

Remember, Remember the 6th and 7th of November: Colombia 1985 Siege of the Palace of
Justice

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ABSTRACT

Remember, Remember the 6th and 7th of November: Colombia 1985 Siege of the Palace of Justice

Angelica Higuera Silva

In the morning of November 6th in 1985, during an impasse in negotiations with the government of President Belisario Betancur, M-19 guerrillas seized the Palace of Justice and held the entire Colombian Supreme Court hostage. The Army responded by destroying the building. More than a hundred people were killed, as well as eleven civilians- the cafeteria staff and some occasional visitors- who were made to disappear. What is puzzling is that these civilians were safely escorted outside the Palace of Justice, but perhaps because they were witnesses to what had gone on inside, they were made to disappear. The families of these people have struggled for over 25 years to find their loved ones.

During a five month period in 2008 I studied the way in which some Colombians remembered or forgot this traumatic event that touched and changed their lives. It was through the use of methods such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, walkabouts, visits to exhibitions related to forced disappearances and a course I took on "Violence, Memory and History" that I came to know their memories and stories and to understand their struggles for truth and justice.

Furthermore, to guide my understanding I drew upon theories that highlighted the

importance of memory in societies where social trauma occurred, societies in transition from repression to democracy. An extensive interdisciplinary study by Elizabeth Jelin, theories by Mario Amorós, Jorge Mendoza García and Reyes Mata among others, guided this study.

I was able to share in the continuous search process which is followed by the families of the disappeared. A search for truth and justice. However, and most importantly, the families struggle to develop ways to keep from forgetting, they share their stories with those who want to listen, and keep courageously trying to remember what cannot be forgotten.

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Introduction: Themes and Questions

On the 11th June 2010 The National Security Archive¹ declassified documents that implicate Colonel Alfonso Plazas Vega for the events that took place 25 years ago during the retake of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá Colombia, which was seized by rebels of a leftist guerrilla movement, the M-19. In a recently declassified North American embassy report, he was blamed for deaths and disappearances during operations to retake the Palace of Justice in 1985, the building was burned and destroyed.

“...Plazas commanded the November, 1985 raid on the Supreme Court building after it had been taken over by the M-19. That raid resulted in the deaths of more than 70 people, including eleven Supreme Court justices. Soldiers killed a number of M-19 members and suspected collaborators hors de combat, including the Palace’s cafeteria staff.”

National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 319

Few days earlier on the 9th of June 2010 in a 302 page ruling by judge Maria Estela Jara (threatened and now in exile) the ex-Colonel Alfonso Plazas Vega was found guilty of the crime of forced disappearance and condemned to 30 years in prison.

You might be asking: who is this colonel? What happened in 1985 in Colombia, besides Armero²? Why did people disappear? Why was a Palace of Justice burned or destroyed? What was the M-19? Or, you might not be interested in an old conflict of the left insurgency in the Southern Cone nor in the stories of state repression which include “the three by now, well known characters in every dictatorship in Latin America: the rebel the president and the general.” (Carrigan 1993: 5) In any case, the stories of conflict,

¹ An independent non-governmental research institute and library located at The George Washington University, the Archive collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/the__archive.html

² Armero, an entire city disappeared under the lava of a volcano that erupted the 13th of November. 25.000 died as a result.

warfare, repression from the South are not unique, for violence “is not peculiar to a given people or culture; violence is far more ubiquitous and universally human, a dark wellspring of signs which, to be true to ourselves, we must communicate, and also as a force we must hold at bay” (Daniel 1996:9) But, the people who were touched by it all, the cafeteria staff of a Palace of Justice in Latin America, were. They were unique and their stories matter, as all the stories and the memories of people made to disappear.

This ethnography is, therefore, not specifically about forced disappearances in Colombia, as if this particular country was more important or worthy of study than others were this phenomena also occurs. I focus on Colombia because the experience of living amidst constant conflict awoke the questions that I wanted to answer. But, in answering my questions I do not want to perpetuate,

“parochialize ... attribute and limit violence to a particular people and place ... which will tranquilize those of us who live self-congratulatory lives in times and countries apparently free of the kind of violence that has seized Sri Lanka / (Colombia) recently, could lull us into believing that we, our country or our people were above such brutalities.” (Daniel 1996: 7)

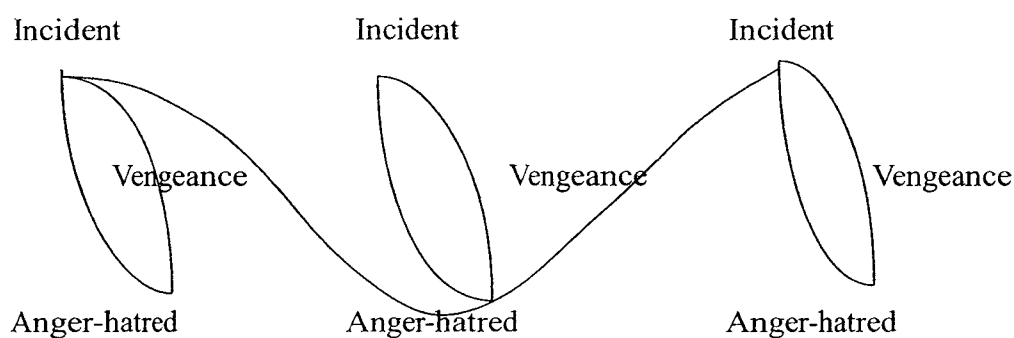
This ethnography instead is about,

Norma Constanza Esguerra, Gloria Stella Lizarazo Figueroa, Luz Mary Portela, Bernardo Beltrán Hernández, Gloria Anzola de Lanao, Ana Rosa Castiblanco, Lucy Amparo Oviedo, Cristina del Pilar Guarín, David Súspez Celis, Irma Franco Pineda, Carlos Rodríguez, and Héctor Jaime Beltrán Cifuentes and their stories. They do not want to be forgotten, they did not want to disappear, and since “forgetting the past would be the second and final victory of the perpetrators, after having already succeeded in destroying the remains of many disappeared.” (Robben 2005: 357) I will remember.

These lines are about lives lost in time and in forced silences, are about lives

remembered and cherished every now and then when it is not too painful to remember, it is about fear, the fear to forget what we do not really want to remember, but know must never be forgotten.

The fieldwork I did in Bogotá, Colombia from July to November 2008, was initially an effort to identify processes of the cycles of violence through the study of memory. I imagined violence followed processes such as traditions, rituals, and commemorations. Particularly, I thought anger, hatred and revenge were part of the legacies that past generations transmitted to new generations. Therefore, I understood violence as a phenomenon that developed in cycles,



I wondered if people, who suffered the disappearance of a loved one, were passing on hatred, anger or past rivalries to their children. I wanted to understand these cycles to understand a culture where violence suffocates the every day and creates a country that is one of the most violent in the world.

I went to Colombia with an objective, with the intention of knowing how Colombians remembered or forgot their past. For this, I chose to study a particular event that took

place on November 6th and 7th back in 1985, when a group of M-19 guerrillas infiltrated the Palace of Justice in Bogotá Colombia, and held the members of the Supreme Court as hostages. The army answered to this attack quickly coming to the Palace armed with tanks and heavy artillery guided among others, by Colonel Plazas Vega. As a result of this confrontation, a mass slaughter and some disappearances occurred. I am particularly focusing on the ways in which, the families of people made to disappear, remember or forget the impact of this sort of violence. The majority of people who disappeared in the Siege of the Palace of Justice, were workers of the cafeteria, some occasional visitors and one guerrilla member. Their disappearance is puzzling since some of them were seen being safely evacuated out of the building (they were caught on tape safely evacuating the premises) which by the end of the Siege was consumed in flames their remains were never found, either in the Palace or out of it.

Initial Research Question

My guiding research question prior to leaving for the field was:

How do Colombians, in their everyday lives, either forget or remember collectively, and how are these practices, affected by the ambiguities caused by violence? Do these ambiguities distort memories in ways in which perpetual cycles of revenge, chaos and terror are allowed to persist, to be passed from one generation to the next? If so, how could these practices be challenged to stop the unending cycles of violence that have ravaged Colombia for more than a century?

I was able to answer this question partially, I did find some ways in which some Colombians remember or forget their shared past, but these processes were not clear or straightforward, the terrain of memory is ambiguous and fragmented, therefore I could not trace the paths in which memory travelled cultivating violence and reinforcing a culture embedded in chaos and constant conflict. I did not account for the agency each

individual had in relation to collective memories. Furthermore, I did not have an accurate theoretical framework that could be applied specifically to the Colombian situation, I worked with Connerton, Pierre Nora, Ricoeur, Halbwachs and Daniel Valentine among other scholars, and even though I used some aspects of each approach, to some extent, I find that the Colombian conflict is older, for example compared to Daniel Valentine's interethnic account of ongoing violence in Sri Lanka (started 1983) and is of a different nature, interethnic. As for Connerton, Ricoeur and Halbwachs the links between memory and violence are (were) not the main focus of their research. However, as I was doing fieldwork I took a course from which I found the theories that I ended up using to guide this research. I found Elizabeth Jelin's theories on memory, Mario Amoros, Mendoza Garcia, Reyes Mata, Nordstrom and Robben who study more in depth dictatorships and periods of repression in Latin America. And even though this work emanates from Latin America, it applies to societies in transition, societies where conflict, dictatorships and wars have ended, societies in route to democracy. Yet, in Colombia we have not had a post-conflict, there is no reconstruction, or transition, Colombia is at war, the conflict is ongoing and democracy is but a façade. Therefore, part of my initial question might remain unanswered due to the lack of a theoretical framework on memory for countries affected by long and ongoing conflicts, and due to the lack of effective, safe methods to research and address the needs of individuals caught in the middle of an armed conflict. ³

³ Initially I thought I had failed to implement an accurate theoretical framework or to implement my methodology, namely the workshops of memory, while doing fieldwork. However, in conversation with Julian Salcedo, I was reminded not only about the ongoing armed conflict and of the difficulties attached to this kind of study, but also about the common inaccuracy of many theories on memory, not because they are flawed, but because they do not apply to the Colombian case where there is not a post-conflict situation. The categories, the processes, the violence, the memories are still raw they permeate the every day, they still belong to the present and not yet to the past. Even if the conflict is almost 60

Methods

I consider the methods used by every anthropologist to be the active component of one's intellectual life project, not only is the methodology used, a way to contribute to the aggrandizement of knowledge, but also it is a way to contribute to the lives we touch, the processes we infiltrate, the universes we disrupt, even if in small ways. I envisioned a methodology that could encompass not only the academic requirements I need to fulfill, but also the responsibilities I felt I had towards people touched by violence, in chapter 2, I will cover in depth the methods I used to write this ethnography. For now, it suffices to explain that I wanted to do workshops of memory, I wanted to combine my methodology with the needs I intuitively adjudicated to my informants. I felt that they needed to be listened to and thought they needed a safe space-time to share their broken past, I felt they needed others to listen and to believe in them. However, I was challenged by various circumstances and by the everyday fear which paralyzed me for a while. I received warnings from professors, friends, family, journalists: "It is not safe, be careful who you ask!" The idea of doing workshops of memory dissipated slowly. Also, I found that similar exercises had been done before by NGO's from Germany, and by the collective of lawyers Jose Alvear Restrepo. Nonetheless, I was able to collect information and stories through different methods, which I also planned using, methods such as interviews, focus groups, participant observation, walkabouts or a collective visit to exhibitions related to the theme of forced disappearance. I was able to find more information guarded under the safety of the academic world, as I mentioned I draw my theoretical framework mainly from the course I took on "Violence Memory and History" taught by a young and very bright professor, Luz Angela Nunez at Javeriana University and also found a way to

years old if we use as a point of reference 1948- El Bogotazo. See 1.3. Colombian Historical Context.

apply my methodology with collaboration of my classmates.

Fieldwork changed, simplified and re-shaped my research question to some extent, no longer was I, alone asking questions, thanks to my informants particularly to Penelope, a young woman in her mid-forties who lost her husband in the Siege of the Palace of Justice, when I shared that I did not want to contact her before, because I felt I had no right to stir her memories, to what she replied: “For me, the more people know the better.” Since then I had less fear of sharing my project, and felt assured that indeed, they wanted to tell and I wanted to listen. I was no longer trying to discover the cumbersome mechanisms of the cycles of violence or looking for a way to stop such cycles. Instead, I understood how important it is to share the memories, even if fragmented, of those who suffered social trauma, those stories that did not make it into the official history. Furthermore, getting closer to my informants, the families of people made to disappear 25 years ago, helped me to see the stratification in which they are somehow categorized as victims. I then perceived another dimension in the study of memories, no longer was I imagining an homogeneous collective, sharing horizontally and equally the past through different processes, for I witnessed what any tourist can see when walking through the streets of Bogotá, a humongous class differentiation among people. Class excludes some people from the processes linked to remembering and forgetting, I will discuss this aspect through my thesis.

Even if there is exclusion there is a major effort in Colombia by academics, politicians, young people, students to deepen the study and importance of memory. Many groups, NGO's, youth, mobilize to make visible the struggles for memory. While doing fieldwork, for example, the week for memory was celebrated with events, conferences,

theatrical representations, commemorations on the street, news paper articles among other expressions this showed me how the importance of reconstructing the collective memory was very much alive in Colombia. However, these processes were taking place in other Latin American countries as well, and it seems to me that it is from Argentina or Chile that many ideas or theories were taken, and then applied to the Colombian case with some success. Yet, as just mentioned, in Colombia there is no transition to democracy, for periods of repression that simulate a dictatorship have never been openly declared, established, only theorized by some scholars. We have not had an Augusto Pinochet or a Jorge Rafael Videla, (later on I will explore Colombian history more deeply and will acknowledge the dictatorship we had with Rojas Pinilla in the 50's, which differs from the dictatorships of the 70's and 80's in the South Cone.) We have had worse political powers in control, an amalgamation of two or three parties, that under the disguise of a democratic state, proceed as dictators, creating the illusion of fairness and transparency in electoral processes, while impunity remains hidden and often democracy is ignored and neglected. We have had periods of repression, under pseudo democracies. Therefore, the disappeared, the political prisoners and dissenters do not exist, what is there to oppose in a peaceful country? Where the president and those in power are fairly elected? No one disappears, no one dies, there is no war, no conflict. Our invisible regimes of impunity, are silent and growing ever stronger. I will explore the models of repression I learned in class in the third chapter, right before the analysis and the memories of the families and other Colombians, this with the purpose of making stronger the memories related to truth and justice, the main two themes that surfaced in this research.

The armed conflict in Colombia highlights the erosion and the continuous destruction of the social fabric, and this can be perceived daily in the ritualization of violence. The conflict permeates the every day, no weapon needs to be fired for fear to be the daily bread, no words need to be spoken for people to hate, to attack, to aggravate one another. Growing up in this culture of distrust and fear and having later lived in a different culture, I wondered why, how, when, who, what allows human beings to constantly destroy the sacredness embedded in the lives of others.

In this ethnography therefore, I will share the memories of some Colombians about the Siege of the Palace of Justice, this will help me answer the question: How do Colombians remember or forget? And how these processes affected by violence perpetuate an armed conflict. But before I will contextualize these memories in space, in time and in the theoretical framework about memory I used to guide my research.

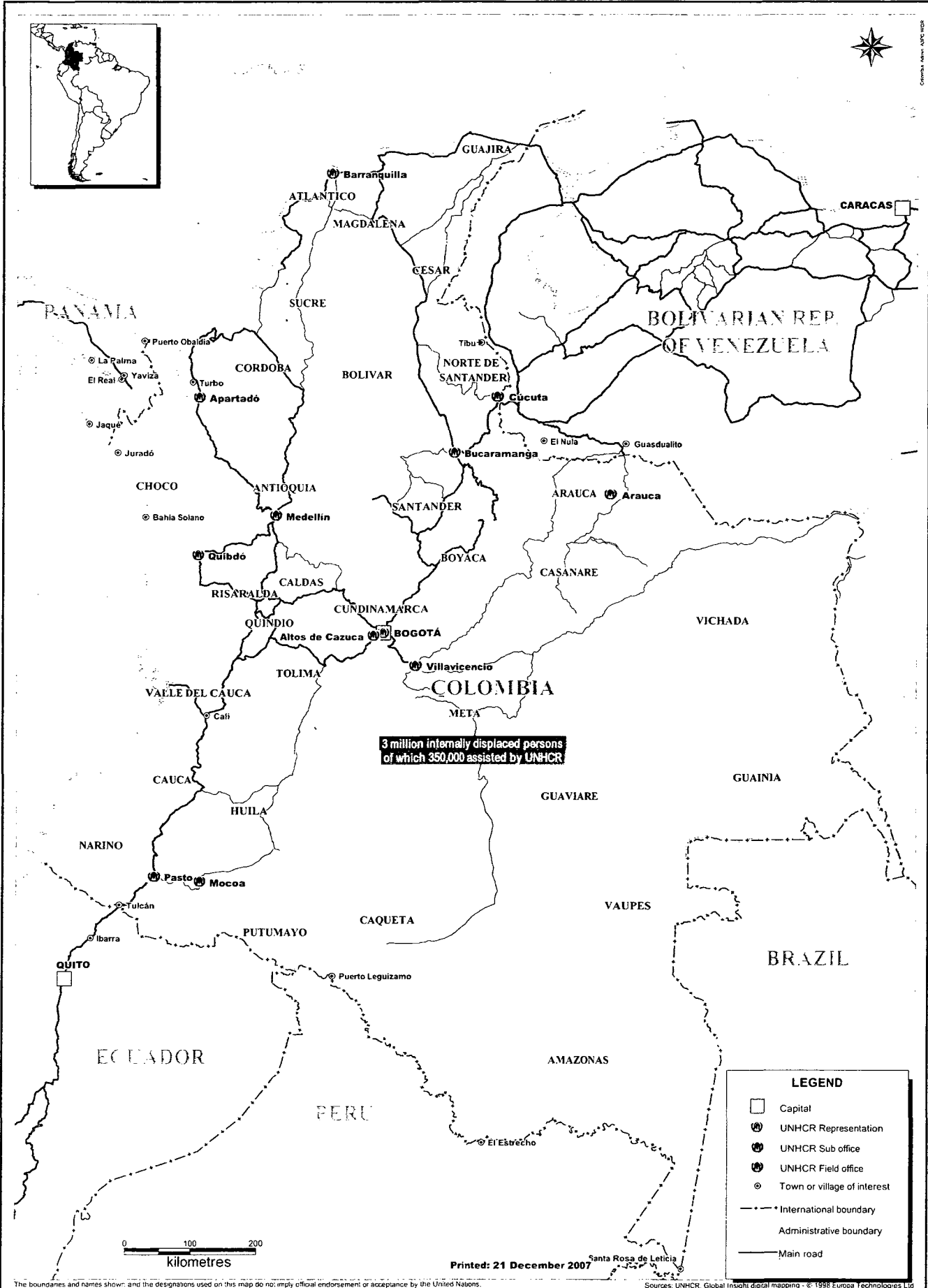
In chapter 1, I will locate Colombia geographically, and will frame the event that I studied within a historical context, exploring briefly what was going on in the world and in Colombia at the time (1985). Particularly, I will explore the dynamics of the social security doctrine, the logic of integral war and internal enemy and the strong importance given to the idea of democracy, all factors influencing the Siege. These ideas will be explored for they were/are used as excuses for the state to take action against citizens that dissent.

