribe, 2016, president of Colombia 2002-2006 and 2006-2010). In addition, an unexpected fragmentation occurred at the very core of Colombian government. The successful task of Humberto de la Calle, chief of the Colombian government delegation during the peace agreements, listed him as a potential successor of Santos in 2018. However, the vice-president of Santos, German Vargas was in the same run; so, he decided separate from the campaign in favour of the referendum. President Santos had to say publicly to Vargas: “Devote to push this vote, the most important for Colombia, the YES to the referendum” (Santos, 2016); this day, media cameras captured a forced smile on vice-president and non-applause (Caracol, 2016, Colombian media). So, Uribe, opposition and Vargas relaxation contributed for the unexpected NO winning by a percentage of 50,2% who voted for the NO against 49,8 who voted for the YES (Colombian electoral council, 2016).

Santos acknowledged his defeat, but announced he would persevere his endeavours to reach the peace. The president invited the opposition to discuss their suggestions to amend the peace agreement (infopresidencia, 2016). Uribe claimed his victory: “Defend the victory of the NO that avoided the substitution of the constitution by 297 pages agreed with the FARC” [translated from Spanish] (Uribe, 2016). A series of meetings with the leaders of the opposition modified the initial agreement that was endorsed this time, not by a new referendum, but through the government majorities into the Congress. The president acknowledged he had learned his lesson (Santos, 2016).

In August 2017, after several political and legislative manoeuvres, FARC constituted as a political party. They conserved the acronym FARC, but they changed their meaning; now they are not anymore Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, now they are Revolutionary Alternative Force of the Commons; attempting to return to their origins political ideals of representing the underdog (RCN, 2016, Colombian media). On January 2018, FARC leader, Rodrigo Londoño, aka Timochenko, launch his candidacy for President of Colombia. Everything seemed to be flowing positively for FARC, however their legitimacy was far from

being legitimate by democracies biggest force, the people. During all this long process from illegitimacy to legitimacy, and armed to political struggle, we have been discussing about internal tensions at the Colombian political establishment. External tensions have also an extreme relevant role and interact with internal tensions. We discuss these tensions in the following subsection.

External tensions

First external tensions in the Colombian peace process came from abroad. In August 2012, two days after the agenda of the negotiations agreed between Colombian government, European Union: “I warmly welcome the announcement by President Santos on the launch of peace negotiations with the FARC. It has always been the conviction of the European Union that only a negotiated solution can provide the basis for lasting peace in Colombia” (Ashton, 2012, EU delegate for Foreign Affairs). The next day, the US followed: “we would, of course, welcome any efforts to end the hemisphere longest-running conflict and to bring about lasting peace in Colombia” (Nuland, 2012, spokeswoman for the US state department). This support was ambiguous; in spite of both declarations and conflict acknowledgement, FARC remained in the list of terrorists from both EU and US.

In general terms, international community has been a strong force in favour of the peace process. During negotiations held in Havana-Cuba, delegations of neighbour countries (Venezuela, Ecuador, Chile, Peru) and Norway (due to their experience in peace processes) accompanied the negotiation in different moments (CEPAL, 2014, Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean). When the parts signed the final document of the peace agreement, international recognition manifested through the presence of the UN Secretary, presidents of 15 nations, 27 foreign ministers and 10 directives of international organisations (ElTiempo, 2016, Colombian newspaper). Despite the unexpected results of the referendum on 2nd October 2018, in which Colombian people rejected the agreements, the international community kept their support. Four days later, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos (Nobelprize, 2016); the president would say: “The Nobel Prize was the ‘stern wind’ that pushed us to reach our destination: the port of the peace” (RCN, 2016, Colombian media). The own leaders of FARC recognised such indispensable support for their survival: “a commander of the FARC said: ‘It is only due to the international community’s support that the peace process has been sustained so far.’” (Mortensen, 2017, American reporter of alternative news).

However, not all international community has been supportive. Even in 2015, when political transition had been agreed, some FARC perceptions were even worse than ISIS: “When we talk about indiscriminate killings, ISIS fall short comparing to FARC” (Wall Street Journal, 2015, international report). Other people, self-claimed as international experts went further: “If the #USA doesn't deal with FARC NOW, it will soon have a powerful ally of #Iran & #Hezbollah in its backyard” (Bula, 2017, international relations expert). Despite some criticisms, during all the period of FARC transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy, the international community support has been a strong force that has contributed to give FARC a political legitimate space.