Also, I will delve into the history of this particular event, by focusing on the causes and the processes that lead the M-19 rebels, who invaded the Palace of Justice, to act on the 6th and 7th of November 1985. Furthermore, I will explore the reasons for the strong

reaction of the army when countering the attack by the M-19.

I will describe physically and symbolically the Plaza where this event occurred and this is to understand the magnitude of this historical moment for the stories and the memories of those who insist on remembering or those who insist on forgetting, what happened there 25 years ago.

My theoretical framework will follow in Chapter 2. In this framework my attention is given mainly to the social and historical dimensions of memory, for there is a vast literature on the psychological, philosophical and technical dimensions (among others) of memory. In this chapter I will explore the methods that I used to study this event, and the guiding theories that allowed me to further an understanding of the importance of memory when thinking that it is through it, that people ensure their survival and their dignity. Finally in chapter 3, I will share memories of the families of the cafeteria staff and other Colombians and will analyze their needs and the importance attributed to truth and justice in their struggles to remember and to eradicate oblivion.



The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Chapter 1 Context and Background.

1.1. Geography

Colombia is located in the North Western region of South America. It is bordered by Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, the Atlantic Ocean, through the Caribbean Sea; and by Panama and the Pacific Ocean. It is the only country in South America that borders both the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. A singular land that encompasses all the climatic, geological and natural characteristics that are spread over the Latino American continent. (Fougère) This study took place in Bogotá.

1.2. Historical context, Colombia as part of the World

It is important to contextualize the events that occurred the 6th and 7th of November of 1985 in the Palace of Justice, since they did not occur within a historical vacuum or outside the political, economic and social world order.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Latin America was drawn into the dynamics of the Cold War and a democracy in disguise, was an ideal imposed upon many countries.

Paradoxically, “democracy” was reinforced through dictatorships and dictators who adopted the national security doctrine and the diverse interventionist strategies the United States proposed. The many military dictatorships in South America were guided by the doctrine of national security, the logic of the internal enemy and the low-intensity conflict.

The low- intensity conflict strategy, consists in “a military-political confrontation between groups or states confronted under the known level of conventional war, yet

above the pacific and routinely coexistence between states” Often, this type of strategy, between ideologies and principles creates long lived conflicts.” (Maya 2006:90)

In effect, guerrilla movements formed, it was then, considered necessary to counteract the rebels’ uncontrollable "communist devil" through any means available. This is how the war between economic systems: Socialism and Capitalism, between ideologies and religions: Communism-Atheism Vs. Democracy- Christianity, fuelled many conflicts in Latin America. It was under the idea of fighting communism, and with the excuse to maintain the peace and the democratic nature of the state, that the strategies used “included disinformation, wrong information about terrorism and cultural and religious subversion.” (Galeano Eduardo Santa Fe II taken from Maya 2006: 90) This strategy was divided in 4 categories: “Counter insurgency – COIN, Antiterrorists Operations, Operations to maintain peace, and Peace time Contingency Operations – PCO- (Howard Dixon, Maya 2006: 91)

Students, workers, unionists, people in agreement with the left were “communists” threatening the “national security” which in turn threatened “democracy.” It was in these conditions, that the armies of Latin America were fortified. The School of the Americas based in the United States offered military training to the armies in Latin America, they were taught how to counteract the spread of communism. They learned the logic of “integral war” which means that the enemy was now part of the civil population. The enemy was no longer a foreigner; it was a civilian living within the boundaries of the state.

In Colombia, the era of the drug cartels validated even more the intervention of the United States, and the war on drugs became not only an effort to destroy the cartels, but

also an effort to eradicate the formation of possible guerrilla organizations.

Many governments in Latin America attacked their own populations, in Chile, Argentina, Brasil and other countries, civilians were seen as the enemies of democracy.

In Colombia, guerrillas formed in part due to the repressive state that functioned under a pseudo democratic system. For example, the formation of the M-19, the guerrilla organization that attacked the Palace of Justice, can be better understood if we look at the historical context and the formation of Colombia as a nation, this understanding, however, does not justify their actions during the 6th and 7th of November, when they decided to enter the Palace of justice and held the supreme court hostage.

1.3. Colombian Historical Context

Colombian history is marked by great wars for independence, power, or any other reason which could spark conflict. The heroes of this nation are military men mainly, or some women who fought against the rule of the Spanish empire. Colombia's war for independence started in 1810 when Simon Bolivar, the Great Liberator of the Americas, fought to emerge from Spanish colonialism as part of the New Granada. Simon Bolivar⁴ dreamed of La Gran Colombia. (Penaranda et al 1992: ix) (I will explore later the importance of Bolivar and his presence, through and statue, in the middle of the Plaza where my study took place, Plaza Bolivar See 1.5.)

In Colombia since the independence war of 1819 there has been a conservative revolution (1851) and five civil wars. The "War of the Thousand days" (1889) the greatest of Latin America's nineteenth century civil wars. (Lara 1982: 22-23)

In the 20th century, late '40s, Colombia was marked by a fierce rivalry between conservatives and liberals; and, after a conservative hegemony (1890 - 1930) the liberal

⁴ Simon Bolivar, he liberated parts of South America from Spanish rule.

republic period began, creating more violence. The era is known as "La violencia" (Lara 1982: 23)

1.3.1. April 9th 1948

On April 9th 1948 the assassination of a popular leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, (a liberal from a humble background who inspired people to fight the hegemony of the two parties in power) sparked El Bogotazo. Liberals started rioting against the conservatives killing them with machetes, firearms or any other weapon they could find. The parties in power fought desperately and it was during the government of Laureano Gómez (1950-1953) that liberals were persecuted by the military and violence increased out of proportion. President Laureano Gómez imposed an authoritarian right-wing government that suppressed the opposition. However, in 1953 the military dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla started. Rojas Pinilla was given power by the elites, his dictatorship was intended to calm the political violence generated by El Bogotazo. But, Rojas Pinilla started to implement an agrarian reform and gave amnesty to armed peasants. (Lara 1982: 24) He started working for the people.

Meanwhile, violence kept escalating, and in 1957, the elites decided to replace him by a five military junta. Then, the conservatives and the liberals decided to share power; they established the national front (1958-1974) an agreement between the two parties to rule the country for four years each.

1.3.2. Formation of Guerrillas

It was in the early fifties, due to an intense political turmoil, that armed peasants started to form republics in various parts of the country. The Cuban revolution, and the state of abandonment in which peasants lived inspired the formation of such movements,

and they ended up creating self-defence communities. The peasants created a republic within the Colombian territory called Marquetalia. However, through a military operation called Plan LASO (Latin American Security Operation) an initiative of the United States to fight the leftist rebels in Latin America, Marquetalia was attacked and peasants were scattered. Some of the survivors reunited later and in 1966, FARC, one of the oldest guerrilla's organization in the world, came into existence. (Lara 1982: 29)

In 1964 the ELN, National Liberation Army, was formed as well. This communist guerrilla movement operated in the cities and it was mainly made up by students.

In general, people created diverse movements to counteract the power exercised by the hegemonic elites. The M-19 emerged at this time, as well from the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO). This political party was created by the former military dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, in the early sixties. (Lara 1982: 31) Rojas Pinilla stood in opposition to the elites and to the Colombian hegemonic powers. His party enjoyed great popularity among a considerable majority; Rojas Pinilla inspired sympathy because of his victimization in the 50's, when the elites removed him from power. Also, his daughter, Maria Eugenia Rojas fulfilled the role of a Colombian Eva Peron. (Carrigan 1993: 76) In 1970, on April 19th, Andres Almarales, and eight other Anapista (ANAPO) candidates, ran successfully for congress and Rojas Pinilla was running for the presidency of Colombia, representing ANAPO, but when the Anapistas where celebrating their victory, after having received over a million votes, the vote count was abruptly interrupted... and when the count resumed the ANAPO had lost the election by a narrow margin, General Rojas Pinilla withdrew from the contest. (Carrigan 1993: 76) Rojas Pinilla lost against the conservative Misael Pastrana Borrero. Members of the ANAPO protested the

fraudulent nature of this election; and after the election, Jaime Bateman, went looking for Andres Almarales to found a revolutionary political movement. Jaime Bateman was a former guerrilla member of FARC, and he expected the legal party ANAPO to be successful, but after the stolen election, he came to believe in the need to create an armed movement, a movement to represent “las mayorias”, the majorities, all those who were disenfranchised. “In 1972 Andres Almarales and Jaime Bateman met to discuss the situation at the old Café Metropole in downtown Bogotá, they sought to create a movement unlike anything that had ever existed before in Colombian politics.... It would use imagination and humour to light sparks of hope and warmth in men’s minds and hearts. It would have nothing to do with foreign ideologies. It must recover a national cultural identity ... in sum, revolution needs to be a party “La revolucion es una fiesta” (Carrigan 1993: 78) Jaime Bateman was an “impulsive, warm-hearted, broad- minded leader of men: articulate, irreverent and generous. And like Almarales, Jaime Bateman was “costeño” a man of the tropical cost.” (Carrigan 1993: 78)

1.3.3. Antecedents of the Siege- Why the M-19 attacked the Palace of Justice?

The M-19 had a military wing and a political wing. Three other Anapista congressmen followed Almarales into the core group of 22 people who joined Bateman to launch the M-19 in January 1974. The M- 19 in remembrance of the date in which the elections were stolen. That is: the 19th of April Movement. It soon emerged that Andres Almarales was not suited for the underground life, nor the increasing reliance on weapons and terrorism or the discipline of the military structures, besides he had never really learnt how to use a gun. (Carrigan 1993: 79)

The M-19 started its operations with a symbolic act, they stole one of the swords and the

epaulets of Simon Bolivar, the liberator of the Americas. Jaime Bateman threatened not to return the sword until peace in Colombia was achieved.

In New Years' eve 1979, the M-19 stole again, this time 5.000 arms from the Canton North Battalion of the army's dependence of the 13th brigade under the command of Vega Uribe. This infuriated the military, for the M-19 were able to break into one of the most secure military dependencies and attacked directly the heart of the army's power. A huge blow to the pride of the country's armed forces. This event occurred under President Turbay Ayala. (1978 -1982) (Caycedo 2008: 67)

The Turbay government was a period in which forced disappearances and torture of political prisoners intensified: "torture became a legitimate weapon to fight the insurgency to destroy the morale of the people, and to preserve the illusion of national security." (Petro 2006: 25)

Few weeks later, the army recovered all the arms and captured most leaders of the M- 19. Many supporters and friends were caught, tortured and/ or jailed in the mass arrests that followed. (Carrigan 1993: 80)

It is in this Context that the M-19 began to develop urban warfare tactics and strategies. The Tupamaros, Uruguayan guerrillas who after the coup in Uruguay went into exile in Colombia (Petro 2006: 26) taught them how to fight in urban territories. They also were inspired by the Montoneros of Argentina.

The M-19 became popular; they made known their political ideals mainly through the media, advertising in newspapers, commercials on radio and so on. They were known and well liked for their "Robin Hood" spirit. They distributed milk in slums (of course stolen milk), food and clothing to those most in need.

However later on, the M-19 killed Jose Raquel Mercado, a leader of workers who they said betrayed them by selling information to the CIA. (Petro 2006:27) Gustavo Petro a former member of this group and nowadays a presidential candidate, said: "As a former member of the M-19, Raquel Mercado ended up becoming a symbol of our social decline." (Petro 2006: 27) From this he points out how guerrillas are at risk of turning to barbarism and injustice. And how those were precisely the things they were fighting against.

Despite this incident, the M-19 enjoyed great popularity, and this infuriated the political elites and the military leaders. Coincidentally, it was at that time when "thousands of Colombians were tortured with "cattle prod, Chinese tortures, and endless brutal tortures" (Petro 2006: 32) for being militants or simply sympathizers of the movement.

In 1980, the M-19 kidnapped ambassadors in the Dominican Embassy. They held 52 hostages, including ambassadors, for 61 days. In their negotiations they demanded the release of 311 political prisoners and \$50 million to free the hostages. (Petro 2006:34) This did not happen, but the takeover of the embassy made it clear that in Colombia there were political prisoners, contrary to the assertions of the president Turbay Ayala, at the time in France, who denied human right violations during his mandate, one of the most repressive and abusive periods in Colombian history. Luis Otero, planned this attack on the embassy, he had fought in the 60's communist guerrillas and became with Bateman a founding member of the M-19.

It can be said that many of the M-19 guerrillas, had a historical memory of the events that formed the country in which they lived and grew up, they had memories of the political system, the economic and social institutions which were mainly formed through violence

and not through a shared process to build a nation. Perhaps this is why they decided to formulate alternatives, something different amidst the suffocating homogeneity of the political hegemony in Colombia.

When the next president, Belisario Betancourt (1982 - 1986) came to power, he wanted to be the president of peace, he initiated dialogues and promised to find a way to disarm illegal armed groups. (Lara 1982: 42) In 1984, an agreement for peace was signed, and the guerrillas inundated the media, they were interviewed and they gathered in Plazas to give speeches. Betancour gave amnesties to political prisoners, including Andres Almarales. But the violence continued and Jaime Bateman “who had invented the concept of national dialogue between the insurgency and the government, was killed. His plane had disappeared over Panama in 1983 while carrying him to secret peace talks with the president envoy.” (Carrigan 1993: 81) The processes of peace between the government and the M-19 were boycotted by the military and even by different sectors within the government. At the end of 1984, the M-19 was brutally attacked by the army in Yarumales. (Maya 2006: 105) The government, authorized the military to attack the M-19, since the military assured they were going to completely exterminate their enemy. But, the army did not win in the attack, henceforth the M-19 had great difficulties in trusting the promises made by the government of Betancour.

With no one as gifted as Bateman in command to direct the movement, and since the government did not keep the promises made, the militarists, Ivan Marino Ospina, Alvaro Fayad, Carlos Pizarro and Luis Otero, (all members of the M-19 high command) sought an immediate return to war. (Carrigan 1993: 82) With the end of the truce between the government and the M-19, the M-19 were perceived negatively. The guerrillas needed to

change the public perception that condemned them as guilty of ending the peace dialogues. People were already fighting against their own reality “a sinking economy with 82% inflation and 30% unemployment” (Carrigan 1993: 82) The M-19 needed an “spectacular” “Golpe Revolucionario Publicitario” (Carrigan 1993: 82) “An strike of a good revolutionary publicity!”

The M-19 wanted to publicly accuse Betancour for ending arbitrarily the truce with the attack in Yarumales, and the idea to enter the Palace of Justice began to take shape. The M- 19 were going to kidnap the magistrates of the Supreme Court. In particular, they wanted to kidnap the brother of the president, Jaime Betancour and the wife of the minister of government, Clara Forero de Castro. Those two hostages were valuable victims, their social status and class affiliation could be used to negotiate a political agreement. The M-19 prepared a document entitled “Operation Antonio Nariño For the Rights of Man⁵” Let us remember that Antonio Nariño was a precursor of the struggle of independence, jailed by the Spanish Viceroy of his day for publishing the text of the “rights of man” (Carrigan 1993: 84) The M-19 wanted to hold Betancour accountable for breaking his promises, they prepared a legal case to accuse him and the state for many injustices. The M-19 were calling for a national and public dialogue, to ask for liberty to express without fear of persecution their political position, and also to bring to justice the President who did not fulfill his part of the peace treaty. Alvaro Fayad consulted with Luis Otero, the guerrilla in charge of the attack on the Dominican Embassy, the idea of seizing the Palace, and later on they shared it with other members. But, they did not consider the fundamental differences between both attacks. The

⁵ The M-19's Plan can be found in its entirety (30 pages of radical political analysis about the Colombian scene.) at the Criminal court 71 pg 18

ambassadors enjoyed the international protection of their sovereign states, yet the Colombian justices were at the mercy of recent judgements they had placed against some members of the army for Human Rights violations, and also they were targets for the drug cartels' capos, who wanted the judges to override the law regarding extradition. "Everyone understood and accepted the obvious well reported threat to Colombia's honest judges from mafia boss Pablo Escobar and his Medellín cartel." (Carrigan 1993: 92) A cycle of threats and death began with the assassination of president Betancourt's first Minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who was murdered by teenagers paid by the Medellín cartel, hit boys better known as "sicarios".

The pressure from the cartels was against extradition, the government, the constitutional court, the council of state and anybody who was in favour of the treaty with the United States. I remember the expression: "Mejor una tumba en Colombia, que una cárcel en Estados Unidos" ("I prefer a grave in Colombia, than a jail cell in the United States.") This is what the drug lords said, and they started an era of terror to make sure that this law was not passed. It was in the early 80's when narcotraffic changed drastically this country. Pablo Escobar, a known drug lord in Medellín, was a congressman at some point, and the magnitude of his empire was so overwhelming that the society changed as a result. Everything could be bought, there was an enormous flow of money from the cocaine business, and there was an "unholy mafia-military alliance" But at this time, the myth of the honour and virtue of the Colombian army was preserved (Carrigan 1993: 92) And no such links were ever made, until the supreme court started to denounce and persecute "The Extraditable." The President of the Supreme Court, Alfonso Reyes Echandia received many threats from the Extraditables in which they used to say:

“if the extradition treaty does not fall, we will execute magistrates and the members of their families, we are ready to die... If you act intelligently, silently, nothing will happen. You alone are responsible for your own future and the future of your family... Not all of our enemies can enjoy the privilege of prior notification and warning. We act suddenly...” (Carrigan 1993: 93)

The justices of Colombia were in a very vulnerable position and they had too many enemies, the military, as I mentioned, were being investigated for “brutality following the M-19’s theft of army weapons on New Years’ Eve 1979.” (Carrigan 1993: 94)

Reyes Echandia, the President of the Supreme Court, was as well trying to avoid the increasing military strength to impart justice, for the army tried to change the jurisdiction of civilian courts to the military courts. The M- 19 hold in high esteem the Supreme Court, and they made a mistake, for they thought that justice, which is what they represented, was going to be respected, for the M-19 did respect the integrity and the efforts to make justice in Colombia by the honourable Supreme Court.

1.4. M-19 Attacks the Palace

Luis Otero was in command of the military aspects of the operation. Alvaro Fayad, who named the assault group “Compania Ivan Marino Ospina” in honour of one of the founders, was the M-19's top political and military strategist and he delegated responsibility for the political and legal aspects of his plans to Andres Almarales and Alfonso Jaquin, both senior members of the National Directive of the M-19. They both had legal experience, both were lawyers from the Colombian coast and were responsible for preparing the legal case against the government. (Carrigan 1993: 85)

The lives of these men and the women in the movement were touched by other historical conflicts, by poverty and violence, and when they tried to change the reality they knew, when they participated legally, they were silenced, tortured, threatened. Therefore, many of them felt that it was impossible to create a political party in Colombia without a high dose of violence.

Once they entered and controlled the Palace, the M-19 imagined that the Supreme Court and the Colombian people, as a judge, in a great court hearing, would accuse the President and would demand:

First of all, the fair distribution of natural resources, land, water for peasants. Second of all, the revision of the treaty for extradition⁶, third they demanded explanations for the sudden breaking of the agreed period of peace, when the army attacked the M-19 in Cauca. And finally, they wanted to discuss Human Rights violations. (Caycedo 2008)

Days prior to the events of the 6th and 7th of November, the newspapers announced that the M-19 was planning an attack on the Palace of Justice, among the advertisements in the radio, the following brief announcement was heard: "In the coming days, the M-19 is going to pull off something so sensational, the whole world will be talking about us!" (Carrigan 1993: 86)

Initially, the attack was to coincide with the visit of François Mitterrand to Bogotá, in mid- October, for there were foreign journalists that could spread the news. But, the army found some documents in the house of M-19 supporters with Luis Otero's

⁶ Why the extradition? It is known as well, that members of the M- 19 had links with narcotrafic, they needed to buy arms and the Medellin drug cartel gave them money to do so, they say. Perhaps in exchange of some intercession to bring down the extradition treaty. Popular stories that circulated after the Siege, accuse the M-19 of burning the 4th floor of the Palace of Justice where the files on extradition remained, but as we will see later on, the fire did not start on the 4th floor, and it was to commit suicide to start a fire, when what they were trying to do, was to save as many lives as possible, including theirs.

plan to attack the Palace of Justice (Carrigan 1993: 87) and Luis Otero's plan to attack the building was delayed, and postponed until November. "The strategy of the M-19 was to attack on the first weekend of November since it was a holiday weekend, the day of the dead, no one would be at work on Monday and Tuesday was going to be a slow day. So, they decided to do it on Wednesday 6th 1985." (Carrigan 1993: 87)

On November 5th, Andres Almarales left his wife and son but before he asked her: "Tell me Maria, If I should catch a bullet on my way tomorrow, if things should go wrong, you will manage to get my body out of their clutches, won't you?" (Carrigan 1993: 88)

It was raining during the 6th of November 1985, and because the Palace was under threat of attack, it was heavily protected by armed policemen during the weeks before the 6th of November, yet this morning the Palace of Justice had no security rings and in the middle of the Plaza the figure of Simon Bolivar dominated this cold, rainy and tragic day.

1.5. Plaza Bolivar - Interlude- -----

La Plaza Bolivar is at the heart of the historical centre of Bogotá, it was in this Plaza where I did most of my research for it is here where the Siege of The Palace of Justice occurred 25 years ago and where the commemorations take place every year.

As I approached the Plaza I walked through narrow and cobbled streets which evoked the Colonial architectural style of cities conquered by the Spaniards, small balconies, roof tiles made of clay, wooden double-hung windows, solid adobe walls painted in turquoise, magenta, blue, green and yellow.

When Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, Spanish conquistador (known as "Knight of el Dorado") founded Santa Fe de Bogotá in 1538, there was at the centre of this square, a tree, a tree of Justice. With time, Simon Bolivar's statue took the space of such tree.

The Plaza Bolivar is homage to the Liberator of the Americas, founder of La Gran Colombia. La Gran Colombia was a republic formed by Venezuela, Ecuador, Panamá, Colombia, Bolivia and Perú, from 1819 to 1831.

“Bolivar’s left hand points the façade of the Palace of Justice, over whose huge portals is engraved the stern warning of his long life rival, first president of Colombia and founder of the conservative party, General Francisco Santander: Colombianos: Las Armas Os Han Dado La Independencia. Las Leyes Os Daran La Libertad.” (Carrigan 1993: 90) (Colombians: Arms have given you independence. The law will give you Liberty.)

But, who is Simon Bolivar? and why is/was he the inspiration for the M- 19, the Colombian army, the actual President of Venezuela, Chavez’ and the leader and hero of a Latin American movement known as el Movimiento Bolivariano?

Simon Bolivar is a hero in many Latin American countries because he fought for the liberty of the colonies and the unity among them. “Bolivar’s basic objectives were liberation and independence. Liberty he said, is “the only object worth the sacrifice of a man’s life” ... he was influenced to some extent, by the enlightenment, the ideals of democracy, absolutism and even by the counterrevolution... but he was not a mere creature of his age, not a slave of French or North American examples. His own revolution was unique, and in developing his ideas and his policies he followed not the models of the western world but the needs of his own America.” (Lynch 4)

European thinkers such as Voltaire or Rousseau did not apply their ideas to the colonial peoples, and this is why Bolivar could not follow exactly those philosophers since they excluded the people he was fighting for. Simon Bolivar wanted for la Gran Colombia, liberty and equality and these were the foundations of his revolution, from Montesquieu,

he developed a hatred of despotism and a belief in moderate constitutional government, in the separation of powers and the rule of law. (Lynch 6)

“But, for Bolivar, liberty was not simply freedom from the absolutist state of the eighteenth century, but freedom from the Spanish empire, followed by the regulation of laws, a true independence under a liberal constitution.” (Lynch 12)

As he proclaimed:

“It is not enough that our armies be victorious and our enemies evicted, or that the whole world recognise our Independence; it is even more essential that we become free under the auspices of liberal laws, deriving from the most sacred source, namely the will of the people.” (quoted in Lynch 12)

He distrusted the theoretical concepts of liberty “abstract theories create the pernicious idea of unlimited freedom” he said and he was convinced that “absolute liberty invariably deteriorated into absolute power.” (quoted in Lynch 12) “His search for liberty was a search for equilibrium and for what he called practical liberty, or social liberty, a mean between the rights of the individual and the needs of the society.” (Lynch 12)

Bolivar wanted a government based on “our own customs, our own religion, and our own habits, and finally on our own origins and history.” He said

“the laws enacted for Colombia had not had a salutary effect, for they are derived from foreign sources, entirely alien to our conditions... Americans were used to tyranny and accepted it, but they were ignorant of freedom, and it would be difficult to change this habit. The vestiges of Spanish domination will long be with us... the contagion of despotism infects the atmosphere about us.” Bolivar instead recommended an adapted a version of the British constitution. (quoted in Lynch 10)

This is why, Bolivar was and is the inspiration for revolution, for liberty and most importantly, in my view, for autonomous rule.

In the Plaza Bolivar, he still fights, he still lives through a statue that points towards the Palace of Justice and specifically to the idea that guided his life, arms will give

independence, yet laws will give freedom. Even if it was Santander who wrote these words and even if both were rivals, because of their different views about the centrality of the state, they were both confident in the need for laws, and, unfortunately, as many M-19 rebels and many army members, in the need to use arms, to gain independence.



Even if the ideals of Bolívar intended to free the colonies, the presence of colonial influence in this Plaza is overwhelming and evident, English, Italian, German and even French architectural styles are present. Also ideologies permeate the institutions somehow.

In this Plaza the legal, religious and administrative hierarchies of Colombia meet. Here we find the representation of the Colombian constitution which reflects the French idea of the division of powers. The executive, the legislative and the judicial system. We also find the National Capitolio (An English architect Thomas Reed designed this

building) Colombia's Senate and Congressional building, and this building embodies the legislative branch of power.

The Lievano Building (French architectural style) is Bogotá City Hall and here we find the administrative offices of the City Council, where the Mayor works (also it is here where we find about 20 carved stone plaques with the official *history* of Colombia, including the episode of the Palace of Justice) this building is also part of the executive branch of power.

Finally, the building under attack 25 years ago, the Palace of Justice where the Supreme Court works: this building represents the judicial system. This building has suffered as Justice in Colombia has, "the original 19th century structure of the Palace was burnt to the ground during El Bogotazo riots in 1948, to later be destroyed once again during the Siege in 1985.

Nowadays, "the modern headquarters of the Colombian judicial system is an imposing, aesthetically alienating structure, flanked on all sides by Colombia's colonial heritage." (Carrigan 1993: 90) "When the Palace was rebuilt the first time, the main concern was security, the complex- including a magnificent law library, innumerable law offices, conference rooms, courtrooms, and a cafeteria where the staff served daily lunch to almost 400 hundred court employees- was encased in a solid, exterior granite wall." (Carrigan 1993: 91)

In the Plaza we also have the representation of another power, the church. The Primate Cathedral represents the church and the power this institution still has in Colombia. Power that Simon Bolivar tried to diminish.

In sum, La Plaza Bolivar is where the power of Colombia is centralized, when I was

there, indigenous populations from all over the territories in Colombia were heading towards the Square to talk with the President and also sugar cane cutters organized a manifestation and even camped in La Plaza to demand their rights as workers. This space has been the center of the political, social, economic and religious life and turmoil of this nation. It is here where important manifestations or negotiations end or begin. La Plaza Bolivar is the place where all the major historical events have occurred, it is where official history collides with memories, for even if this place is where great numbers of people come to dialogue or protest with the powers of the state, ironically enough it is also the place where they come to be ignored. For, when we are in the Plaza we are facing the back of these buildings, for the entrances are located elsewhere, we face in the middle of the square, the back entrances of all these buildings. And in a way, we Colombians, are left in a paradoxical space that was and is used as a political arena, a space where the great powers that control Colombia dwell, and yet as always, those powers are turning their backs to the people. The student, the campesino, the sugar cane cutter, the victims of the disappeared in the Palace of Justice, the less valuable victims, gather in the Plaza. As it was already mentioned, there is a stratification of the victims, the M-19 planned on kidnapping two privileged, powerful individuals and the Supreme Court of Justice, also they kidnapped diplomats in an embassy, and they knew that the government was not going to negotiate for less privileged or less important people.

1.6. Events of the 6th and 7th of November 1985

In this Plaza, charged with meaning, on the 6th of November 1985, the M-19 encountered no resistance when they entered the Palace, only two guards were protecting

the entire Supreme Court and the Palace of Justice. Like a mouse being lured into a trap, the M-19 entered the Palace, perhaps grateful for their luck.

As the Commission of Truth found out subsequently, contrary to what two colonels declared, the President of the Supreme Court, Reyes Echandia, did not ask for security to be removed.

Being in such a vulnerable position, the least he wanted was to now be kidnapped by the M-19 rebels and to be a hostage in a country where most people seemed to want him dead. "The building and its occupants were totally unprotected. The army was poised and ready to strike back." (Carrigan 1993: 97)

The entry was "successful", but things did not go as planned for the M-19, some guerrillas were delayed in traffic and could not get on time to the Palace. Nonetheless 35 guerrillas entered the Palace armed and determined to bring to trial President Betancour.

The Commission of Truth found out as well that on the 6th of November, once the M-19 were inside, the military answered to the alarm rather quickly, even if many of the military bases were far from the Plaza Bolivar and having in consideration that they were moving heavy artillery through the narrow streets of the old center in, tanks and armed men started to surround the Palace; they started to shoot indiscriminately, and quickly evacuated 150 hostages that were on the first and second floor. Because of the missing guerrillas, the M-19 could not occupy the first floor as they planned, so they went up to the third and fourth floor. Testimonies from survivors tell of a guerrilla, (Violeta) located specifically in the stairs that went to the third floor, they say that she did not let anybody go up the third floor, as she was strategically positioned with a gun machine to shoot everything and everyone that moved. This caused a longer and a more deadly response by

the military.

There were some last minute changes made by the M-19, and even if doubts and mistakes impeded the plan from going smoothly, the rebels entered the Palace. Some entered before as regular visitors, they were armed and had false papers. They brought cameras to record this epic, historical moment, they had medical supplies and high protein foods, and they thought that the confrontation was to last 6 or 8 hours maximum, and that after they would negotiate with the President Betancour. The M-19 found it important to be well prepared for the attack, they stole money from banks to buy arms, they thought things were going to be similar to the incident with the Dominican Republic embassy, and that there would not be a need to fire arms non-stop, as it actually occurred. (Carrigan 1993: 101) Otero's plan suffered because of the 5 missing rebels that were to take the first floor, and also because one of them was a specialist in laying plastic explosives, and because the arms and communication equipment was in the basement and it had to be abandoned, for the unit to be responsible of taking over the first floor, could not make it. (Carrigan 1993: 109)

“During the first 10 minutes, 10 guerrillas were killed or wounded, and they were reduced to 25, for the army began firing indiscriminately.” (Carrigan 1993: 110)

The rebels divided themselves and put in position their powerful weapons, two guns a 50 mm and a 30 mm machine gun in the second and third floor landings, this way they were able to control movement across much of the courtyard. (Carrigan 1993:110)

On the fourth floor, one of the youngest judges of the court, Manuel Gaona who also received threats against his life and who at the time of the attack, found himself without body guards, was told by the guerrillas: “Move slowly. Not too fast. Keep your hands on

top of your head” (Carrigan 1993:111) and was brought close to the elevators where he was asked to sit with other people.

“Meanwhile, in the office of the minister of defence, General Miguel Vega Uribe, an unidentified call, informed him of the assault. Colonel Alfonso Plazas Vega, the generals’ son in law and the one in charge of the Cavalry School, was in the reception of the minister’s office. Plazas Vega called General Jesus Armando Arias Cabrales, his superior to inform of the Siege of the Palace, he received orders to go back to his base and to wait for further orders, forty minutes later at 12: 25, at the head of a battalion of ten tanks and armoured cars” (Carrigan 1993: 114) Plazas Vega arrives to save democracy. Plazas Vega is known for answering to a journalist inquiring about his actions, that he was saving democracy!