Looking to reports from international organisms and academy, tensions of FARC organisational identity remain similar. On the side of legitimacy, some historians and journalists have recognised FARC struggle as legitimate arguing they have assumed the role of the State in isolated areas of Colombia: “in especially impoverished areas of the country, the FARC represents the only pseudo-government system with which the local residents have any contact” (COHA, 2010, leftists US NGO). This perception is attached to two concepts: state abandon and concentration of land tenancy in oligarchy. The state abandon in isolated areas of Colombian geography facilitated FARC spread throughout the country: “young recruits came from very bad situations and regarded the FARC as a superior option to their former abuse and exploitation” (Lee, 2011, American academic)”. Parallel, land tenancy in oligarchy hands has been the main claim of FARC: “Colombia has historically been a country which suffers from huge levels of inequality, where vast swathes of land are owned by a very small elite” (BBCNews 2016). So, in spite of their series of crimes, defenders of FARC claim their actions have been supported in political and historical motives.

On the side of illegitimacy, international organisations, news, and reports, make sense of FARC as a criminal group not committed to any political programme, and who only wants power for their own benefit: “The FARC rely heavily on the use of weapons forbidden by international humanitarian law, including anti- personnel mines and unexploded munitions, causing indiscriminate killings of civilians as well as security forces” (Philip Alston, 2010, Human Rights Council, United Nations). In addition to their crimes, perception of FARC has been deeply attached to drug trafficking: “The FARC earns as much as 654 million pounds a year from the production and sale of cocaine in Colombia and undoubtedly is involved in

trafficking of the narcotic to international markets” (Helen Murphy and Luis J. Acosta, Reuters journalists). Table 4 exemplifies tensions of FARC organisational identity along their transit from armed to political struggle.

At the level of Colombian society, the beginning of dialogues received approval from citizens: “The polling agency Gallup reported that around 60 percent of Colombians welcome the upcoming talks” (DW, 2012, international media). Entrepreneurs were supportive: “research on the attitudes of Colombian businesspeople have identified that they are interested in the peace process and supporting the economic reintegration of ex-combatants” (Nussio and Howe 2012). Other sectors criticized the advances along the process: “Law of lands is a buried way of expropriation to be managed by FARC” [translated from Spanish] (Pérez, 2016, Catholic leader). In any case, majorities rejected FARC political participation: “80 percent of Colombians do not want any political participation of the #FARC leaders” (The Stream, 2015, international press freedom organisation).

At the interior of Colombian society, the most interesting period, when tensions most emerged was since 24 August 2016, when the government released the final document to public opinion, until the 2 October 2016, when Colombian citizens voted at the referendum. We described two examples to show how tensions increase with discourses.

The first example happened only two days before the referendum. At a popular square in the centre of the historic and touristic city of Cartagena, a group of people gathered to perform an ancestral celebration in support of the peace agreements. The people drew a circle and a six-point star, danced around the circle and made a kind of yoga exercises. The popular Christian pastor Miguel Arrázola commented on Facebook: “They are giving the country to the devil” (Arrázola, 2016), even more: “A peace with satanic rites is nothing more than an attempt to mock Jesus, the prince of peace” (Arrázola, 2016), while confusing the six-point star with the five-point star, sometimes used for satanic rites. This is not just another comment; catholic Spanish rule formed Colombian identity during three centuries (1510-1810). Although since 1991 constitution Colombia is a secular country, more than 90% of population remain Christian. It is fair to say that religious leaders promoted the vote for the NO and also for the YES to the peace agreement: “Promoters of both campaigns have wanted to filter into those powerful pulpits from which almost order the vote to the parishioners” (El Espectador, 2016, Colombian national newspaper).