Plazas Vega, drove his tank through the bronze doors of the Palace of Justice, by 12: 30, General Arias had installed his own operational headquarters in the Museum of the Casa Florero, a two story colonial building situated on the corner of the Plaza Bolivar. (Carrigan 1993: 115)

General Arias and his staff under the supervision of the Chief of the Armed Forces, General Rafael Samudio and with the participation of the Minister of Defence designed the military plan to take back the building. “The plan: massively and indiscriminately use fire power against the building from all sides, and mobilize the tanks to penetrate the Palace.” (Carrigan 1993: 116)

Inside the Palace, guerrillas keep looking for the most important hostages, Andres Almarales found Manuel Gaona, the supreme court’s youngest member, they studied together and even had similar friends, for Almarales was in the early 70’s a congressman,

they were strangely familiar to each other. Almarales and Gaona were relieved to see each other, Almarales assured the hostages that their lives would be respected and that everything was going to be over soon. But, the fire was so intense that the guerrillas had to move hostages towards the bathrooms. (Carrigan 1993:117)

“The bathrooms were located on a series of mezzanines adjacent to the main stairway in the north west wing of the building.” (Carrigan 1993:118) The bathroom where Gaona and Almarales were located, was between the third and fourth floor, the space was quickly transformed into an arsenal. Luis Otero and Jaquin were with seventeen other guerrillas and they had their base on the opposite side of the building, on the south west corner, they had the most important hostages for them, strategically speaking, namely the president of the court. But, Colonel Plazas Vega, was successful in breaking into the Palace, and Almarales, Otero and Jaquin lost communication. They were on their own during the attack. (Carrigan 1993: 119)

“Luis Otero knew that 50% of the ammunition and radios stayed behind, and also that the Palace is a fortress and that it does not have two ground entries, these were the very characteristics which would have helped withstand a lengthy siege, but that have now converted the great building into a prison.” (Carrigan 1993: 122) As time goes by, Otero and Jaquin talk with Reyes Echandia, the president of the Supreme Court, they realize that he has the authority and power of the President of the Executive Branch and that he can talk to the President Betancour to request him to order a cease fire. When Reyes Echandia finally reaches the presidential office, the secretary asks him to wait and he is asked to leave a message, because the president is not available to answer his call at the moment. Reyes Echandia never talked to the President, he waited impatiently for the call,

but it never happened. Reyes Echandia contacted the director of the secret police, Colonel Maza, an old friend, the Chief of the Police in Bogotá, he asked him to deliver a message to the president, the immediate cease fire. But, there was no way to communicate with President Betancour. (Carrigan 1993: 133)

The army began firing gas, and it started coming through the pipes, the hostages in the bathroom were suffocating, on the other side, Otero and Jaquin began calling the radio and television stations, saying that they were going to kill the hostages if there was not a cease fire and that they were going to throw the bodies out the windows, “Let the president and the army take responsibility for the deaths of the hostages” (Carrigan 1993: 138) they said.

Since the army was inside the building, they went to the first and second floor and evacuated hostages to the Museum, to the Casa Florero were they brought every hostage to be examined. Were they civilians or guerrillas? They could not afford to set free guerrillas. Secretaries, bodyguards, the young workers of the cafeteria were brought safely to the Museum for identification purposes. Clara Forero was an important hostage, she was on the second floor safe in her office because of the failure of the M-19 to seize the first and second floor.

Outside the Palace, the families of more than 400 hostages were trying to establish contact, or to find information. Yezid Reyes, son of Reyes Echandia, president of the Supreme Court, called his father and asked him to ask Otero and Jaquin, if they would allow for a message to be delivered through the radio by Reyes Echandia. Yezid called the director of Caracol radio station and Reyes Echandia delivered a message to all those listening, the journalist asked: “What can we do? What should we do? To which Reyes

Echandia answers: "What is important is that the order finally be given, here within the building, for a cease-fire. Here within the Palace.... Help us, is a matter of life and death. Help us to get a cease-fire and we can talk later. Thank you." (Carrigan 1993:143)

At this moment, the minister of communication, Noemi Sanin, nowadays a presidential candidate, ordered all live reporting from the Palace to be suspended and instead a soccer match is announced. And another one shown on Television.

The minister of Justice, Enrique Parejo is trying to contact the president of the nation and to challenge the military counter attack, he was a friend of Almarales as well, Parejo was trying to establish communication with Almarales, for he knew he was not a murderer.

Meanwhile, President Betancour, was looking for counsel, he was calling the ex presidents of the country, who were in Montecarlo (Misael Pastrana) or in Paris (Lopez Michelsen) he said to the truth commission, that he tried to find counsel to act, and that he usually avoided quick decisions and preferred to be advised before making important decisions. In this case, his caution cost more than simply time.

Luis Otero and Jaquin had to move the hostages to the bathroom as well, because Special Forces arrived on the fourth floor of the Palace. The army tried to enter the Palace from above and used dynamite, the idea was to open an entrance through the roof above the room where the hostages and guerrillas were trapped. As soon as "the Hawk", "a Captain Talero who received special training from Israeli commandos and who believed passionately in his mission to rescue the hostages" (Carrigan 1993: 158) was in, the confrontation continued, Captain Talero asked them not to shoot, but he was killed immediately. Soon after, the hostages started feeling a suffocating smoke. The building was on fire! The fire started at 5:30 in the afternoon in the library located on the ground

floor.

The army blamed the M-19 for burning files so as to do what they were asked from the drug lords, to burn the files on extradition, so they would not be sent to the United States. But, the guerrillas were trapped in bathrooms with the hostages, and their main objective was to find a way to dialogue with the President, because they thought this was the only way in which they could survive. They were not going to immolate themselves, furthermore they were not in the ground floor, when the fire started. The commission of truth, and ballistic studies, have shown, that the fire could have started due to the firing of rockets by the army. (Carrigan 1993:160)

In any case, what matters is that this fire, which consumed the library, and later the Palace of Justice, consumed the lives of many including the life of the President of the Supreme court, Reyes Echandia, eight of his colleagues, six associates from the council of state, another twenty something civilian hostages and all the M-19 guerrillas. Those who survived the bombing, the grenades, the submachine gunfire that the army poured directly through the craters they have blown in the roof, into the conference room where all the hostages were striving for their lives, all were burnt alive in the conflagration that now engulfs what remains of the fourth floor of the south and east wings. (Carrigan 1993: 168)

Meanwhile, Andres Almarales and the hostages on the other side of the building do not know of the fate of their friends and the other hostages. And Almarales remembers the “Panama-Medellin-for-arms connection, the antitank rockets promised through the Medellin drug cartel.” (Carrigan 1993:175) which never materialized, and he remembers that he doubted the success of the operation without these rockets. But Otero wanted to

go on with or without the rockets, and since Almarales was trapped presentiments came to mind. Perhaps, because the fire stopped for a while. Suddenly, the judge Gaona and Almarales heard on the radio what the army was saying, that they were not many hostages left inside. But they were 70 people in that bathroom, how could they say that they were not too many left?

Manuel Gaona had an idea, he took out his diary and found some numbers of important people in Bogotá, he takes some sheets and writes the names and rank of the most important hostage members. Almarales gives this list to a young guerrilla to make a phone call on behalf of the hostages. But, the guerrilla comes back and informs that all phones are dead. Almarales refuses to give up, and says that they needed to let the army know that they were alive. He then, suggested that they shout their names, but the army started firing once again. (Carrigan 1993:183)

They had a discussion in the bathroom, a survivor tells how the hostages asked Almarales, how was he defending Human Rights and at the same time making them go through such a terrible ordeal.

Time went by, and at 5:00 am in the morning on the 7th November, the army announced the “operación rastrillo- Rake Operation” the final offensive to “fumigate” the guerrillas. Carlos Uran, a judge trapped in the bathroom, offered to go out to the battle field to say that there were hostages left, Justice Reynaldo Arciniegas, said he knew an influential man in the army, and so he was chosen to go out to represent them, and furthermore, to save their lives. They wrote again their names and Manuel Gaona, offered him his white shirt to be used as a flag for peace. Then Reynaldo Arciniegas went out asking the army to stop shooting, the general Arias Cabrales received the slip of paper with all the names,

which was never seen again. He slipped it in his pocket. Reynaldo Arciniegas had a mission, he was supposed to ask for the international red cross, for a cease fire, for the freedom of the hostages, but instead the army used him to find out, the exact location of the guerrillas, how many weapons they had left, and the machine gun manned by Violeta on the third floor landing, since she was the only obstacle for the army to gain control over the third floor. But, he forgot all that was entrusted to him, he did not contact the government, nor the red cross, he did not ask for a cease fire, or about the communication needed from the government (Carrigan 1993: 203) “he went home, to his pleasant, suburban house, he went to sleep, an exhausted but contented man, peaceful in the conviction that he had managed to carry out the mission that had been entrusted to him.” (Carrigan, 1993: 204)

The hostages felt the gun fire now being directed at them, since Arciniegas left, he must have told them where we were for the fire intensified, they thought.

“General Arias first objective was Violeta Roman Paéz... he instructs the engineers to blast an opening in the floor of the fourth floor mezzanine above her head.” (Carrigan, 1993: 213)

The army kept on planning their rake operation; they delayed some attempts made from different people to stop the massacre. Andres Almarales wanted to avoid a massacre and he thought that if the government intervened, if they knew they were hostages, they could flee the Palace. Manuel Gaona, told him that he had a baby daughter a ten months old baby, he asked him to let them go, but Almarales refused. He told them to kneel in order of importance, first the judges and behind women and others. This way, when the army entered they will respect the lives of all.

“Manuel Gaona was shot six times, he died as he crouched beside the exterior wall of the bathroom, trying to make his way down the stairs to the second floor landing. He was shot by soldiers who were standing on the third floor, their order: fire at anything that moves. The same soldiers also flung grenades down the stairs at the other hostages who were trying to get away.” (Carrigan 1993: 246)

Almarales wants to avoid a massacre, and he orders a cease fire he then lets women go out. 31 young women, mostly poor, secretaries, assistants and cleaning women have survived this monstrosity. Two M-19 young women ask Almarales to come along with them, but he says that he is going to stay, “we are machos” he replied, “we only have one life, and we will stay here to die like machos” Then Andres decides that the wounded must leave as well.

The army now waits for the M-19 to run out of ammunition to then enter into the bathroom and “in a final spasm of butchery, the soldiers lift their guns over the tops of the partitions, and fire the last fusillade of the long battle, blindly, frenetically, into the toilet stalls. The soldiers find Andrés Almarales slumped on the floor beside the north wall urinal. According to the autopsy report conducted at the city morgue, the shot that killed Andrés is a 9mm bullet, fired on contact, execution style, into his right forehead.” (Carrigan 1993: 252)

When the carnage is over, the soldiers, report: “Mission accomplished, my general”.

General Arias then communicates with the Minister of Defense the General Vega Uribe

General Arias:

The personnel is totally fumigated! Over

To what the General Vega Uribe responds into the internal communications system:

I want to express my personal congratulations... for the success of the operation. You have demonstrated to Colombia and to the world the professionalism and spirit of service of our army. (Carrigan 1993: 251)

1.7. People Made to Disappear

During the Siege, seven workers of the cafeteria and three occasional visitors to the Palace, disappeared. Colombians forgot for a long time about them, soccer matches shown on the 6th of November at 8:00 pm, beauty pageant competitions, which happen on the 11th of November each year, and unfortunately, the natural disaster and explosion of a volcano, which erased an entire city: Armero, helped this collective forgetfulness. Many died incinerated, others were shot, yet some others were never found, they were brought safely to the Museum, La Casa Florero, but were never seen again. What happened to them? We might never know, what we will know is how they are remembered, who remembers them, who wants them to be forgotten and possibly why their disappearance was neglected for a long time.

1.7.1. Who were the hostages that disappeared?

Occasional Visitors:



Lucy Amparo Oviedo had an appointment with Reyes Echandia, she was studying law and was looking for a job, she left two children. Her mother died never knowing of her whereabouts.



Gloria Anzola Lanao, a 32 years old woman, lawyer who was an occasional visitor to the Palace, she parked in the spot # 42 because her aunt, the justice Haydee Anzola, authorized her to use her parking spot. She worked close by in her own office.



Norma Constanza Esguerra was bringing an order of pastries to the cafeteria, she was a lawyer and had this small business to help her financial situation. She left a daughter, Dévora.

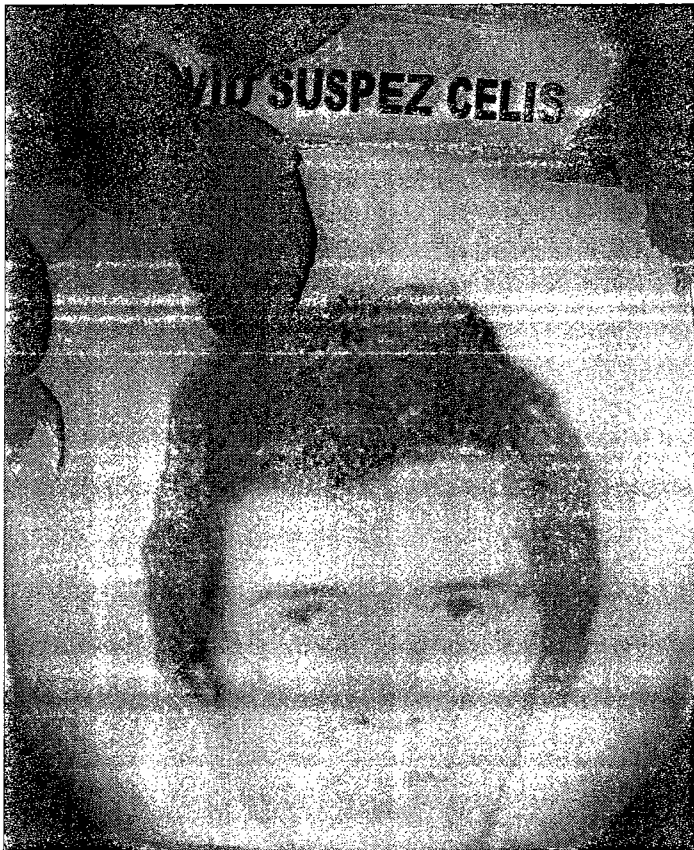
Workers:



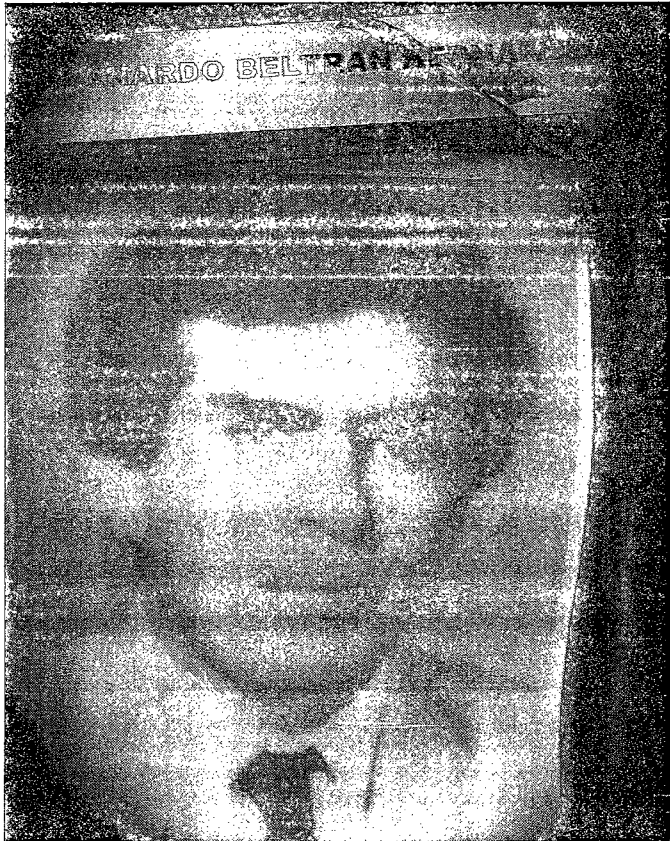
Hector Jaime Beltran, 28 years old, known as Jimmy had a wife who was 20 years old when he disappeared and had 4 girls.



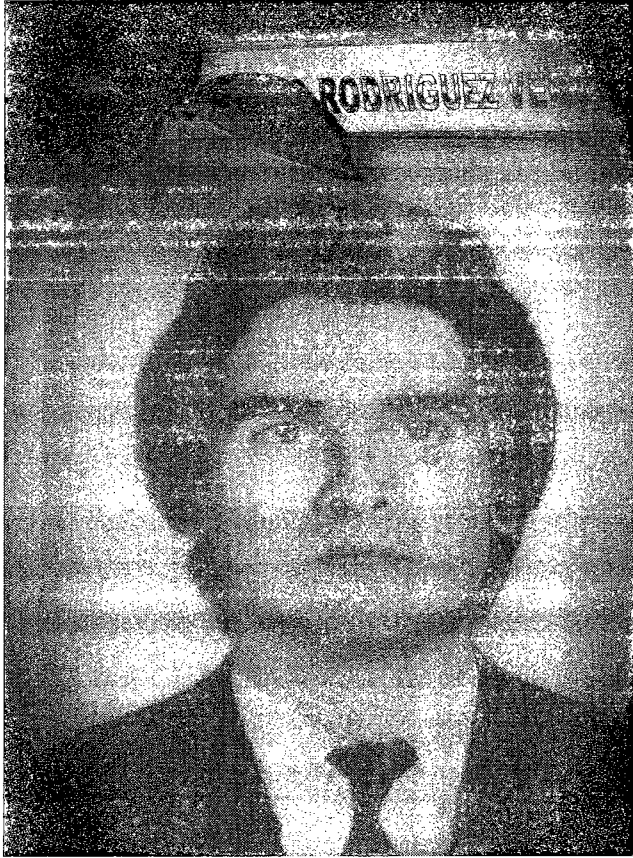
Luz Mary Portela Leon, a 26 years old woman, she was replacing her mother, her work contributed to the maintenance of her mother and younger brothers' household.



David Suspes Celis was a cook, he worked part time in the cafeteria he had a wife and a daughter and dreamed with opening his own business. The 6th of November, David Suspes was going to quit this job, for he had been hired elsewhere and this new job was going to allow him to finish his studies. He was 26 years old.



Bernardo Beltran Hernandez was a waiter, he was also seen being brought to the Casa Florero, but never seen again. He was 24 years old, his friends called him “banana” he was known for his joy for life and loved playing soccer. He finished his studies at SENA, an institute for technical studies three months before the Siege.



Carlos Augusto Vera Rodriguez, was the administrator of the cafeteria, he was 30 years old, married and with a new born girl.



Cristina del Pilar Guarin, worked as a teller, her friend, Carlos rodriguez asked her to replace her wife, who used to be the teller and who was about to have a baby. She was a student of social sciences and she got an offer to go to Spain to do a masters in armed conflict in Central America. She was 26 years old.



Gloria Estella Lizarazo Figueroa, a cafeteria employee had 4 children and was a single mother.



Irma Franco, was a law student and an M-19 member. Another guerrilla who was able to leave the Palace, but was made to disappear.

Ana Rosa Castiblanco a 33 years old woman, was a cook assistant, she was pregnant, 7 or 8 months. The remains of Ana Rosa matched with the DNA of a body found in a public burial site, however, the whereabouts of this baby are unknown, yet, in the testimony of Gamez Mazuera for the commission of truth, an ex military witness and actor in the retake of the Palace, he assures that Ana Rosa had her baby while she was being brought to the North Canton, and that the baby was stolen by a military man. Also, Penelope told me that she received two right arms and two femurs, and was told: take it or leave it.

The families of the victims rushed to “La Casa del Florero” looking for their loved ones, they heard on the radio that everyone being evacuated was brought there. But, many of the disappeared, were brought to diverse battalions in Bogotá. The military said that the cafeteria workers perished in the fire and that the bodies were not found because the fires consumed the remains. But people who disappeared were actually caught on video and seen exiting the Palace safe and sound, only the bodies were nowhere to be found. They did not perish in the fires that consumed the Palace, and if they never went to “La Casa Florero” then where are they? Or where are their remains? This is the constant in the interviews I did to the families, where are the remains? The colonel Alfonso Plazas Vega, who was in charge of the operation, thought that people in the cafeteria were accomplices of the M-19 and decided to held them captive. He denies the above, but he has been accused by Gamez Mazuera, a retired soldier who says he received direct orders from him, from Plazas Vega to keep them and make them talk.

(Truth Commission reports) Vega says in his defence, to the commission of Truth:

“I did not know who was who, and I had no obligation to make the necessary investigation.”

1.8. Why Forced Disappearances?

“Nacht und Nebel” (Night and Fog) is the decree dictated in 1941 by the German Army through which it was ordered to detain- without leaving any trace- any person suspected of putting in danger the national security of the Third Reich. (Maya 2006: 235)

Even if we can trace through studies the possible origin or the use of this macabre strategy, and even if there have been efforts to stop this practice, this criminal act has been used by many governments against civilians that oppose the established state order. Targeted civilians like students, unionists, campesinos, guerrillas, or even sympathisers of certain parties have suffered Nacht und Nebel.

Even if World War II ended, this practice is remembered and it is a preferred method for many governments to warn civilians of the possible consequences of dissenting. In the 60's close to half a million people disappeared in Indonesia, in the 70's in Cambodia close to three hundred thousand.

And in Latin America, this practice of terror started in Guatemala during the 60's, and it continued until 1996 until the “Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera” Agreement of Firm and Lasting Peace, which ended an era of violence. However, the commissions created to establish truth and reconciliation did not help in the search for truth or justice. Victims were left in the fog, and the number of people made to disappear is still unknown. Furthermore, processes to heal social trauma, such as reparation, did not fully occur. In Chile, Pinochet's dictatorship left more than three thousand disappeared.

Now in Colombia since 1977 more than eight thousand people were made to disappear, and organizations that try to defend Human Rights say that every two days a person is made to disappear nowadays. (Maya 2006) The current President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) continues defending the National Security doctrine and the para-military squads, (which he helped form in Medellin, while he was the mayor), accused of killing civilians and making them pass for dissenters or as usually called influenced by the Cold War dynamics, guerrilleros, red ones or communists. This phenomenon is known as the “false positives scandal”, or the body count syndrome, a strategy that allows soldiers to increase their quota of bodies to impress superiors and to measure progress against guerrillas.

The Siege of the Palace of Justice unveiled this practice. It happened before, but it was through this event that forced disappearances touched the civil, urban population. Not only the poorest campesinos in the rural zones were the main target of a chaotic and out of control pseudo democracy, guided by foreign principles and interests, people in the urban metropolis were also targeted and for the first time they had to pay attention, even if briefly.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This theoretical framework changed as I did my research in Colombia it is mainly based on the course: “Memory, History and Violence” taught by Professor Luz Angela Nunez at The Javeriana University. I focused briefly on a definition or understanding of violence, but mainly I focused on the social and historical dimensions of memory, for there is a vast literature on the psychological, philosophical and technical dimensions (among others) of memory. Furthermore, I chose theories that highlighted the importance of memory in relation to Latin American historical processes, (even if they relate mainly to societies in transition to democracy or under peace processes agreements after post conflict resolutions) for they are the closest theories I found towards the understanding of memory as a vital field of study in Colombia and the South Cone, a field that could offer ways to remedy, to some extent, the ongoing internal conflict. The study of memory in Colombia, cannot wait for a post-conflict situation (this is why I find inadequate some theories because they were born in a different context) to offer optimal conditions to then study the impact, the importance, the processes, the actors of repressed memories, it is precisely the contrary what is needed, the study and the application of methods that could stimulate the birth of a collective memory in times of war and conflict.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Memory

There are two dimensions to consider when studying memory as a field or a discipline, in times of conflict. One is the academic interest or need one might have to investigate intellectually and scientifically the past, and the other is the interest one might have in the emotional links human beings might have to their own *Histories*, their memories about that same past, (the one investigated under the rigor of science). Both dimensions belong to different approaches to account for the past, the first relates to history as a science and the second to memory as a terrain of the imagination, therefore mined with silences, oblivion, and alternative ways to conceive the future. Both rooted in different truths, and in times of conflict, they struggle.

2.2. What is Memory?

There are different understandings about memory, here I will refer mainly to two general types. One relates to memory as the capacity to remember, the neurological or neurobiological process that allow us to acquire, retain, register and retrieve in the brain perceptions of events, people or sensations. The other is the psycho-social processes that are embedded in a cultural, historical and social context. In this thesis, the second understanding of memory, memory as a contested cultural shared process (Riano-Alcala 2006) will be studied further.

Elizabeth Jelin distinguishes two types of memory as well, *habitual* memories

which allow us to remember forms of greeting, eating, walking, the body language we use in public and in private and all the shared learned practices in our cultures. And *narrative* memories. When we make a transition from habitual memory to the present, usually due to particular emotions attached to trauma or joy or any emotion, which changes a routine into something memorable, we have a way to remember through symbols, we have *narrative* memories.

Jelin says that when we narrate memories, there is a progression of events, there is a plot and we use narrative conventions (rhetoric) to make our memories credible. When we transmit memories we do through symbols or shared languages and this creates fusion between the individual and the collective. This capacity to remember or to forget ensures the survival of an individual, in the social aspect, because at the core of our individual and collective identity there is a linkage to a sense of permanence through time and space to such a group. Furthermore, our sense of belonging, our idea of who we are and where we are going depends on our shared memories, on our affiliation to other human beings with whom we can share not only the same language, traditions, religion but also our common stories. However, the relationship between identity and memory is not arbitrary, a person has the capacity, to some extent, to select which shared memories will define his/her identity. Memory has therefore, many functions, it provides us with identity, it helps us survive including us in society as political and social beings, it also allows to imagine the future, among other functions.

The scholar who began considering the social aspect of memory was Maurice Halbwachs. Maurice Halbwachs researched, in the 1920's, a sociological understanding of memory, contrary to the individual psychological understanding of memory at the

time. Focusing on memory in collectivities, drawing from Durkheim and his theory of collective representations, he stressed the importance of the social world over individuals. Halbwachs stated that “nos souvenirs demeurent collectifs, et ils nous sont rappelés par les autres... C'est qu'en réalité nous ne sommes jamais seuls.” (Halbwachs 1968: 2) An individual has the capacity to remember through being a member of a social group only. In such social groups, Halbwachs established, the most influential frameworks in the life of an individual, (in Halbwachs time) the structures that defined a person’s identity and memory, were the family, religious affiliations and social class and the associated traditions.

“Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire: la famille, les groupes religieux et les classes sociaux et leurs traditions” these important structures of a society, said Halbwachs, allowed for the creation of collective memory. In this ethnography, family and religious affiliations, since they are less influential nowadays, will not be explored thoroughly, yet social class and its traditions and the influence of the media will be considered as important frames to shape the collective identity and memories of Colombians.

It is through membership in a social group, said Halbwachs, particularly a family, a religious group, or a particular social class based on traditions that individuals acquire, localise and recall their shared memories. Even if a person remembers or forgets being alone, those memories are framed within social processes, social roles, or collective spaces. For example, if one wish to remember a dream, language will be used, images, roles, relations to others will emerge in the process of remembering. From Halbwachs, the most relevant aspect to consider is the importance of the collective in the formation of shared memories.

The possibility of collective memory allows people to not only develop identity but also to develop a sense of belonging to a culture or society. Of course, this belonging is intersected by time and space, which Halbwachs recognizes as elements of memory. Elizabeth Jelin, from a more contemporary perspective, adds two more elements: Artefacts and instruments.

These four elements indicate that what a collective remembers or forgets, is anchored in a particular space and a particular time in artefacts and instruments. Instruments either symbolic like language, or material like monuments or buildings

This is why, there is no universal memory because every memory is framed and shared by particular groups which are bounded by time and space.

In this ethnography, memories will be situated in time, space and their presence in artefacts and instruments, yet they will also be found in trajectories, not only in the physical act, such as when people walk in a Via Crucis, remembering particular moments in the life of the Jesus Christ, but also, in the sole act of remembering, for these trajectories occurred through the constructions of narratives people shared when evoking their particular memories of the Siege of the Palace, usually in response to my question: what do you remember happened the 6th and 7th of November 1985? (Asked right in the Plaza Bolivar)

It is important to bear in mind, that even if shared memories give a sense of collective identity to individuals in a society, they transform continuously according to the changes in the overall structure of the group. If the structures of the family, religious groups, social class and traditions change, the collective memory changes as well.

However, this is a complex process and memories could be the cause for changes in the structures of a society.

Memories change depending on the time and the space in which we choose to evoke them, or the time and space in which they wish to exist. For, many times we remember unintentionally, and it is the smell of a mountain or the sea which bring us into a trajectory towards childhood or even towards the wish for a future trip to particular landscapes. This is why or how memory is linked to the imagination, memories are not only from the past, they are not bounded by time, which does not make them fantasy, memories can be from the future, they can be constantly evoked and felt even if we had no awareness that we lived them (memories) before consciously. For example, I had a memory of going back to Colombia, I grew up close to the mountains I knew how it felt to live surrounded by the Andes, when I left I did not miss the mountains for a while, until I went to Mont Royal and suddenly felt them again, the memory imprinted in my senses by the Andes, in the past, was revived by the mountain Mount Royal, and this memory gave me a sensation to imagine and hope for my future encounter with the mountains I never knew I would miss. In my imagination, my memories created a future encounter from a past experience, a memory from the future. On the contrary, a traumatic memory from the past, might destroy the capacity to imagine and to hope for the future, the families of those who disappeared 25 years ago, were mutilated from the capacity to envision forever a future encounter with a loved one, not only did they lost suddenly the presence of a father, a mother, a sister, a husband, a brother a wife, a friend, they also lost the opportunity to say goodbye, thank you, I loved you, I will miss you. Many never accepted the fate of those who disappeared, and until their own death, never ceased

looking for the faces they knew and missed. Others, are still waiting for the remains so they can finally say goodbye, so they can finally have a memory to allow them to once again imagine the future.

Our memories are selective and psychic; sometimes it forgets to protect us from trauma. But, if general forgetfulness occurs, a group can lose its collective memory and identity and will therefore, cease to exist. However, even if changes in the collective memory are inscribed within the overall structures of a society, these structures at the same time depend on relations of power. In this case, the relation is between the actors and processes that produce official history and memories in societies under conflict, these relations affect what and how is something remembered or forgotten. Both processes struggle for the power to establish particular *historical* truths, since some actors in the conflict wish to silence some truths and to spread others.

And even though it is true that memories have a social and a historical dimension, memory is not history and history is not memory, the two are different processes to legitimize the past, both use different methods, instruments, spaces, actors and ways to remember or forget.

2.3. History & Memory

History as a discourse in modernity, based part of its validity in scientific, factual data, the logic of historians was lineal, hegemonic and power centered. The official history became an unequivocal, unitary and unified truth.

On the contrary, Walter Benjamin said that memories were “similar to ultraviolet rays capable of detecting aspects of reality never seen.”(Gesammelte Schriften: 142) Memory is a gaze over the past or better yet, a construction of the present from the past

(konstruktion) not a restoration of the past, but a rekonstruktion, a creation of the present with materials from the past. (Mate 2000:45) But for this konstruktion to take place, an encounter between a determined past with a determined present must occur.

2.4. What Kind of Determined Pasts do Exist?

There are two kinds of pasts, according to Reyes Mate, one that is present in the present and one that is absent in the present. The victorious remain in the annals of history, but the vanquished are forgotten and absent, history forgets them, yet some memories remembers them.

Walter Benjamin said that history is written from the point of view of the victorious and not of the vanquished. This is why it is crucial that the study of memories be a non-hegemonic field, for the state, (a repressive state) historians and some others with particular agendas, try to collectively manipulate the past by emphasizing some memories and by diminishing others.

I will be, therefore, making a differentiation between history and memory. However, note that I am not talking about the ways in which historians in general participate in the making of history, I am focusing and discussing the processes and the actors that participated directly in the construction of the official history in Colombia for as the novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote in *Big Mama's Funeral*: "I must tell this story before the historians have time to arrive." "but the historians arrived long ago and the novelist is righting the wrongs of Colombian historiography by giving life and breath to long-forgotten incidents which should have been at the center of Colombian historical consciousness, but were omitted by historians." (Rappaport 1990)

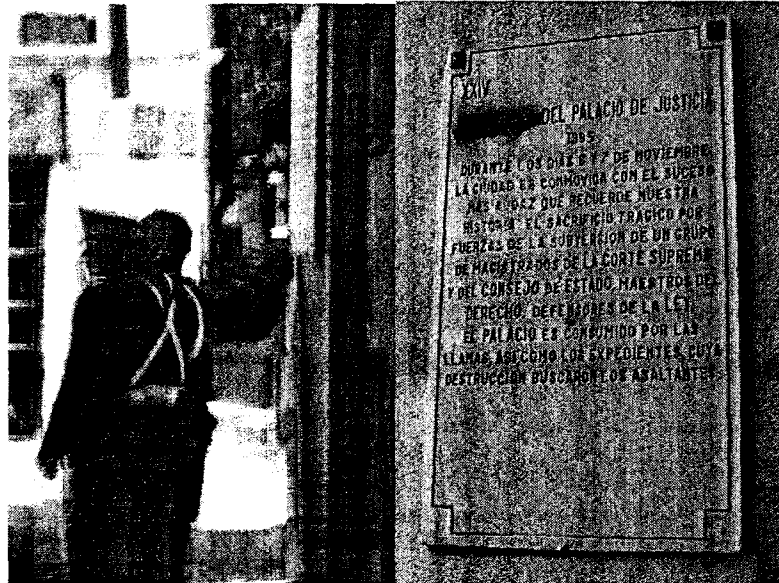
2.5. Differences Between Memory and History

XXIV

blocaus of the Palace of Justice 1985

During the 6th and 7th of November,
the city was moved with the most audacious
event that our history could remember.
The tragic sacrifice of the Supreme Court,
Professors of justice, defenders of law by
the strength of the subversion.

The palace was consumed
by the flames, also the archives,
which destruction was caused by the attackers.



During the commemoration of the 6th of November 2008, a beggar took some flowers he found in the Plaza and brought them to the Plaque XXIV, where the chapter of the Palace of Justice is written in stone.

Quickly a policeman asked him to remove the flowers from the plaque. Flowers are brought to tombs, as a way to remember, what harm could a flower represent? If a small act of remembering like this one, is suppressed and controlled, how could Colombians safely create a collective memory, if it is forbidden to remember?

Elizabeth Jelin and Reyes Mate explain some of the differences between history, as a hegemonic social science and memories as more participatory ways to reconstruct

the past. This is a basic differentiation to begin to understand how memories might be different from the official history in the context of the Colombian conflict

History

Written
Academic transmission

Hegemonic
Power centered
Truth (citations)

Excludes
Function: legitimize the past

Memory

Oral (mainly)
Rite and traditions

Social and democratic
Counter hegemonic
Truth (Expressed through the senses, I saw, I felt, it smelled)

Includes
Function: Reconstruct the broken social fabric.

History is one of the ways to preserve the past, but it can be an arbitrary method for not all cultures arrange their memories in the same way as historians do. History is “chronological, organized on the basis of a coherent dating scheme and uses evidence derived from documents that are then formulated into a systematic presentation.” (Rappaport 1990:12) However, there are other ways to remember through stories or “myths, which are the antithesis of history: non-linear, atemporal, fictional non-systematic.”(Rappaport 1990:12) Orality has been a major way to keep memories from being corrupted, this is because history might be construed by those who wish to “account for images of the past and not from the past, and who instead of documenting what really occurred bring up images of what should have happened.” (Rappaport 1990: 12) according to their particular interests, for as “Marx wrote over 150 years ago the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” (Shore 2002: 2)

In Colombia, and the South Cone, the persistence of mutilated history, of forgotten people, of absent voices, of disappeared innocents, of tortured alternatives,

makes of memory as a field of study, an effective field to imagine ways to repair the fractures, dictatorships and periods of repression, imprinted in our shared *histories*.

2.6. A Latin American Gaze on Memory

Elizabeth Jelin's work on memory is an extensive interdisciplinary work in Latin America, and it was until I studied her theoretical views, that I understood how Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Brazil and many other Latin American nations were somehow part of an orchestra, they all played the tune of dictatorships and they all suffered periods of repression, which marked their histories and memories and therefore, not only their past but their futures as well. To complement Halbwachs I studied a more contemporary approach. As I wrote before, I am exploring Elizabeth Jelin's, Reyes Mata and Jorge Mendoza's work on memory.