The second example is a message in Twitter from Jose F. Lafaurie, a conservative politician who was vice-minister of agriculture and currently works as president of the cattle breeders' federation: "International left at the service of FARC. Communists are united to elect Timochenko as the new national hero" (Lafaurie 2016). Communism became the enemy, not only after WWII, but after Colombian participation in the Korean War, as Colombia was the only country in Latin America that supported the US against the 'communism threat' (Cano, 1953). The idea of victory and pride, created an anti-communist spirit at multiple levels of Colombian society.

Although it is fair to say that majority of Colombians wanted to finish this 50-year conflict, the fears from religion and change in the traditional political and economic model contributed to the victory of NO in the referendum. The government amended the agreement somehow and endorsed it again through the congress, and FARC political party named their leader as presidential candidate for 2018 elections (El Espectador 2018, Colombian newspaper); however, Colombians rejected FARC identity as a political party; in the cities and towns they began their campaign were overwhelmingly rejected by common citizens (Sanchez, 2018, journalist France24). In the city of Armenia, the departmental capital from which FARC leader came from, aka Timochenko was booed and some of the political party flags were burned (ElColombiano, 2018, regional newspaper).

Therefore, only two months after FARC entrance into the race for Colombian presidency, the new party renounced to participate in the presidential campaign (BBCNews 2016). On the front stage, FARC alleged health issues of their leader, aka Timochenko (Caracol 2018, Colombian TV media); on the back stage, multiple mass protests wherever they attempt to campaign showed them their legitimacy is still far from the eyes of the citizens (Casey 2018, New York Times reporter). International analysis confirmed the long path to legitimacy: "In August (2017), before the FARC became a political party, 84% of Colombians had a negative view of it and just 12% a favourable one" (Bello, 2017, TheEconomist reporter).

In the following section we examine how these tensions of organisational identity work relates with previous research and discuss the contributions we make to research on identity and legitimacy.

Table 4. Examples of external organisational identity tensions (outside Colombian establishment) 2010-2016

External forces outside Colombian establishment that contributed to <i>legitimize</i> FARC transit from armed to political struggle	Year	External forces outside Colombian establishment that contributed to <i>delegitimize</i> FARC transit from armed to political struggle
“Farmers do not receive anything but meagre benefits from the Colombian government, and like many others in especially impoverished areas of the country, the FARC represents the only pseudo-government system with which the local residents have any contact” (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, leftist Washington, D.C.-based non-governmental organization founded in 1975)	2010	“The FARC rely heavily on the use of weapons forbidden by international humanitarian law, including anti- personnel mines and unexploded munitions, causing indiscriminate killings of civilians as well as security forces” (Philip Alston, Human Rights Council, United Nations)
“Many of the young recruits came from very bad situations and regarded the FARC as a superior option to their former abuse and exploitation” (Chris Lee, American academic. Latin American Perspectives)	2011	“FARC are the biggest drug cartel in the world. They profit somehow from the whole chain of cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of illicit drugs” [translated from Spanish] (Colprensa, archival compilation website from Colombian news)
“FARC maintains a political dimension and they cannot be simply reduced to narco-terrorists, as government officials have often referred to them” (E. Nussio and K. Howe, Swiss and American academics. International Journal of Security and Development)	2012	“What kind of peace does the government and FARC have in mind, what kind of peace are they negotiating, while they continue to massacre defenceless members of our communities?” (Nils Naumann. Reporter Deutsche Welle. Interview extract)
“From their military discipline, their speech, their urban militias, and their international action, all the acts of the FARC have had a political intention” [translated from Spanish] (Alvaro Forero, CEO Colombian ONG Leadership and Democracy. Opinion column)	2013	“The FARC earns as much as 654 million pounds a year from the production and sale of cocaine in Colombia and undoubtedly is involved in trafficking of the narcotic to international markets” (Helen Murphy and Luis J. Acosta, Reuters journalists)
“The topic of dealing with the possible political participation of the FARC and guarantees for the political opposition was approved by negotiators” (Montoya 2014)	2014	“The FARC is considered a drug-running terrorist organisation by the United States and the European Union” (Anastasia Moloney, Thomson Reuters Foundation’s correspondent)
“The government will guarantee the full ‘re-incorporation into civilian life’ of FARC members” (Aguirre 2015)	2015	“After 50 years of warfare, they (Colombian people) see the FARC not as a legitimate representative of marginalized citizens, but as a criminal mafia looking to score amnesty from their drug-trafficking ways” (Cardenas 2015)
“Their main founders were small farmers and land workers who had banded together to fight against the staggering levels of inequality in Colombia at the time” (BBCNews 2016)	2016	“If the #USA doesn't deal with FARC NOW, it will soon have a powerful ally of #Iran & #Hezbollah in its backyard” (Bula, 2017, international relations expert)