Elizabeth Jelin takes from Halbwachs the importance of the social and historical aspects of memory and says that the study of memory is a continuous dialogue, open and unfinished. Therefore, to talk about memory or of a definition of it, will ignore the elusive, complex and always changing nature of this field. Jelin instead proposes we study memories not memory, to oppose the hegemonic nature of history. Jelin proposes the study of memories in post conflict situations, as already mentioned, this approach even if useful is insufficient. Nonetheless, the most accurate.

2.7. Jelin's Guiding Premises to Study Memories.

First of all, it is vital to understand memories as subjective historical processes linked to symbolic and material practices, particularly processes related to narrative memories. However, trauma leaves gaps, and silences interrupt these narratives. For this reason, we cannot approach memories as we would histories, memories will have

variations, interruptions, pauses and these obstacles, should not diminish the validity of memories, for memories cannot be proven nor do they need to be. Why? Because the brutality of repression leaves no traces and in many cases only a bracelet will survive a forced disappearance, like the one left by Lucy Amparo Oviedo de Arias. The bracelet will be meaningful for her family, this is an artefact of memory it will be a link for the family to evoke memories, nothing can be proven with the existence of this bracelet, and as I just wrote, nothing needs to be proven with it. For while studying memories, “the past is somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, unmistakably present in some material object or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us.” (Proust taken from Marks 2000: 77)

For the scholars studying memories, these objects or sensations are valid, not as proofs, but as elements that constitute forgotten memories, and since memories are linked to emotions and there is no scientific study to investigate the logic of a sensation felt in the absence, a human being feels, when a loved one has disappeared, the bracelet is not an element to establish truth, it is a memory that refuses to disappear, a material incongruence that challenges the official version of truth.

Second, it is important to recognize memories as the objects of disputes, conflicts and struggles. This premise requires that we focus on the active role of the participants in these struggles. For they generate meanings of the past, framed within the power relations in which their actions are embedded in the present. (Jelin)

Lastly, it is important to contextualize memories, meaning to recognize the existence of historical changes in different societies, cultural settings and/or spaces of political and ideological conflicts. To further guide us in the study of memories, Jelin

identifies four elements that constitute memories. Note, that Halbwachs also situated memory in time and space. Jelin added artefacts and buildings to the other two elements to study memory, namely time and space.

Jelin also proposes a methodology to study memories based on three questions.

- 1) Who? 2) What? 3) How and When?

2.7.1. Who remembers?

With this question we come back to Halbwachs' questioning, it is the individual or the group who remembers? This question stresses the eternal dilemma between the individual and society. However, it also allows us to include more versions of a historical truth. For some will remember what they were told to remember and others perhaps, those who were silenced, will remember what they lived, what happened to them. Even if their memories have been ignored and erased from history.

2.7.2. What is remembered? What is remembered or forgotten?

This question relates to one of the most important characteristics of memory as it relates to the idea of « being there » I saw, I felt, I heard, I smelled, I sensed. "Memory is actualized in bodily sensations and correspondingly is not simply a mental but an embodied process: perception appeals to the intelligence of the body" (Bergson taken from Marks 2000: 146)

Contrary to history, memories do not establish objectivity through specialist determining what really happened (truth) through facts, memories are not written most of the time, they inhabit the bodies, they are orally shared, performed through trajectories, evoked in rituals and this is why it is important to include more answers, less facts, to this question, what do you remember?

2.7.3. How is the Siege remembered or forgotten and when?

When are particular memories elicited? This question makes us think about the processes employed by the state or by people to remember or to forget. When we ask about the time, we are locating and finding why at some particular moment, memories were awakened or left asleep. The Siege of the Palace of Justice started to be investigated many years after it happened, processes were reopened after they were buried for years in oblivion, not because of a need for justice from the ruling class but because candidates to the presidency of Colombia, who belonged to the M-19, were accused of their past and were asked to respond for their participation in this holocaust, as it is referred to, by many politicians in Colombia. A strategy against a political foe, accidentally brought back a process that was ignored for a long time. How is the Siege remembered? Or Forgotten? Despite the general oblivion in relation to the Siege of the Palace of Justice, the families directly affected by this tragedy, commemorate every year these days, which marked their lives. The families of the employees of the cafeteria, (gathered under the direction of a lawyer, Umana, who was killed for his intervention in this and other processes) and started judicial action against the state. Later on, I will explore further the how they remember or forget.

2.8. Importance of Memories in Latin America

The study of memories in Latin America is truly important, after repression and dictatorships, people finally have more space to share their stories with others and they feel empowered to know that they were never experiencing dictatorships by themselves. Yet, even during dictatorships or periods of repression, people never really renounced their right to have memories: places were engraved, streets were walked, songs were

written, songs were sung, poems were proclaimed, sensations emerged, perceptions changed. Memories were ways to survive; they inhabited terrains that no human being can remember or perhaps forget, terrains that touched the imagination and the human capacity to create. During conflict, memories equally occupy a vital role in people's lives, even if repression continues, the power of memory allows people to create their own *histories*, even if their versions are not official or accepted.

2.9. People need to remember, but do they also have a need to forget?

Jelin and Mendoza Garcia emphasize the complexities related to memories, sometimes to forget is a crime and sometimes it is a necessity. They identified forgetting as a dimension of memories and theorized about different types of forgetfulness.

Definitive forgetfulness occurs when something or someone is forever forgotten, memories are erased or destroyed permanently. Silences and gaps appear in the narratives, in the routines, in the everything of a person whose memories have vanished permanently.

Evasive forgetfulness occurs when memories are evasive or mutilated (Ricoeur) they are silenced for some time, particularly when social trauma is recent. People avoid memories that hurt and keep them for later.

As time goes by, sometimes there is a type of forgetfulness that is liberating. **Liberating forgetfulness** is a necessary process that individuals go through in order to keep on going. No longer can memories be avoided, people start to share and feel accompanied and sustained, all along they were not alone.

And yet sometimes, forgetfulness is induced. **Induced forgetfulness** happens when some memories are imposed, or destroyed. For example, memories are corrupted through

constant repetition, a saturated type of forgetfulness or a senseless empty repetition of memories usually by the media, which causes people to feel suffocated and to prefer forgetfulness over remembrance. (Mendoza 2005: 13)

Memories can be destroyed and changed as well through the destruction or construction of architecture and the use of objects.

“Monuments (which include statues, cenotaphs, museums, mausoleums and the Millennium Dome) not only venerate and commemorate the rulers and “great men” of our age, they actively construct those histories by which people come to identify themselves. In this sense they become powerful technologies for shaping subjectivities and influencing how societies remember – or the obverse; how they choose to forget.” (Shore 2002: 13)

“Much has been written about the deliberate repression of cultures- their language, literature, art, customs- But little about the repression of their architecture.” (Bevan 2006:9) Through the destruction of particular meaningful “Lièux de la mémoire” (Pierre 2002:10) cultures lose important guidance for the production of meaning. Certain buildings or places become central symbols for the continuity of important aspects of culture, and when they are destroyed “architecture takes on a totemic quality: a mosque, for example, is not simply a mosque; it represents to its enemies the presence of a community marked for erasure, a library or art gallery is a cache of historical memory, evidence that a given community's presence extends into the past legitimizing it in the present and on into the future.” (Bevan 2006:8) In this case, The Palace of Justice does not keep the memories of what happened 25 years ago. Instead the architect was guided by the military, who suggested, the construction of a Palace to follow the structure of a medieval fortress. In this case, “the threat to familiar buildings is a threat to identity and to the collective memory which maintains a group's consciousness.”(Bevan 2006:10)

Memories and the practices related to memory-making are crucial for the survival of individuals. What members of a collective choose or can remember or forget, forms and determines their continuity not only in time but also in the possibility to create and imagine their future.

In many ways, memories can be distorted and yet they belong to people and to their willingness to find meaning and to survive through the understanding of their past. For when we excavate the past we are looking for memories to imagine the future.

2.10. Methodology

As I mentioned in the introduction, I was initially interested in the ways in which Colombians either remembered or forgot the Siege of The Palace of Justice, particularly in the processes that allowed, those directly affected by forced disappearance, to transmit either hatred, resentment or forgiveness, to new generations. My main objective was to discover the functioning of the cycles of violence, following the paths traced by memories. I had, therefore an urgency to gather forgotten stories from the official historical record, through processes (workshops of memory) that could help individuals to reconstruct their truths.

2.11. What are Workshops of Memory?

I wanted to follow the approach used by the anthropologist Pilar Riaño-Alcalá who has pioneered the technique of the “workshops of memory”. Such workshops are designed to create a space for ethnographic fieldwork based on the

“intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground.” (Jackson, 1996: 9).

“The memory workshops gather together groups of individuals who interact in remembering through the use of verbal and visual methods– storytelling, mapping, visual biographies, image making, paper quilts, music, and photographs – to explore the multiple embodied and sensory dimensions of the practices of remembering and forgetting, in ways in which memories are actualized in everyday life.” (Riaño-Alcalá 2006: 17)

My main objective in using the “workshops of memory” was to create spaces where there was an agreement or an effort to make of this time/space an oasis from the violent, disrespectful, and distrustful every day of most Colombians. In this space/time memories were to be elicited through questions, music, paintings, pictures, the making of

quilts, creating the construction of a contested social memory. “This contested social memory returns to people a sense of control over the past and over their destiny.” (Robben 2005: 358) as they become actively engaged in creating their own version of a collective memory, in this sense the weaving of memories becomes a way to survive the indiscribable.

I imagined the workshops of Memory to be able to integrate “the multiple modes of human interconnection” (Finnegan 2002) and to be ways to explore diverse artistic expressions that could facilitate communication and healing. For example, I wished to include some time to listen to music, for “music it has been suggested, is experienced with the whole body and sound can be hypnotic and exhilarating, drawing people inescapably out of themselves and into a common communicative ambience.” (Finnegan 2002: 90) I wished to explore as well, through painting, drawing, singing, storytelling, in sum through creative mediums, the infinite capacity that human beings have to remember and to imagine.

The workshops of Memory were designed to create a space for ethnographic fieldwork based on the “intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground.” (Jackson 1996:9)

The main objective behind the “workshops of memory”, therefore, was to find ways to challenge the cycles of violence that I thought were perpetuated through the ways in which memories were maintained and passed from one generation to another.

My methodology was influenced by a need and a desire to contribute to end the cycles of violence I perceived existed in Colombia, and therefore by the idea of praxis.

I understood praxis as the blend between academic work and social involvement,

this is why I planned doing workshops of memory, a research method I thought gave the space and time to evoke memories and share the emotions attached to all that has mainly been forgotten rather than remembered.

This method offered me a direct way to contribute. I was ready to listen to the “victims” and their stories. Unfortunately, I did not realize beforehand that five months is not a very long time to start a process such as the one I wanted to start. I did not take into account either the fact that these people have to work and have busy lives and most importantly, that they have gone somehow through these processes before. I did not know how their legal battles took most of their energies and that despite their shared experience (the loss of a loved one) they were all different, not just because they had lived through what seems to be “similar” social trauma, did they necessarily agree on how to remember or forget their loved ones. The project of the workshops of memory as the process that “returns to people a sense of control over the past and over their destiny.” (Robben 2005:358) as they become actively engaged in creating their own version of a collective memory, making of “...memory a strategic tool for human and cultural survival.” (Riaño-Alcalá 2006:12) is a project I hope to develop in the future. The project needs more time, and also collaboration from other scholars who are interested in the study of memories.

2.12. Other Methods

I was able nonetheless to develop other methodologies while doing fieldwork, even if they were not workshops of memory, I had the same underlying intention whenever I actively engaged in finding memories. The course I took: Memory, Violence and History at the Javeriana University with Professor Luz Angela Nunez, gave me a better outlook on education about memory and history in Colombia, access to the

academia and to what is being done in relation to the field of memory studies, access to a collaborative dialogue with young people who were studying and thinking about memory in Colombia, and most importantly, to the families of people made to disappear. It was in a Psychology class where I met Penelope, the wife of one of the employees of the cafeteria made to disappear 25 years ago, she was invited to give her testimony, to share her story in front of a class of young psychology students, she then helped me establish contact with the other families. I did have a way to contact her before, but was never able to make the phone call before, I struggled with the validity of my research and my position, how can I call her and say I am a student and I want to know what you remember about the day you lost your husband 25 years ago, because I am interested in knowing your particular story and what happened during the Siege. I was never able to make the necessary phone calls, but with time I met her in an environment in which she was the one sharing her story willingly and collectively. I was unsure about my right to ask questions, instead with time I asked for memories, or was simply in the place wherever stories were told and memories evoked.

In the class I took, I explored a rich theoretical framework and learned about the work of scholars, about conferences, events, and most importantly I learned about my classmates' need and desire to contribute, they too were wondering: what went wrong in our past? And how can we change it? It was very soothing and stimulating to encounter young people with whom to share the same concern for our sad country, and the enthusiasm to imagine that the study of memories can be an alternative to change the future of that sad country.

I did walkabouts with Penelope sometimes without walking physically, but only

walking through the paths of memory right in the Plaza Bolivar. For example, I heard Penelope remembering what she did 25 years ago, she was pointing out the places where she was looking for her husband, remembering what she did when the Siege occurred.

I also did a focus group with seven classmates all in their early 20's or late teens, talking of what happened or about the moment and place when they learned about the Siege of the Palace. It was during these talks, which also occurred informally during breaks, that I realized how they linked their past with their present, forced disappearances were not something from the past, they were happening as we spoke. Perhaps in different circumstances, or for different motives, but still people disappear like smoke. I went with my classmates to the MAMBO, The Modern Art Museum of Bogotá, and visited exhibitions from Argentineans and Chilean artists exploring the disappearance of thousands during the dictatorships of the South Cone. We read poems, watched videos, pictures and afterwards talked about it as it related to the Colombian conflict.

Furthermore, I did interviews using storytelling techniques. This method allowed me to pose open ended questions rooted in stories, which revealed more in depth views of people in relation to the Siege, as they related their stories in relation to the 6th and 7th of November 1985, the distortions that violence might have caused to their memories was evident. Particularly, the fractures in the narratives due to a lack of accurate information or the repetition of a story fabricated by the media around a particular image, of a tank entering the entrance of the Palace, which has been widely shown, to reinforce the moment in which the army saved democracy. This induced memory, violates alternative memories and distorts the complexity of the action taken by the army, one story has been imposed through an image, an image that pretends to create an homogeneous narrative of

a particular moment during the Siege of the Palace.

To counteract the effect of this imposed memory, I interviewed people who lived and worked in the Plaza, homeless people, photographers, peanut vendors, storytellers, and tried to include more narratives, more memories of the Siege, reaching to different generations and to a closest experience of what happened 25 years ago in downtown Bogotá.

I included also the work of journalists like Maureen Maya who co -wrote “It is Forbidden to Forget” (Prohibido Olvidar) with Gustavo Petro (an ex- militant of the M-19 organization and nowadays a candidate for presidential office) a narrative of the events of the 6th and 7th of November 1985, the causes, actors, consequences. Also, the journalist German Castro Caycedo who wrote “ The Palace in Flames” (El Palacio en Llamas) a book in quotation marks, he said, for he consulted all the archives, testimonies and declarations of those involved in the Siege, creating a narrative with those declarations, not including his point of view, which he considered was a dangerous endeavour.

Also, I interviewed various family members of those made to disappear, a pro-military protester present during the celebrations of the 6th and the 7th of November 2008.

I contacted “Hijos e Hijas”, the young sons and daughters of people who dissented mainly from the leftist political spectrum in Colombia. They are an extension from Hijos e Hijas, an organization in Argentina. In this group I found the daughter of the administrator of the cafeteria who was made to disappear 25 years ago, and talked to her and to her grandfather, who brought the case of the disappeared to the Inter American

Court of Human Rights.

I attended conferences during the week for memory, celebrated in Bogotá, and had the opportunity to talk with groups that work with memory. I went to some events in the Plaza Bolivar where through performances, an organization (Rayuela) of young people, tried to make visible the reality of violence in Colombia, particularly the phenomenon of forced disappearance.

I visited the Plaza Bolivar and gathered information through participant observation, or through a combination of both, structured and unstructured observations. I was attentive to random conversations, unexpected encounters, persistent absences or subtle repeated presences.

Finally, I went to the commemorations of the 6th and 7th of November, to the mass offered in the cathedral for the memory of the justices that were killed, this time, the families of the cafeteria workers were invited. They usually have a different celebration (mass) for their loved ones.

3. Chapter 3 Sharing Stories and Memories. Truth and Injustice

3.1. Models of Repression – A Late Context to Highlight Memories.

A Model of repression is a strategy articulated by the state and assumed by the establishment. It constitutes the fundamental framework in which crimes and violations of human rights occur.

The first model of repression in Colombia occurs from 1966 to 1981, when a state of siege is legally established. In 1977 the model changes because the army becomes more autonomous and legal exceptions that favor the military, are strengthened.

During the same year (1977) there is civic unrest and new social movements emerge to resist forced disappearances, political assassinations, torture.

From 1982 to 1987 state repression occurs in the context of the dirty war and it is during the mandate of President Betancour (1982-1985) that attempts for dialogue were sabotaged and selective assassinations of leaders of the opposition occurred. During this period Betancour tries to partially end the state of emergency. Yet, new repressive strategies are developed, but this time not under the umbrella of legality. There is an increase of forced disappearances, yet, official arrests diminished. From 1988 to 1993 there is a better linkage between legal repression and para-statal strategies of repression.

A slow come back to the state of siege is established through a democratic defense legislation then Massacres begin to be the modus operandi of para-military groups who are the actors that reinforce illegal state strategies to exterminate the opposition.

Usually, the massacres occur in rural zones, giving people in the urban zones a sense of security. However, from 1985 to 1994 the battles among drug cartels against the laws of

extradition made the conflict felt in the cities as well. Bombs and selective assassinations touched the city dwellers.

In 1994 to 1998 there is a military reengineering process and the legalization of the para-military squads of death by the government.

There is legal support to Convivir, a para-military squad that received financial help and legal protection to acquire weapons. At the same time a greater budget (from the United States through the Plan Colombia⁷ a kind of Marshall' Plan intended to fight drugs and the violence in the country) is given to the army so they can improve their combat capacity, communication technology and intelligence.

Lastly, from 1998 to the present there has been a consolidation of repressive models, consolidation of the para-military squads and a weakening of social movements, particularly of the so-called leftist movements.

One of the specific ways in which the government has given protection to para-military groups is through law 975 expedited in 2005. This law reduces sentences to a maximum of eight years in exchange for full confessions and reparation of victims. The law initiated the reinsertion process of paramilitary bands, and until now they have been the only illegally armed group to take advantage of it. The reinsertion process might be perceived as a turning point to consider the end of conflict in Colombia, a point to start studying post conflict, but the fact that it is only the para-military who have been reinserting themselves into legality, shows that there is a process of military reengineering, for once paramilitary reinsert into society, bands like the black hawks, begin their delictual activities once more, only this time they are doing it legally, openly and with greater

⁷ Plan Colombie: Passeport pour la guerre
<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/ameriquelatine/plancolombie-intro>

support from many sectors of the population, the state and the army. This law is a strategy that even drug traffickers use as a way to reinsert themselves and their capital into legality, drug lords buy entire squads and appear as para-military so they will be able to benefit and be protected by this law.

The latest model of repression hides under the democratic security policy, in which the civil population is encouraged to help diminish the violence by supporting the army, by supporting the armed groups of civilians- campesinos, to arm and defend themselves, (these actors are called the Auto defenses United of Colombia: AUC, paramilitary squads). Also, recompenses are given to civilians to help capture criminals, and diverse financial incentives given to illegal armed civilians to reinsert themselves into society.

This summary of Colombian history during the second half of the twentieth century in terms of models of repression is introduced at this point, because I want to highlight the importance of the stories and memories of Colombians who lived under these circumstances. I want to impress the meaning of their search on to whoever is reading. The search for truth, justice and reparation, this search might be articulated in the academy, by commissions of truth, by the historical society for memory in Colombia, by many writers, and it is even a search that became a law in 2005. But, deep down all the victims of state repression know, feel and desire truth and justice. Truth in its most simple, least perverse philosophical or post-modern meaning: Where are they? What happened to them? Where they tortured? Justice in its most humble and fair state, not disguised under burdensome laws or never ending judicial processes: Who is responsible? Who disappeared my mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, my friend my child?

3.2. What do They Say about Truth?

While the commemoration was taking place, (6th and 7th November 2008) the families of the disappeared gathered at Plaza Bolivar, they were invited to the mass for the magistrates, they rarely are invited to this mass celebration, and instead they have their own mass and commemorate in the Plaza bringing empty chairs with the names of their loved ones. During this day I gathered stories, some were elicited from my questions and some by the journalists who were present that day, 6th and 7th of November 2008.

Let us begin with Don Justino, an 80 years old male who was a magistrate of justice for 40 years, he was the person responsible for bringing the case of the cafeteria staff to the Inter American commission of Human Rights.

“In the high circles, the ties, the connections are tremendous, there are many toes to step on, toes with coms! And probably they do not want to be involved, in a book that (he : Belisario Betancour) pretends to write or already wrote, the truth would be known, just that it would be (published) after he dies. But imagine my case, as a victim, I have never wished death to anybody, but I would like that he died so I can know the truth.”

23 years later and Don Justino still cries when looking at the picture of his disappeared son, his granddaughter accompanies him and strives as well to know the truth and also to spread it, for she belongs to Sons and Daughters, the organization of young people that strive for memories to be kept alive. She wants people to know that her father was made to disappear by the army, that he was seen outside the Palace of Justice safe and sound and then afterwards, inexplicably, was never to be found.

Andrea wrote:

Look, how could I tell you? I think that for a person to be able to have an opinion about this, (he/she) would have had to suffer in (his/her) family a disappearance, to know the pain of the people, who are 23 years ago waiting for the remains of our children.

Where are they?! - So we can give them a Christian burial?!-“

The writer and journalist Castro Caycedo made an “effort to not forget” by writing The Palace without a Mask...

“The book I wrote is an effort to do not forget, everything is based in documents, is a book in quotation marks, for the danger that it represents to write a more open book, for the danger to study the many documents that show how the army entered the Palace to bulldoze after the guerrillas, then I did not ask for interviews, I did not make interviews to those who are alive, and took what hundreds of victims told the judges, so I could take distance.

I revised 5000 folios, and found that everything was said but not divulged, not articulated, no one told the country before, look the army entered to destroy whatever there was and whoever moved either from the M-19 or not.”

Caycedo’s book is therefore a compilation of many truths, of the memories of many victims, witnesses; it is also an effort to know about the whereabouts of his friend, a magistrate who is not usually counted as a disappeared victim. He was as well escorted alive from the palace and from what Castro Caycedo remembers was never found.

“I was a very good friend of one disapp... (not a cafeteria worker, a magistrate, does not finish saying the word disappeared) at around... I do not remember, Carlos called me to my office and said he was trapped in the Palace, in the afternoon and he told me, look in the radio are saying that the Palace has been evacuated, here we are still about 200 people trapped, please tell Caracol (radio chain) to do not continue saying that, that on the contrary, say that there are 200 hundred people inside, because that can represent our death, that they say that it has been evacuated.”

Truth in this case was straightforward, there were hostages still in the Palace, the army had a way to know and to cease fire, many intervened, but unfortunately, truth meets with censorship when repression is the model and the strategy used by the state, a weakened

government in this case, overwhelmed with the strength of an army out of control driven by anger and revenge and possibly by a military logic of duty before life, logic enshrined in the history and the national anthem of Colombia. I will analyze this later on.

Castro continues:

“Then, I went to talk with the President of RTI and he said let us go to Caracol together, this was the first time that I saw him walking alone on the streets, (meaning, no body guards, no security) RTI it was two blocks away, we talked to the news director, we told him Carlos was on the phone that they were in danger if they kept on saying that the Palace was evacuated. He replied, that there was nothing he could do, because there was censorship. There is when I understood, that from an ethical point of view, I would have not cared for the censorship, if it meant saving 200 lives, Caracol did not want to do it. This is how I lived this day. Next day, I went into the Palace, went to the second floor, looking for the remains of Carlos. I entered at 5: 30, the Siege, hmmm the bulldozing finished towards 3: 30 in the afternoon, we did not see his body on the first and second floor, it was a building in ruins, a hot building really hot, smoky for the fire and with a fetid, strong odor of flesh exposed to fire, we did not find his body. The bodies were moved around, the army moved them, and any body with basic notions of penal law, knows that a body in an accident cannot be moved from its place, because the site where the head is located, etcetera, etcetera, can help clarify the crime. The bodies were moved close to one wall in the first floor, around 50 bodies easily. Carlos was not there, we left at around 6: 00 pm, when it was dark, that is the memory I have.”

In this case, facts became hidden truths, what was happening was silenced and censored.

This is why people strive to keep their memories alive, memory becomes then a synonym of truth, even if partial, personal, touched by pain, the families of those who disappeared remember and they want the lives of their loved ones to be respected and acknowledged. And since those lives were brutally taken, the memories that remain is all they have left, and they are not willing to forget, because “forgetting the past would be the second and final victory of the perpetrators, after having already succeeded in destroying the remains of many disappeared.” (Robben 2005: 357)

I asked Penelope:

After 23 years, do you think the remains could be found?

“I would want that, I would like to believe that one day we will receive the remains of my husband and that we will know the truth, that there will be justice and reparation that we will be told the truth and the remains will be returned. But I have a big, big, big, lack of trust that it will not happen.”

The truth they seek is simple as I said, they want to know where are the remains of their loved ones and also they want other Colombians to acknowledge these crimes. For them it is important that this never happens again to anybody else, they are not just looking for someone to assume responsibility, when I asked Penelope about the responsible she said:

“I have always said that there is not one person as such, I cannot say is Plazas Vega or Samudio, is a combination of all of them and many more, but if only one of them wants to assume the responsibility, wonderful! But not for revenge or to hate him and not for the same thing to occur again, but so people will learn and this will not happen again.”

It is important for the families that truth about the intellectual and material responsible is known, perhaps some will naturally feel or felt sentiments of revenge, but some others like Penelope wishes that this tragedy would never happen again, despite the fact that it continues happening in Colombia.

Also, it is of utter importance that their truth could be shared and respected, because for many years they were accused of being liars of being crazy, therefore, for them to commemorate these days, to perform acts to counteract the official history, to share memories, despite the accusations and the distrust of people, is a source of dignity for their lost family members and also for themselves.

In this respect Penelope said:

“Now we are no longer treated as liars or crazy because we said they were made to disappear that they were tortured and that terrible things happened, it is something truly beautiful for us is like receiving trust, people no longer think we are crazy or liars and

understand that we are not making this up, but, I do not think that we will know the truth nor will we receive the remains of our families.”

More people accompany the families, yet still others have different truths, different memories. During the commemoration in the Plaza Bolivar there was an encounter of diverse groups, those for the M-19, those for the army, those for the cafeteria staff, those for the magistrates, bypassers and journalists. They all compete for spaces to share their own memories, they all want their truth to be widely spread and believed by other Colombians. The families of the magistrates do not stay in the public Plaza, they attend the mass and leave, and the others stay in this symbolic square, walking, shouting, remembering and forgetting. The doctrine of democratic security, which has been reinforced by the current president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez operates as an operation to militarize the country. The presence of armed soldiers in the city and in the urban zones is alarming. However, the media portrays the army as the angels, the heroes of the nation, and to have doubts about their honorable mission to protect the national territory and the inhabitants of this land is to be anti patriotic. Violence, that “macabre form of certainty” (Appadurai) is what many Colombians share as part of their own identities. The first president of Colombia, the liberator of the Americas, was general Simon Bolivar, one learns in school that he fought incessantly, one sings the national anthem every morning remembering how the heroes of the nation were “soaked in blood of the land of Columbus... how the Orinoco's bedfills with the remains, of blood and tears a river is there seen flowing. In Bárbula they don't know the souls nor the eyes, if admiration or horror feel or suffer....soldiers without breast plate won victory; their virile breath as shield served.” (Colombian National Anthem)

“War in Colombia is not going to be won with another war, but with peace agreements, we are witnessing this, the M-19 was reinserted and it started to dissolve. But this is not accepted by an ultra right wing country like ours, the right wing thinks that it is with gunshots that the conflict will end, but this is an old conflict, centuries old. After the independence, colonial times, and the crops of marihuana, why the traffic of drugs began? It was stimulated by North Americans who were coming back from Vietnam addicted and as a way to fight them, looking ahead light years, the Vietnamese provoked their decadence. Young soldiers come back addicted and got marihuana from Jamaica, then Colombia begins producing and the quality is supreme, The United States promoted it. They found a country of hard working people, creative and with hunger and the war of guerillas started to add up to the violence brought by the drug trafficking in the 60’s and then, in the 70’s cocaine, and it has not stopped.” Castro Caycedo.

The violence brought by the drug traffic has corrupted many spheres in Colombia, the army, the government, the guerrillas, and the society in general.

This dimension of the Colombian conflict is worth mentioning because it acknowledges the corruption coming from one of the most lucrative businesses, the trafficking of drugs, phenomena that changed the civil society and the state creating a mentality that devalued life. Drug lords paid \$ 500 to teenagers to shoot policemen, and anyone on their way was threatened and-or killed. There was also an increased desire for easy money and already corrupt institutions were strengthened with such money. The M-19 also had links with drug cartels; they were going to receive some money to buy weapons. In this scenario the cost of dissenting in Colombia is high, not only has the opposition been systematically assassinated, as is the case with the UP, an entire party that was persecuted and made to disappear, but also through more subtle forms, the elites, the hegemony, which

“have amalgamated doctrinal bases since the 40’s and therefore are not really in opposition to each other, but instead a business partner, for the political elite in Colombia is as well the business elite, in other countries they are independent, here they are mixed. Nowadays they are the same thing and they give their back to the country and say nothing, because they are nothing.

Furthermore, the media has been owned or controlled by the state, there are no

antecedents of many independent media. Cano was sent to a panoptical prison, and this is how the Espectador survived at the beginning.” Castro Caycedo’s interview.

The media is one of the sources for collective memories, but during the siege truth was silenced, for many years it was hidden, and when the case was re opened, truths, memories were saturated by empty images, images with no historical context, but with a superficial official version of the events.

Amidst this situation, people learn to accept violence as a way of life and to avoid involvement with the effects of repression, and indifference to what happens to others, becomes blame. By blaming those who suffered, people feel secure and imagine that what they know happened to others, will not happen to them. After all, they will not dissent, they will not give reasons to the powerful to commit any violence against them, yet others resist the legitimization of abuse, of violence.

3.3. Legitimization of Violence

Effective models of repression succeed in many ways, through the control of the media, through the spread of terror techniques, rumors, bureaucracies, but people are aware, specially and unfortunately when violence has directly touched them, when it is no longer possible to live in oblivion or to turn around and say: Por algo seria! There must be a reason! This is a common saying, I remember my mother saying it when something bad happened to me, because I was not obeying. I told you so! Do not disobey is the mantra one hears over and over as a child, perhaps in some it remains, yet others do otherwise, but if something bad happens to them when disobeying then there is another saying, which is considered the 11th commandment, after the 10th Christian commandments: No dar papaya, do not give papaya, do not give the opportunity to others to do something bad to you, meaning if something bad happens to me, if I decide to go to

the bank and get some money without going with somebody, it is automatically my fault, because I gave papaya, I gave the thief the opportunity to rob me. All this mini- analysis within the analysis, to start reflecting on the ways in which memory is a vehicle for violent imaginaries to exist and be passed from one generation to the next and to begin to understand how come my great grandparents were telling stories about the War of Thousand days and how I sure will be telling some more war stories.

People learn to live amidst conflict, the families of the disappeared know that it is not their fault that their loved ones were disappeared. For example, members of Sons and Daughters said in this respect:

“In Colombia we live in a conflict, and it is not to say that we live in a cross fire, it is to say that we live in a state in which many of the actions that can be executed, like acts of repression are legitimized socially and this is what happens in the case of the extrajudicial killings. If one is assassinated, one gets disguised as a guerrilla and there must be a reason!”

Don Justino talks about effects of repression,

“The army is trying to destroy everything else and they want to govern alone and command here and do things their way, we no longer have the right to think, we are only subjects subdued to these forces that want to destroy this country.”

He has received threats against his life, papers related to the judicial process have been stolen from his office, yet as he said at the beginning of one of his memories: Why are we here? “Because, thank God we are alive” As long as there is life in his heart, he will fight for truth and justice.

Families of disappeared when asked to be interviewed by journalists said:

“Sometimes one does not declare, because we do not know what is going to be on the

news, if the government does not allow it, forget it!”

They also know that sometimes there is no purpose in trying to express themselves, one of them said that she was not afraid of the government, they know they have no right to share some information, yet they continue trying in other ways.

3.4. Indifference and Action

Veronica, a 20 years old literature student during a focus group that felt like a workshop of memory, the 7th of November 2008.

“I think the media has a lot to do with my fragmented memory, but I feel that in class too much blame is placed on the media to RCN and Caracol, (radio and T.V. chains) and obviously they are to blame, they have an 80% of culpability, but also the Siege of the Palace of Justice is a great symbol, because it was a urban attack and it was downtown and if we do not care about an urban attack, an attack in the capital of Colombia, we will care less about a rural village, do you know what I mean? Then, yes we should blame the media, universities and the president, but we also need to see that it is a matter of laziness, an intellectual laziness, even us as students. For example, there is a theater piece, “la siempre viva” very good, it is about one of the people of the cafeteria, and there is literature and songs, but we go home and we are too tired after studying to watch a documentary, but one is always blaming somebody else, but one also contributes with silence.

And now I ask myself who is going to go to the Plaza to accompany the families?

Others smile

And we are the intellectuals, the ones with the opportunity to pay the Javeriana University, we are studying social sciences and look at us!

Then, imagine a house wife, who is not immersed in these type of things... I think there is a vast indifference, because is not about supporting the victims of the paramilitary, but also those of the guerrillas, because in any case a dead person is a dead person. And people get accustomed to death, one then another, we need to fight against that.”

Angel male in his thirties no formal education, son of a woman disappeared during the siege.

“I have not been that involved since I was interned in a public school when my mother

was disappeared, I was 6 years old. My sisters told me that an aunt took the legal custody she was in charge of the resources given by the state. I escaped the school and became “gamin” a street boy and one learns many things and eventually I got caught stealing and was arrested, and it has been really hard and I have been in Bogota for a month, trying to find a job. I ask the soul of my mother to help me find a job, I worked with a machine to make tattoos, I was detained for 5 years and learned all about it.”

Angel’s case relates to indifference because after reading and talking informally to the families when we were gathered at the Plaza Bolivar, I was able to understand that his aunt took the resources given by the state and bought a house. Penelope and Angel’s sisters told me she stole the money and never shared it with them, who were directly affected by the disappearance of their mother. What level of indifference, carelessness possibly misery and need does a human being have to experience to steal and scatter the children of a woman already robbed of her humanity?