Discussion

As the examples in results section illustrate, the transit of FARC from terrorist group to political party is not exactly the transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy. To become legitimate, and to sustain legitimacy seems to be a much longer process that cannot be achieved only by regulations and agreements between two parts, but need the assessment, validation and acknowledgement from externals.

We have confirmed the processual character of organisational identity work. Kreiner et al. (2015) define organisational identity work as: “the cognitive, discursive, and behavioural processes in which individuals engage to create, present, sustain, share, and/or adapt organisational identity”. Although we agree in organisational identity work as a dynamic process of multiple actions, we suggest that individuals not only engage, they also disengage, particularly in the ambiguous transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy. So, when Brown (2015) discuss identity as a construction process, we may say that identity is not only constructed, but also deconstructed and reconstructed, according to the dynamics of tensions. Kreiner et al. (2015) also discuss that contradictions and confrontations of organisational identity generate a constant series of tensions that the authors observe as organisational identity elasticity. We agree with Kreiner et al. (2015) that organisational identity emerges in an environment of tensions and contractions. However, Kreiner et al. (2015) suggest that organisational members are the participants in this elastic process. We add the decisive role of external stakeholders, which have a tremendous influence in organisational identity work, and sometimes a decisive role for organisation survival, coinciding with Tang. et al. (2016) when the authors suggest that organisational identity of hotels may depend more in the revision of the customers than in the certifications of industry authorities. Figure 1 illustrate that tensions happens inside organisations, outside organisations, and also happen inside and outside at the same time.

The differences in direction and length of the double-headed arrows in Figure 1 suggest that tensions are different in their meaning and relevance. We do not mean tensions as problematic; on the contrary, we suggest that organisational identity emerges among tensions. Differentiation among internal tensions, external tensions, and both internal and external tensions, contribute to distinguish participants, identify the opposite forces, and analyse the possible causes and consequences of such tensions.

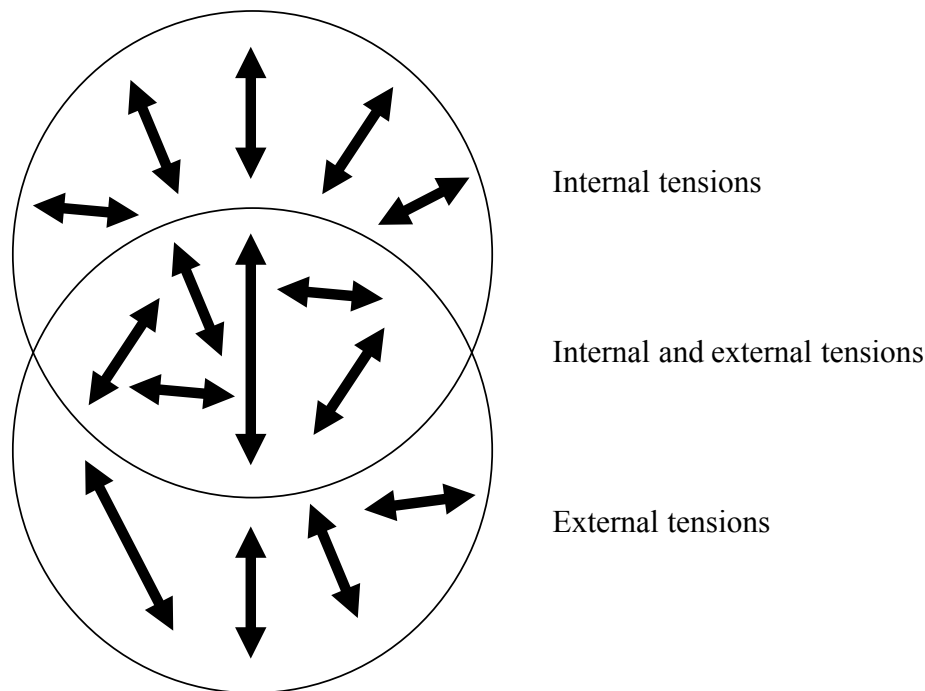


Figure 1. Tensions of organisational identity work

Our results revealed the importance of external stakeholders in organisational identity work; so we can ask: who are the members of organisations? This paper suggests that organisation is too much greater than firm, so organisation also involves external people from the firm. To explain this finding, we build on Fachin and Langley (2015) as they identify three types of organisational identity work: ideological work, practice work and boundary work. First, ideological work was determinant during the legitimisation process as FARC organisational identity as FARC was associated by a substantial proportion of citizens as opposed to Christianity and as communists. So, ideology work is a constant source of tensions of organisational identity that eventually were determinant in the vote of the referendum. As Suddaby et al. (2017) suggest, legitimacy as perception is highly influenced by social groups, especially if people are immersed in a system of rewards and sanctions. Second, practice work was well-applied by opposition into the referendum. FARC organisational identity as drug dealers, children criminals, and kidnappers were terms frequently repeated; so, discourses referred to what kind of activities organisations undertake are also an important source of tensions of organisational identity work. Third is boundary work, where the question of who is in and who is out as well as the idea boundary is ambiguous as results evidenced that tensions happen at the interior of quite different levels, but also among different levels. Based on previous studies from the theoretical orientation section and the

results section, Figure 2 represents tensions that construct, deconstruct and reconstruct organisational identity work.