As Veronica reflected on the homogeneity imposed by governments, either left or right wing, she was saying how this is not ideal, she also developed ethical arguments about truth or ones position in relation to “injustice”. From her argument, I did decide to share Angel’s story, fully knowing that I am no one to judge, but knowing as well that I am someone who can tell. There is injustice at many levels and liberal values of tolerance in my case and in Veronica’s are not sufficient to justify and forget the violent actions that have suffocated the life of a human being.

“The left starts saying we have to unite as if we were all equal, but we are not, if a country, if countries in South America are gestated in the very things that makes us different. For example, in the left there are different points of view, way too many, why silence them? why not say come work with us, if this country is based on diversity? But, I am not saying is about a complete tolerance, I tolerate that you are Uribista (follower of Uribe) and I am not, but there are things that hurt, I am hurt by some comments of Uribistas, because they might say I agree with social cleanliness⁹, I do not think that I am

⁹ Limpieza social. social cleaning is to kill homeless people, homosexuals, guerillas, prostitutes, young people in the streets after 10:00 pm. emergent bands of reinserted paramilitary have spread pamphlets

going to be in ethics class and that I am going to be told: hey! you have to tolerate that because you have to respect different point of views, but I am sorry, I can't!"

I cannot tolerate either the fact that Angel's life was ruined in many ways, first the state then her sister, then her partner who abandoned her when she had 4 children, and nowadays is present at commemorations, as others say, to see what money he can get.

The grade of indifference that has touched these lives is painfully normal in Colombia.

3.5. What do They Say About Injustice?

Don Justino

"Justice in this country works for some, for the unprotected, the poor, it does not exist. The proof is palpable, 23 years after, here we are, in the same situation. Those military, who the attorney general have accused, are in the clubs as prisons taking advantage of a uniform that they never should have worn.

23 years have passed slowly, seeing murderous impunity run right in front of our noses, slaving away to impede even that we remember our sons who were assassinated by the state...."

Guillermo a pro-military student in his 20's went to the Plaza with the Patriotic mobilization group, for the victims of the Palace of Justice. On their t-shirt and in the pamphlets they gave out, they were also wanting what others need and want as well: Truth and Justice. For them, the attackers to the Palace are now in the legislature, while the defenders of the nation are arrested, meaning the reinserted M-19 ex militants are in congress while the military are being accused and sentenced.

Why Justice? I asked.

"Because we consider that the history that has been told about the Palace is not the

announcing dates and times.

history that was, even worse, it is a history full of gaps, manipulated for convenience. But, we are also fighting for justice for the victims that died.

The victims of the cafeteria?

Yes. Yes those who died in the Siege of the Palace done by the M-19, but also for those victims who nowadays have been accused and incarcerated unjustly.

The military?

Yes, exactly, we are looking for justice so those legislating are punished....

Whose victims do you support?

We are for absolutely all the victims, all the victims that fell under the murderous gunshots of the M-19 and for the victims that are presently suffering an injustice, those are the victims that we are defending.”

3.6. How Do Colombians Remember or Forget?

Colombians remember and forget through protests for justice, talks given in the classroom, writing, researching and saving from archives the memories of many, through commemorations, rituals, the sharing of stories as a job or to kill time, or simply when asked to evoke a memory, some Colombians remember, and continue struggling against imposed oblivion. However, in Colombia, the struggles for memory need to be preceded by struggles for knowledge, not education, since those affected by violence will make efforts to remember, but others will not even know, or will learn a particular version of the past, the official version, neglecting all the other memories, the suppressed and forcibly made to disappear memories.

Justice and Truth are the common themes in the narratives of the families of the cafeteria staff. They demand that the intellectual and material authors of this crime against humanity may be punished, and they demand to know the whereabouts of their

loved ones, they want to know how they lived their last days. Were they tortured? How long did they live? Where are their remains? They struggle for truth to be known. For a long time, they were considered to be liars and to be crazy because of their accusations against the army and the government, the widely spread version of this event was that everybody who did not survive the Siege perished in the flames. The families and the victims were believed to be incapable of dealing with the pain of their loss, and hence they made up these lies so as to receive compensation from the government. Also, people collectively blamed the victims, if they were killed it might be because they were helping the M-19. As if in such case the army had the freedom to take their lives. However, the families of the disappeared constantly need to struggle to maintain the dignity of their dead, they repeat that their loved ones were honest, humble workers who did not have any links with the rebels.

Also, these victims of state repression suffer from solitude. During the commemorations they celebrate each year, very few people acknowledge the tragedy that occurred 25 years ago. Instead, the 6th and 7th of November is usually a grey, rainy day in which very few people go to Plaza Bolivar, some bypassers stare and still wonder why they walk around with a pamphlet that reads SIN OLVIDO. Never Forget.

Since we Colombians do not share a history, and sometimes do not know our own past, we do not share either a common identity. We do not relate to others as those who have suffered some sort of violence, instead the identity of Colombians is manipulated with campaigns about products and people like Shakira, so as to sell resources and a positive image of a country where the government insists on denying the internal conflict, for it will scare investors. Our memories and identity are not rooted in our shared history,

therefore, the creation of initiatives to allow Colombians to reinvent an identity through our shared memories does not happen.

Many Colombians know that massacres occur, homicides, forced disappearances, unfortunately, because they have lived through these traumatic experiences, sometimes they die of sadness forgotten and ignored. Colombians who have suffered violence do not forget, some others do not know or do not want to know, which is a strategy to ensure survival. But, when they do know, they also know how dangerous it is to remember. Nonetheless, there are many attempts to evoke and to share a story, a memory, however timid, memory is too powerful to hide it, to neglect its existence. Some have loudly voiced what they knew, what they remembered, what they wanted others to never forget, brave men and women, who, unfortunately, no longer breathe to continue the struggles for memory. Their stories and memories are remembered by a few and forgotten by the majority. Are we intellectuals, professors, students, lawyers, activists, really engaging in telling truths and sharing memories? Are we challenging the power of the state? Perhaps many dare, and that is why they are still being disappeared, many activists dare not falter, they keep telling truths that we did not know, in the classroom, in the bus, in the Plaza Bolivar in the cafeterias and that is how the social fabric, perhaps could be weaved and healed. Yet, most of us need to commit to think, speak, feel and act consistently with honesty, sensitivity and love for a subject that is not just an interesting issue but also something that directly affects the lives of other human beings.

After 25 years of the Siege, I found an extensive array of books, documentaries, news, newspaper archives, memoirs, oral stories from those affected directly or not, narratives and even the building keeps a history, even though it was re-built with very

little intention of leaving traces of what happened, yet precisely this forced presence of forgetfulness, helps to highlight the absence of memory, and of the general desire to leave aside certain memories, those that stir a past that compromises, the army, the government, the fragile democracy many have fought to maintain for their own benefit. 25 years, enormous piles of information, concrete evidence of those directly involved in the Siege, evidence of torture, forced disappearances, and just recently, and for the very first time, a colonel was condemned, he will most likely appeal the verdict, but at least he was found guilty for the forced disappearance of the cafeteria staff. This is an important step to establish truth and justice for the victims and for the families. As Penelope said, it is important for them that people believe in them, this verdict therefore validates the memories of those who always knew that torture and forced disappearance occurred.

The Siege is an event that marked our history, being the moment when we witnessed the brutality of the army trying to protect democracy (or the status quo), the inefficiency of the state in protecting its own citizens and further being precisely the aggressor and the principal Human Rights violator, that allowed justice (the Supreme Court as a symbol of honorable and just men) to be erased in a matter of two days. The way in which we remember the Palace of Justice allowed the elites in power to verify the fact that Colombians will accept brutality from the state as it is reinforced by the army, nowadays and for the past decades, the army has consolidated as the embodiment of order, justice and there are campaigns that develop nationalistic feelings of pride and love towards the “angels” as the army is referred to in many publicities.

When the carnage ended in 1985, the memory, unitary and univocal that was purposely spread was the version that exonerated the government and the army from guilt, this

memory says how the M-19 was a group of terrorists who killed hundreds of innocents in the Siege and that they did so because drug traffickers offered them money in exchange for a favor, the favor? To burn the files on extradition, those were in the 4th floor in the Palace. The government imposed this memory, and a great majority of Colombians believe in this version, right after the Siege, the army wanted the M-19 to be remembered as the cause for this entire holocaust. The news helped spread this message, the president took full responsibility, protecting the army from any accusation. President Betancour, further imposed a silence through a promise: "I will share the truth after I die, I will leave my memoirs with all the truth." As the father of one of the employees of the cafeteria said, I do not wish death to anyone, but I hope he dies, so I will finally know the truth!

These common stories, pretend to link the M-19 with drug lords, further this story justifies the actions taken by the army. From what I observed on November 6th 2008, in the commemoration of the 23 years in the Plaza Bolivar, memories and counter memories arose and fought for space in the collective memory, but this particular memory was strongly defended by a group of protesters, about 50, who claimed to be in disagreement with the status now enjoyed by former militants of the M - 19 and instead they showed support for the "heroes of the nation" they considered unfair that criminals are legislating, referring to M-19 ex militants, (who did not actually participated in any way with the operation Antonio Nariño, as it was called by the rebels, for this action was reserved to the most experienced members of this guerrilla, and those nowadays in government office aspiring for the presidency, were not directly involved) and their heroes, who defended democracy, are being investigated and might end up in jail.

Memories of this event are vivid to those closest to what happened, but many of us, the rest, often fall into some kind of evasive oblivion (Jelin 2002) these mutilated memories find refuge in silences, which might create ignorance as bliss for some, or even they might create the cowardice of those who do not want to know. This neglect has been elusive, established and strengthened in many ways and for a long time. Several families of missing persons were warned and threatened to remain silent, to stop seeking the remains of their loved ones. Many of those affected, were exiled far from the regime of silence. And in a slow but sure way, a kind of induced forgetting installed itself in the historical memory. The Siege of the Palace was something that had happened, but it was not an important historical event for the country, this I knew when I talked to my classmates, we were remembering our textbooks and were reviewing them, we found no record of the event, or if it is mentioned it becomes a very shallow and little mention, a foot note almost, a footnote of the M-19 being funded by the drug cartels to destroy and incinerate the files of extradition found in the Palace.

As German Castro Caycedo says, we do not learn our own history, we learn European and North American history, we do not know our own.

My classmates have fragmented visual memories of the event, they retain an image, the tanks entering the doors of the Palace in the Plaza Bolivar. But no content or meaning is attached to those memories. The media spread the image so often, and so out of context that the image is just a shocking ridiculous picture of a tank entering the Palace. As Mariana said, “when I was little we went to the Plaza all the time, and I asked my father, linking the image of tank entering the palace, what the hell is a tank doing entering through a door where actually people are supposed to go through?”

The Siege of the Palace showed not only to the families affected by the disappearance but to many more, that enforced disappearance by the state against its own citizens, existed. Penelope expresses how it "was Dr. Eduardo Umaña (a lawyer and defender of Human Rights) who meet with us and who told us what we were living, were it not for this man and the clarity of his gaze and the purity of his soul, we had not even known that our relatives were made to disappear."

Elizabeth Jelin, considers in her interdisciplinary work, to some extent, gender and generational differences. I found important as well to focus on social class, for memories are as well affected by it, particularly in a culture where wide gaps exist among people, due to the marked social stratification.

In talking with several families of the disappeared, I found very different realities, family members, (well those who have the time and the resources to come to the city and meet in commemorative events, some live far away and do not even have a phone) have had struggles with intellectuals, because they feel that their memories are sometimes used to the benefit of those scholars who take the experiences and profit from the privilege that can be obtained when being an exponent of their experiences. The role of social class, therefore, the role of the intellectual not only as an agent or seeker of knowledge, but also as a member of a social class, became something important for me.

Perhaps because when studying memory in the classroom of a private University of Jesuits priests, I realized I was paying for one course, what I pay in Canada for an entire semester, and also because as I walked through the noisy streets of Bogotá, witnessing misery wherever I went, feeling the polluted air and hearing homeless people on the streets being thrown away from their bed for the night, a bench or the front of a house, I

finally reached the entrance of the Javeriana University, where a guard inspected my backpack and my student ID. Then I went up the mountain where my classroom was located, and a different view gave me a sense of tranquility, students having coffee, chatting, revising their email on their portable computers, and as I passed close to the music faculty, I heard cellos, violins, guitars, I entered into a different class dimension.

I confirmed these differences, when Penelope told me with some shame, for she did not want to sound like an envious woman, that at a commemorative event, an acquaintance, a teacher and a dedicated scholar in the field of memory studies, who she has known for a long time, a day was talking to another person about her very expensive and beautiful boots, and Penelope said to me: Angelica, at the time I could not pay for a year and a half the water bill, and here is X and Y talking about such an expensive pair of boots. I did not feel she was envious and thanked her honesty for I realized through her telling me of this, that her reality is basically different and that the struggle for memory can be easier for some to fight. It must be difficult to feel that as others can buy luxurious shoes, one cannot afford to pay for a glass of water.

Even the M-19 had strategies to be able to manipulate the elites, the brother of the president was a target as was the wife of another known politician in Colombia, they both exited the Palace perhaps they were lucky, or perhaps they had influence, but what is significant is how the M-19 knew that certain hostages were worthy or more important while others were not. Also when Andres Almarales was in the bathroom with the hostages, he asked them to position themselves in order of importance, first the magistrates in their knees, then the workers right behind them, for they thought that the

army would respect the lives of the influential, privileged men of justice, but even if they had some power they did not belong to a relevant social class, many had humble origins and a story of great efforts to become justices of the Supreme Court, this might be one factor in determining the lack of importance given to their lives as well.

Many efforts are happening in Colombia, despite the social hardships, to revive memories, the words, memory, justice, truth are beautiful words, but in actions? In daily life? In the hunger and misery of others? In the eyes of those lying beside the roads begging us to do not avoid them as one avoids garbage? It feels like memory and truth are industries of which many of us benefit, but not so many of us are willing to risk our lives in the battles for memory, which is understandable. Then, to some extent and contrary to the theories that emphasize the importance of memory to restore the social fabric after a period of social trauma, in Colombia, memory is important when it refers to the truth that victims share and preserve, yet memory cannot be studied, or evoked as if the guarantees to do so, were granted. So, how can then the social fabric be reconstructed amidst an ongoing conflict? How can Colombians remember what they do not know? How can they develop a sense of identity therefore of empathy towards fellow Colombians, and further to a fellow human being, if there is no respect for difference, for the life of others? When sometimes the resources needed are not available?

4. Conclusion

My initial question can be answered positively, yes violence is perpetuated through the ways in which Colombians remember and forget, in the stories our parents told us, in the history class we had, in the stories neighbours tell, in the popular saying,

literature, music, rituals, but overall and mainly in the stories one hears in the bus, in the street, in a cafeteria having a coffee, in informal settings, for everywhere people are innate story tellers, the stories are many times touched by violence and there will be anger, revenge, or hatred transmitted, this can be seen every day in social practices where one can feel a loss of respect for the value of life, robberies, assaults, small fights, general distrust, constant angered faces, misery in every corner, hunger, internal refugees singing in the bus, children walking the streets selling their bodies, homeless ashamed of begging, sick and dizzy of hunger, a policemen in every corner, at the exit of the supermarket at the entrance of a cinema, ill gazes boasting envy of those who have from those who have not. Yet, at the same time, and paradoxically people will from somewhere find a way to be kind, to help out, to smile, small and timid acts that reminds us that amidst the worst conditions, human beings still will try to balance in some way the conditions in which they live. However, since my question changed because I encountered that it was more important to listen to the memories and the truths of those who had suffer the disappearance of a loved one, and not so important to understand how the mechanisms in which violence is passed through memory, for there is no stopping of such cycles, without first knowing what the victims believe will restore their trust and their brokenness, since it is them who will be the reservoirs of stories, if they cannot tell stories of reconciliation, of satisfaction, of restitution, of truth and justice, violence will continue to exist, to live in all the practices related to memory, new generations will inherit past unresolved conflicts. The families of the disappeared struggle for truth, justice and restitution. Truth will mean the establishment of the perpetrators and the facilitators of crimes against humanity, yet also the identity and the projects of the

victims needs to be known.

Justice meaning the authors of crimes are punished, this will show that the state works.

Trust can be reestablished. Furthermore, it is necessary to create a social pedagogy to guarantee the no repetition, so there is a commitment to Never More.

And restitution which is a right of the victims, psychosocial, psychological, medical and financial support that will ensure that the victims will not become abused or abusers.

There is also a need to make public what happened, to generate educational projects.

Victims look for the proclamation of the truth by the state, a public apology and the necessary homage. If these processes do not occur, the lack of trust of people in their own government diminishes, the ethic of solidarity among people and generations is broken and violence continues existing as an everyday ritual. So yes, Colombians and the ways in which they remember or forget fuel the cycles of violence that have ravaged the country since times immemorial.

While truth, justice and restitution occurs, and in the presence of so much destruction, there is always a counter strategy to resist, memories in South America are strategies that give hope, a sense of a possible future different from the past, and memories find ways to resist oblivion and misery because the practices related to memory-making are crucial for the survival of individuals. Even in the middle of an armed conflict, Colombians remember, they reconstruct memories and share stories, they forget sometimes what is better to forget, but they remember what needs to be remembered, somehow. Surprisingly amidst chaos, one finds hope, dignity, strength, willingness and despite the many distortions to people's memories, they know that their

memories belong to them and to their willingness to find meaning and to survive through the understanding of their past. For when they excavate the past, when they look tenaciously for truth and justice, they are really looking for ways to imagine and create a different future for their children, or so I felt they did.

With deep admiration and gratitude to their lives and struggles, I present this thesis hoping it will let them know that we want to know, we want to listen.

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