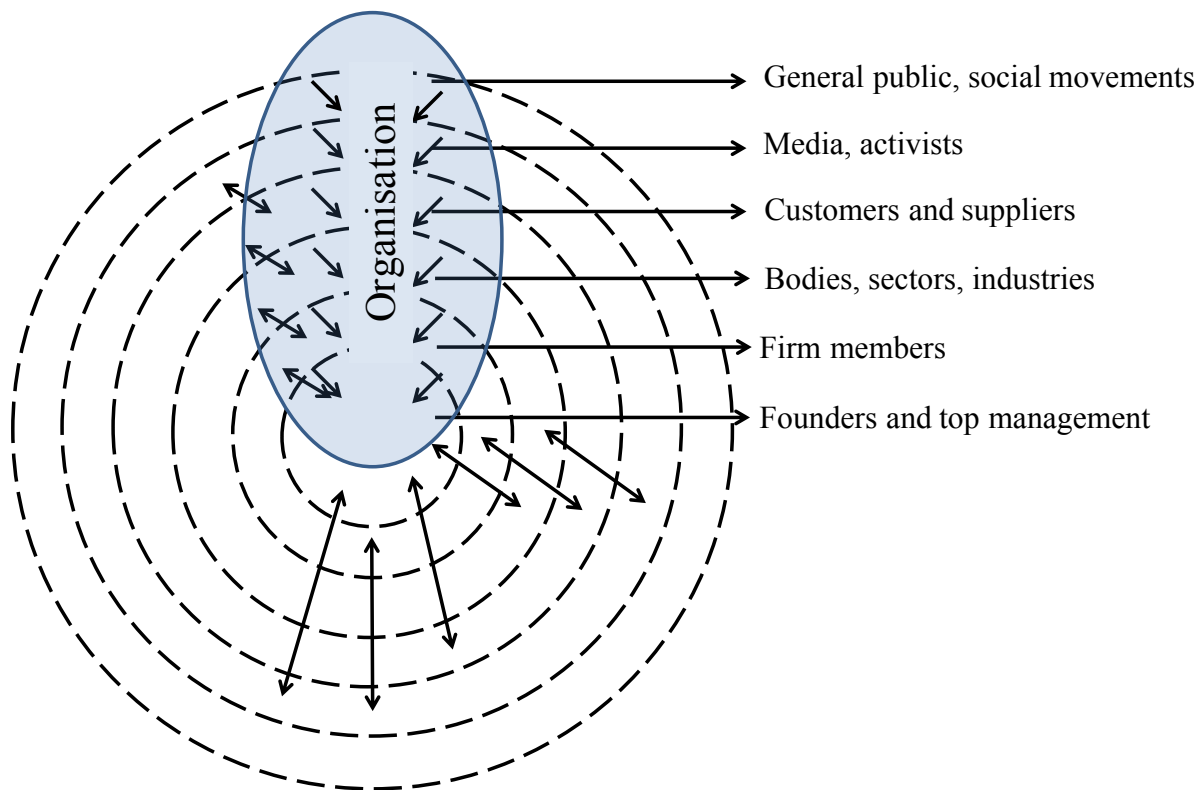


Figure 2. Internal and external tensions of organisational identity work

The arrows with only one tip represent tensions that may happen among two or more participants into the different scales. The double-headed arrows represent the tensions among the different scales. We draw the scales in dashed lines as these scales are not independent, and we could argue, not permanent. The scales are also permeated by the roles of individuals; a founder can be part of a body, or a member can be also an activist, and so on. We draw the oval of organisation covering all the scales, as we argue that organisations not only are much greater than individuals, but also that firms may consider in their organisations participants at the different scales to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct an emergent and temporal organisational identity; as Clegg et al. (2007) indicate: “identity is something that is enacted, performed and (re)negotiated in an ongoing fashion” (p. 509).

We have transferred one important debate of identity work from the individual to the organisational realm. Brown systematic revision of identities and identity work ask if identity is “chosen by or ascribed to individuals” (p. 25). Although we do not underestimate self-

definition and self-construction of organisations inside firms, we insist in our twofold contribution in terms of organisational identity work: first, organisational identity work involve participants at multiple levels; second, organisational identity work need assessment and approval from external stakeholders for the organisation survival.

We also contributed to research on legitimacy in organisational studies. As the vast majority of research part from certain degree of legitimacy in their studies, there is a substantial gap that has been missed, the gap from illegitimacy to certain degree of legitimacy. We may claim that tensions are too much evident when we part from confronted positions that study the transit from illegitimacy to legitimacy. We suggest that organisational action and activity happen when there are tensions. If there are no tensions, very hardly would be new ideas.

Conclusions

Our findings demonstrate that organisational identity work is much more than a process of social construction by members inside a firm. Indeed, we argue that external participants at different scales contribute decisively to organisational identity work, in a construction process, but also in deconstruction and reconstruction. Our focus on tensions of organisational identity work may underlie the processual aspects of organisational identity, especially in turbulent or changing times. Moreover, we argue that the inherent tension and transition between illegitimacy and legitimacy is central to understand identity, as identity, individual or collective is assessed, validated and acknowledged from externals.

Our limitations reside in our quite local story from the Colombia, and our decision to have the point of view from the Colombian government. We took this decision conveniently because the vast majority of the sources come from them, and because one author has been working with the Colombian government for more than 20 years. However, we also decided the position from Colombian government theoretically because along this research we realised that the voice of FARC has been predominantly silent. Although FARC has produced some documents, leaflets, etc. along their history, we mainly know FARC through the voice of the externals to this group.

Previous studies on organisational identity work have started from the position of the legitimate, and they end with the position of the legitimate. This study has started from the position to the illegitimate, covering the gap between illegitimacy and certain initial degree of

legitimacy. Similar research in and around illegitimate organisations or less legitimate organisations may have access of the story from the legitimate side, using a similar approach that we have used in this paper.

We have explored organisational identity work beyond corporation walls. This paper, focused on a government (which is formed by a multitude of organisations, institutions, etc.) as an organisation, contributes to explore organisational identity work at the national level and facilitates to widen the idea of an organisation of something to much greater than the closed context of a singular firm.

To close we could question all the process: Are they in the end really legitimate? Have they genuinely been/become included? Was this process really open? It seems to be that many more steps would require to consider FARC as legitimate by Colombian society and there would be questionings to their cause for decades. We could reflect in perspective the question is if the door should be opened to FARC or should be maintained closed. Hopefully, further research will give the answers of such queries. By the moment it seems to be that Colombia is getting better with this conflict ended and other countries with similar problems are looking what happened in this corner of South America and what we can learn from it.

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